

Integration of Art Strategy in Development of Shopping Mall Identity

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Abstract: This article investigates the impact of the application of art-related approaches on the development of shopping mall identity. The findings show that aesthetic preference influences the sensory response of visitors and their involvement with the art displays in shopping malls. In order to present an artistic mall identity, the aesthetic congruity of the visitors and a high cognitive association of the store type are crucial. The mismatching of store type with art work will reduce the artistic environment projected by the mall. Also, it is recommended that mall developers select more popular art work to stimulate the interest of their visitors so that they can recall the art work from their cognitive schema.

Key words: art; mall; identity; retail

JEL codes: Y

1. Introduction

To remain competitive and draw visitors, shopping mall developers apply different strategies to increase visits and purchase intentions. Like many large cities, such as Tokyo and Shanghai, the competition between shopping malls is intense in Hong Kong. As the major gateway to China and an international metropolitan city, Hong Kong attracts many wealthy and eager customers from Mainland China as visitors, who contribute to a high proportion of the retail sales. Therefore, shopping mall developers not only focus on the variety of stores, but also on unique mall identities and atmospheres to deliver unique shopping experiences to customers. The current trend includes a strategy that uses art in the retail business, such as holding art exhibitions in malls, collaborating with artists and designers to develop customized art-pieces, or even turning a mall into an art gallery to strengthen retail identity. Examples include collaborations with internationally well-known artists (e.g., Yayoi Kusama, Yue Minjun) to hold large scale exhibitions, and with young and local artists and illustrators to organize art activities in upscale shopping malls in Hong Kong.

To determine the effectiveness of a strategy that uses art, the nature of the art exhibitions and collaborations, and consumer aesthetic preferences, should be taken into consideration because the purpose of the strategy is to maximize positive consumption experiences via appropriate choices of art exhibitions and activities. Art and design activities affect aesthetic congruity and lead to different responses from consumers towards shopping malls, which increase intentions to visit, prolonged stays and differentiation from competitors. This study focuses on the contribution of art pieces to mall identity by investigating the relationship between aesthetics and identity perception of shopping malls from the viewpoint of customers. Since subtle qualities perceived in design elements

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(e.g., line, color, and texture) ultimately affect customer response, the findings provide insights into the inter-relationship between art and shopping mall perception, which makes this strategy important in attracting customers. This study also explores the impact of the strategy on the building of shopping mall identity, which influences the cognitive understanding on the recall and uniqueness of shopping malls among consumers. This research work also conceptualizes and validates the findings through a systematic analysis with a grounded theory study. The contribution of this study is twofold. First, this study enriches the existing literature on the understanding of aesthetic preference and the degree of aesthetic congruity towards art awareness and preference. This study also gives shopping mall design professionals insight into understanding and integrating consumer aesthetic preferences in commercial art installations to create an appropriate, aesthetically pleasing yet distinctive mall identity to influence buying decisions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Shopping Mall Experiences

Shopping malls are not only places for consumers to shop, but also contribute to the overall quality of life (Chan, 2013; Hedhli, Chebat & Sirgy, 2013) and an expression of personal values (Michon & Chebat, 2004). The experience that shopping malls give to consumers affects their image perception in their mall selection (Blawatt, 1995; Finn & Louviere, 1996). Chan (2011) reported that the contemporary shopping mall culture is fragmented and consumers expect a unique and specific mall personality. As a result, traditional malls have started to add more open space, and diversified retail facilities to increase the shopping frequency of customers (Reynolds, Ganesh & Luckett, 2002). Chebat, Sirgy and Grzeskowiak (2010) investigated the attributes of mall image and described a mall with a stimulating interior environment, exciting décor and planned entertainment events, which could result into a popular meeting place for consumers. Even a small change in ambient odour can affect the emotions of shoppers towards a retail environment, and thus, researchers have indicated that it is vital to determine the congruity between mall atmosphere, objects (products) and people (sales associates) (Michon, Chebat & Turley, 2005). Wesley, LeHew and Woodside (2006) found that there is correlation between mall type, mall activities and decision making styles of consumers, and this contributes to mall perception and planned expenditures. The literature shows that there is a significant relationship between visitors and mall experiences. Yet, previous studies have only focused on the general attributes of the mall environment and the mall experience, but neglected the importance of the shopping mall identity which facilitates customers to recall and revisit the shopping mall. As the contemporary mall culture is not clearly evident (Chan, 2011), suggested shopping mall identities include those that are outstanding, specific and congruent with the expectations of visitors in order to increase mall recall (Michon, Chebat & Turley, 2005). Thus, to address such limitations, this study explores shopping malls with specific artistic identities and their contribution to mall perception and identity development.

2.2 Retail Identity Creation

Rekom (1997) defined retail identity as “the set of meanings by which an object allows itself to be known and through which it allows people to describe, remember and relate to it”. It is not a static but a dynamic concept between retailers and consumers (Silveira, Lages & Simões, 2013). Specifically, retail identity is the personality of a retailer which affects consumer perception towards the retailer (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). The creating of a unique retail identity and store atmosphere has always been a challenge for retail design professionals. For instance, international fashion brands (Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Christian Dior) build flagship stores with

extraordinary and technology-driven store designs which create distinctive store identities that differentiate them from their competitors. To achieve a unique retail identity, attention is often paid to the shopping environment to induce a desired cognitive and affective response (e.g., positive emotion) from consumers (Kotler, 1974). In particular, visual identity through logos, colours, shapes and other symbolic elements (Baker & Balmer, 1997), retail space, and aesthetic structure (Marrewijk & Maaïke, 2012) are important to maintain a clear and consistent image (Kapferer, 2008). Schmitt and Simonson (1977) indicated that a unique retail identity depends on the manipulating of aesthetics through styles and themes to match the impressions of consumers. The creating of a pleasing environment is a multi-faceted task of combining different in-store variables, including displays, shop/mall architecture, and layout (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). These variables can influence both the cognitive and the affective responses and evaluation of consumers towards the retail identity (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed that the external environment (e.g., shopping mall and retail store design and layout) can influence whether an individual approaches or avoids a product. However, researchers have also found that environmental attributes can influence the emotional state of consumers, thus leading to diversified behaviours (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcooley & Nesdale, 1994). To stimulate positive emotions and perceptions toward retail identity, design factors, such as color, props and product display format, are very important (Baker & Darden, 1996). A distinct retail identity generates strong recall in the minds of consumers, thus allowing the identity to stand out among competitors, increasing the intentions of customers to re-visit a retailer (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Babin & Darden, 1995; Arnold, Reynolds, Ponder & Lueg, 2005) and influencing brand equity (Beristain & Zorrilla, 2011). According to Baker (1986), design factors also affect different aspects of the “stimulus, organism and response framework”. The design factors stimulate the sensory response of individuals towards the color, form and silhouette of a prop/product, or the overall mood of the retail environment, followed by cognitive and emotional responses towards the symbolic meanings and the moods that are induced by these design elements, which then result in positive or negative responses towards the product. A unique and memorable mall atmosphere distinguishes a mall from its competitors which increases the tendency of consumers in recalling the mall and inducing an approach response (Babin & Attaway, 2000). Previous studies have focused on studying the general cues in the environment for retail identity development; however, the impact of a specific theme, such as an art-oriented strategy on the perception of visitors as part of the retail identity has not been explored.

2.3 Consumer Aesthetic Preference

Vukadinović and Marković (2011) defined aesthetic preference as “the affective or hedonic evaluation of the level of pleasure we feel while observing external objects”. Aesthetic preference can stimulate the cognitive state of human beings towards the design elements (e.g., line, rhythm, color, etc.) of an object. Veryzer (1993, 1999) suggested that there is an internal processing algorithm in every individual with regards to the identification and understanding of aesthetic patterns. These patterns deal with the visual aesthetic response of various design elements and principles, in terms of balance, unity, harmony, contrast, and so forth (Lauer, 1979). The patterns develop over time through learning on a daily basis and continual changes. People unconsciously use criteria or standards that they learn from daily life to judge the aesthetic aspects of the surrounding environment (Veryzer, 1999). Aesthetics evokes affective responses, such as liking and approaching (Bloch, 1995), and subsequently affects the aesthetic affective response, such as feeling happy (Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998). The evoked affective response further affects cognitive judgments towards object features (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993). Responses to aesthetics are not rigid or absolute; the responses are subject to change in accordance with individual interactions

to different product categories (Cohen & Basu, 1987; Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005). Also, it is useful to apply aesthetics-related strategies to provide a cognitive understanding of the perceived value (Dorn, 1998; Eisner, 2002). Speaking from the perspective of aesthetic perception, Chapman (2010) suggested that aesthetic perception is an essential element to motivate one's creative mind. Chang (1980) expressed a similar idea, in that people construct their own perceptual standards to an aesthetic judgment. He argued that aesthetic attributes and situations are filtered by the human brain with psychological turn-ons and turn-offs to determine the aesthetic quality of the stimulus. Moreover, aesthetic preferences affect the type of aesthetic experience through the degree of engagement and fascination towards an object (Vukadinović & Markovć, 2011). The work in the literature implies that when consumers experience and evaluate aesthetical objects, such as art displays in shopping malls, they tend to subconsciously apply their aesthetic criteria to evaluate their cognitive responses towards visual elements and create different emotional responses towards those elements. Therefore, the strategic application of art makes the visual environment different and unique. However, the degree of response from consumers depends on their aesthetic perception of the art elements.

The literature shows that aesthetic preference influences aesthetic understanding, response, experience and final judgment towards stimuli. However, the impact of art on the perception of shopping malls has not been studied. Researchers have indicated that a positive mall image can be obtained when the aesthetic congruity of consumers with art displays is high. Although prior research has been done to investigate the stages/processes of the development of aesthetic perception and its impact on art (Chang, 1980; Chapman, 2010), there is no study on the attributes/content that contribute to the development of aesthetic standards in aesthetic preference and its corresponding impact on mall identity.

3. Methodology

This study aims to explore the relationship between art and the identity perception of shopping malls. A qualitative study method, the grounded theory, is chosen to investigate the inner thoughts of the subjects. Goulding (2002) suggested that the grounded theory helps to reflect the reality of subjects and understand their inner thoughts, and provides an in-depth and rich understanding of a phenomenon by using the inductive and field based approach for data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The aim is to develop theories from views that are collected from subjects which are taken into consideration during the data analysis. Data are coded according to open, axial and selective procedures. Open coding codes the opinions of the subjects into categories. After open coding, axial coding takes place by establishing inter-relationships between the categories through the combination of inductive and deductive thinking and fitting the findings into a basic frame that consists of the phenomenon, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action strategies and consequences (Borgatti, 2013; Corbin, 2008; Strauss, 1998). The inter-relationships are then used as a guide for further sample collection. Finally, the categories are formed which make up the core concepts to explain an issue (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The grounded theory is used in research to obtain the richness of a phenomenon and the viewpoint of the anecdote of the end-users (Mintzberg, 1979), and thus, it is the most applicable to the work in this paper. Therefore, the grounded theory approach is selected as the research method. Focus groups and in-depth interviews comprise the methods used to collect the data, which provide information on the personal experiences of the subjects (Corbin & Strass, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The interview questions focus on the aesthetic preferences of mall visitors towards art and mall identity.

3.1 Research Stimuli

The research stimuli comprise three shopping malls that apply art to create their mall identity in Hong Kong. The rationale is that they focus on using art as a strategy (to build their mall identity), with emphasis on the integration of a guided tour, art jamming and seminars to facilitate an artistic and contemporary mall identity. Through an all-rounded approach, the malls organize diversified art-related activities that provide a different shopping experience to customers. Also, two malls target the mass market and one targets the high-end market so that there is a wide coverage of targeted customers.

3.2 Research Subjects

This study has selected Chinese young adults in Hong Kong, both males and females, as the study subjects due to their relatively high propensity to spend on aesthetic related products (Chanda & Husband, 2006). The study selected subjects outside the studied shopping mall who have the following screened criteria: (1) age 18 to 35 (the age that is definitive of young adults in Hong Kong), and (2) those who have visited and participated in the art activities and exhibitions in the mall. The screening procedure ensured that the subjects had interacted with the art inside the mall. After the screening, the subjects received an invitation to take part in the focus group interviews. There were a total of sixty participants, and they were interviewed in ten separate focus group interviews.

3.3 Data Collection Process

Each focus group interview comprised two parts. The first part of the interview was related to the comments and opinions of the art activities in the mall. The second part of the interview focused on the aesthetic background of the subject and the related impact on the aesthetic understanding of the art activities/displays and perception towards the mall identity. The subjects viewed pictures of the art activities held in the mall to help them recall their experiences. The first four interviews served as the foundation to the developing of the concepts and inter-relationships for open coding. The latter six interviews served the purpose of further investigating and enriching the relationships in the axial coding. Finally, the core concept was determined from the selective coding. A professional translator tape-recorded and translated the data from the interviews. To validate the results, the research randomly selected twenty subjects from the ten groups, and they received a copy of the transcripts so that they could assess the accuracy of their opinions which were to be coded. The researchers revised the transcripts when there were deviations from the actual opinions. A professor who specializes in consumer psychology re-coded the interviews and together with the researchers, mutually agreed on the core ideas developed from the interviews. The length of the interviews was one to two hours.

4. Results and Discussion

The following are detailed findings and discussions on the use of the grounded theory for the three stages of coding: open, axial and selective, towards the association of art and design and shopping mall identity.

4.1 Open Coding

The interviews provided the basis for the development of the categories in the open coding stage, and the categories include: (1) aesthetic insensitivity; (2) search for aesthetic congruity; and (3) high degree of cognitive association.

4.1.1 Aesthetic Insensitivity

The subjects expressed that they tend to disregard or ignore the art displays or activities in the shopping mall

during their visit. There is also a weak recall of the message in the details of the displays. The data indicated that such responses are derived from the perception of the subjects towards art. Most Hong Kong Chinese rank art as an inferior entity. The subjects had not been encouraged to overly focus on art-related issues when they were growing up. Thus, their sensitivity towards art is not strong. The following quotes support the findings.

“I used to like drawing and painting when I was a kid, however, my mom told me that it doesn’t make sense to choose it as a career. It won’t help us earn a living.” (Interviewee 20, 31, Housewife)

“We (Hong Kong people) are trained to focus on business-related subjects instead of art and design, especially in Hong Kong, because being successful is determined by the savings and amount of properties that you have.” (Interviewee 45, 24, Fashion Designer)

The insensitivity also influences the sensory response of the subjects. Although expensive art pieces and installations are placed in the mall, the subjects treated them as part of the interior decorations. On the sensory level, they are the stimuli that give sensory pleasure to the visitors; however, they may not be cognitively associated as art because aesthetic insensitivity prevents cognitive artistic thoughts towards the installations. As a result, the visitors are not inspired by the installations nor developed any visualizations that would enhance their mental imageries.



Figure 1 Expensive Art Piece 1



Figure 2 Expensive Art Piece 2

4.1.2 Search for Aesthetic Congruity

The research work found that the level of aesthetic congruity affects the amount of attention that the subjects gave to the art displays. The degree of aesthetic congruity is related to the association of mental schema to cognitive understanding of the displays. The subjects had a predetermined schema about art. They tended to refer to art displays or installations that are congruent with their cognitive schema and understanding. For instance, Mona Lisa is an iconic reference in art. Consequently, focus is placed on related displays because the subjects already have a high degree of cognitive understanding. The following quotes support the findings.

“I was attracted to the Mona Lisa very much; it drew my attention among all the other exhibits. When I looked closer, I found that it was made of toast. That really surprised me and it was fun to look at it.” (Interviewee 8, 19, College Student)



Figure 3 Mona Lisa

“I enjoyed visiting this exhibition, it is easy to understand. The theme is about the five types of tastes which are close to our daily lives.” (Interviewee 36, 28, Customer Service Officer)



Figure 4 The Five Types of Taste Exhibition

“The art pieces are based on the five types of tastes; it is interesting and attractive to see some new ideas given to them.” (Interviewee 40, 34, Accountant)

4.1.3 High Degree of Cognitive Association

The research work found that the involvement of the subjects in the art displays depends on their cognitive association with the symbolic meaning of the art displays or activities. An art theme that can help them recall a nostalgia memory reduces any barriers towards approaching the art. Culturally familiar cues trigger a high degree of cognitive understanding among these Chinese Hong Kong visitors, thus stimulating their cognitive pleasure via nostalgia. The following quotes demonstrate this cognitive style.

“There are some exhibits that specifically drew my attention; there is a paper sculpture of old Hong Kong style grocery

stores. It reminded me of my childhood and the good old days. But when I looked closer, the 3D paper cutting method made the traditional stores look more interesting.” (Interviewee 39, 20, University Student)



Figure 5 A 3-D Hong Kong Style Grocery Art Display

A familiar theme, such as food art, not only increases the cognitive association of the visitors, but also their mental imagery of the art displays. The familiar theme also decreases their psychological defenses, thus increasing their intention to approach the art elements.

“It is fun to be surrounded by the food-inspired artwork, I enjoyed the food art demonstration activities and also the enlarged food display; it made my visit to this art mall special and different.” (Interviewee 17, 30, Programmer)



Figure 6 Food Art

The degree of cognitive association is extended to linking store type with art identity. The research work found that there is disassociation between the nature of the stores and the projected artistic feeling. As a result, consumers may participate in the art activities, but might not stay and walk around the mall. Most of the shops in the studied mall are not related to the art, which confused the respondents. The following quotes illustrate the disassociation in mall identity.

“I have been to this art gallery mall a few times, but I did not walk around the mall in general. As you can see, one, the

shops are not well-known; and two, all the shops lack elements of art, making the art and design impression weak.” (Interviewee 22, 23, Financial Planner)

The stores that are not related to the art exhibits are the contextual cues and sensory information that reduce the artistic mood that is being projected by the art displays in the shopping mall. As aesthetic sensitivity is weak among these Chinese Hong Kong visitors, this layout arrangement further lessens their cognitive understanding of the art, thus blurring the mall identity. The following comments support this logic.

“The layout of the shops on every level doesn’t match the atmosphere. I expected there to be art souvenir shop/counters around the displays. Although there are shops all around, but they have no association with the mood and style of the displays.” (Interviewee 35, 26, Fashion Buyer)

“It is hard to feel the creativity with all of the different types of stores (clothing for mature ladies, luggage and cosmetic stores) around, which are totally separate from the art theme. The art exhibits look like decorations in the mall and do not trigger any particular feelings in me.” (Interviewee 50, 35, Sales Executive)

4.2 Axial Coding

Ideas and categories from the open coding were abstracted and formed into a series of relationships through six elements: phenomenon, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action strategies, and consequences (Corbin & Strass, 1990) (see Table 1). The six elements formed a storyline to illustrate the impact of art and design on building mall identity among Hong Kong Chinese consumers.

The phenomenon relates to the differences in the expectations of the mall visitors and developers of the mall identity. The mall developers considered the art displays from the viewpoint of a promotional gimmick, whereas the visitors evaluated the art from their degree of cognitive congruity. As a result, the visitors may not approach art exhibitions with a low degree of aesthetic congruity, and attention will be instead directed to art exhibitions that are cognitively associated.

Causal conditions relate to the events that contribute to the phenomenon. The research found that the cognitive involvement of visitors plays an important role in affecting their perception of the art displays and mall identity. The subjects paid less attention to the related promotions and displays due to low sensitivity towards art. They did not pay close attention to an exhibition unless they were able to locate cognitive cues which enhanced their cognitive understanding towards the symbolic meaning of the displays. Finally, exhibitions that elicited a high degree of cognitive congruity in the visitors enhanced their approach response.

The context comprises the background that influences the causal conditions. The degree of response towards this particular mall identity depended on the perception of the subjects towards art. Hong Kong subjects tend to pay less attention to art and find that it is difficult to process and understand the sensational cues of art elements due to lack of related training. The subjects relied on the congruent content in their schema to identify the stimuli in order to focus on the exhibitions. The subjects tended to forego displays that have a low degree of aesthetic congruity and focused on those that match their cognitive schema. As a result, they only partially experienced the mall identity.

An intervening condition is an indirect factor of the phenomenon. The differences in mall identity are due to cognitive schema differences in art. The mall developers looked for gimmick-driven art displays, whereas the visitors looked for familiar cognitive cues when they interpreted the art-related exhibitions in this study. Therefore, it is evident that the differences in mindset create a deviation in the mall identity perception.

The consequence is that the subjects in this study employed different strategies towards the phenomenon. When the visitors found that they had weak cognitive congruity towards a display, they had low involvement with

the art and design exhibitions or activities held inside the mall. They referred to their aesthetic algorithm as the perceived criteria to judge the art displays. Thus, they would not be able to grasp the complete identity of the mall, which makes mall identity recall more difficult.

Table 1 Developed Relationships in Axial Coding

Phenomenon
There is a difference between the cognitive expectation and understanding of the content of the art.
Causal conditions
The aesthetic sensitivity of the visitors is relatively low.
There is a discrepancy between the cognitive understanding of the visitors with the art displays and activities.
The visitors tend to pay more attention to art displays with high cognitive congruity.
Context
The perceived concept of art.
The difference in the interpretation of art between the mall developer and the visitors.
There is weak association between the artistic mood and the store type inside the mall.
Intervening condition
The cognitive schema towards art is different for the mall developer and the visitors.
Action strategies
The visitors select art displays that have a high degree of cognitive congruity.
The visitors recall familiar art displays and activities from their cognitive schema.
Consequence
The visitors show a relatively low degree of interest in the art displays.
This results in vague mall identity.
The mall identity recall is weak.

4.3 Selective Coding

The research found that through the grounded theory approach, the perceived understanding of art is a core concept in determining the success of applying a strategy that uses art towards mall identity development. A study has found that art sensitivity is weak as Hong Kong Chinese have weak perception towards art. They prefer to rely on abstract yet socially determined standards, such as acceptance of famous and iconic art work and attention given to them in order to evaluate art and creative work (Li, 1994). Thus art work that is congruent to their aesthetic understanding and perceived standards provides important cues that draw their attention. A familiar theme will trigger their senses and cognitive schema, thus allowing them to better understand the art display. For instance, the Mona Lisa and food art are displays that draw attention because they can be easily and cognitively understood, and lowered the psychological defense of the audience. Thus, the following proposition has been developed.

P1: The degree of aesthetic congruity of mall visitors towards art is positively associated with their cognitive response towards the identity of the shopping mall.

Rudowicz and Yue (2002) found that the Chinese view creative and art work as a group issue so social expectations are also important to them. Therefore, reference to general aesthetic preference is common when the Chinese see new and creative work (Dunn, Zhang & Ripple, 1988). Compared with those in the West, the Chinese have a unique sense in evaluating art elements (Fan, 2000), where aesthetic preference is closely related to the perceived symbolic message of art (Li, 1994). Therefore, the Chinese tend to focus on well-known art pieces or topics instead of new and innovative work. The application of art can stimulate the cognitive state of consumers, but fail to create a unique yet unforgettable mall identity for the Hong Kong Chinese because of the unique aesthetic algorithm. Since aesthetic patterns are developed over time through daily life and culture, there may be some changes throughout time, but the core values (Bornstein, Ferdinadsen & Gross, 1981; Flavell, 1985) are difficult to change. For the Hong Kong Chinese, disregard of art is common (Kuo, 2003) and so the respondents in

this study had difficulties in extending their mental imagery towards the exhibitions. Chitturi (2009) suggested that the best way to make a design decision is to take the emotions of consumers into consideration by considering the best product attribute that triggers a positive emotion. Thus, the following proposition has been developed.

P2: The aesthetic perceptions of mall visitors are positively associated with the degree of their emotional response towards art displays.

For mall identity design, the application of art elements in interior design is a product attribute. Unlike the relationship between consumers and a single product, art elements only influence a hedonic response, which aims to create fantasies in the minds of consumers. However, the perceived understanding of art also influences the degree of association between the expectations of stores/shops and the art elements. The study found that a strong identity recall of an art mall has two aspects, which are: (1) cognitive understanding and association with the art, and (2) perceived association with the environmental cues that surround the art. Thus, the third proposition has been developed.

P3: An art-oriented atmosphere in a shopping mall is positively associated with mall visitors' perception on mall.

The following quotes illustrate these findings.

"I quite enjoyed the food art exhibition, it was fun and creative to turn something that is familiar into something creative, but overall speaking, the exhibition and the mall are separate matters. It is weird to have jewellery, cosmetics or even a Vietnamese restaurant around you in the exhibition area. I almost ignored the stores and just paid attention to the exhibition." (Interviewee 57, 18, Clerk)

"The large decorations (the abstract art displays) are meaningless to me. Even though there are signs that explain the inspirations and the meanings behind them, I was not interested in reading about them. I haven't taken art courses and I don't think I can understand the meaning behind them. I think it is common in Hong Kong that we have art and drawing lessons up to junior high school, but I do not understand anything about art. It is too difficult for me." (Interviewee 43, 29, Banker)



Figure 7 An Abstract Art Display

In sum, this study reveals that the application of a unique theme, such as the use of art as a strategy to create a distinctive mall identity, should take the aesthetic schema of visitor into consideration. Since art exhibits and

displays are visual aesthetics, the degree of visual impact and stimulation is associated with the sensory, cognitive, and emotional responses of visitors. Unlike choosing a gimmick-driven theme, the impact of art exhibits on mall perception is associated with the art sensitivity and aesthetic congruity of the visitors towards the symbolic meanings of the exhibits. The findings indicate that visitors who have a low degree of art sensitivity may not be aware of the art exhibits displayed in a mall or stimulated by them, thus failing to elicit sensory and cognitive responses. As a result, they cannot associate the mall identity with the exhibits. If a high degree of sensory and cognitive responses from the viewers is anticipated, the relationship between the aesthetic schema of viewers and the choice of art exhibits should be considered. Art exhibits that are congruent with the aesthetic schema of viewers would easily draw their attention and create a high level of cognitive association. For instance, the famous and well-known Mona Lisa created a high level of sensory awareness and cognitive understanding among the visitors in this study, and projected an artistic image. However, to establish a unique artistic mall identity, a series of art exhibits, activities that have a high degree of cognitive understanding and congruence with the aesthetic schema of the visitors are necessary. Having one or a few art exhibits displayed in a mall cannot achieve the purpose. Although previous studies of retail identity have suggested that environmental and physical attributes such as displays and shop or mall architecture are important to establishing retail identity (Baker & Darden, 1996; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcooley & Nesdale, 1994), this study suggests that the cognitive understanding of environmental stimuli and the degree of art sensitivity are important to create favourable affective responses on retail identity perception. Since visitors depend on their internal processing algorithm to create aesthetic patterns that evaluate aesthetic-related environment and activities (Veryzer, 1999), it is necessary to understand attributes that contribute or stimulate their algorithm before selecting aesthetical stimuli for the environment. The insensitivity to art of Hong Kong Chinese implies that internationally well-known art exhibits and artists are necessary in order for them to process the work in their internal algorithm and generate a high level of cognitive response. Finally, the degree of emotional response to art exhibits and mall perception depend on the congruity of the art work and the perceived standards of art.

5. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

In terms of theoretical implications, this study provides insights into the cognitive understanding of visitors on art. The aesthetic schema of the visitors is important because it directs their preferences in terms of sensory response towards certain art exhibits and displays. This type of cognitive understanding provides a guideline to identifying their level of focus and the degree of involvement. For instance, the visitors look for cues that stimulate their sensory, cognitive, and emotional responses towards the mall environment. For visitors with a narrow cognitive understanding of art, well-known or local cultural art pieces serve as cues to draw their attention immediately, and lead to the establishment of a high degree of cognitive congruity due to familiarity. The art pieces and displays increase and extend the mental imagery and involvement of the visitors, thus leading to their cognitive pleasure when they are shopping at the mall.

Also, a more aesthetically congruent theme invites visitors to recall art displays from their memories, which creates fantasies, and this nostalgia adds value to the art exhibits/displays. Thus, an aesthetically congruent theme creates an emotional attachment between the visitor and the art exhibit, and therefore, prolongs the time that s/he stays in the mall. High involvement with art displays also increases recall and perception of the shopping mall identity. By enriching and re-designing familiar themes into interactive art activities, such as through art-jamming,

workshops, or games, visitor involvement is further stimulated, which creates positive emotions and emotional pleasure. Such pleasure is a crucial factor for visitors in their evaluation of the shopping mall environment, assists them in locating the mall identity which then helps the mall to differentiate itself from its competitors. However, the art strategy should be consistently applied with all-rounded art activities. For instance, a local shopping mall may adopt an art museum concept in the creation of its identity, with an art museum to exhibit different works of artists, display art exhibits on every level of the mall with correlated art activities that will provide a complete artistic atmosphere to the visitors so as to maximize their emotional attachment and pleasure so that a remarkable identity is created. On the other hand, unfamiliar art pieces and displays may also stimulate visitors, although their involvement will be lower in comparison to well-known or local art pieces. However, these art pieces and displays will only stimulate the visual response of visitors due to their low cognitive understanding and emotional response to the art pieces. The emotional attachment of visitors is also low due to the low aesthetic congruity with the unfamiliar art pieces. As a result, such art displays should comprise part of the mall decor that will contribute less to the development of the mall identity.

In terms of managerial implications, mall developers may consider introducing or organizing well-known art pieces and themes to attract their targeted visitors. Such an approach can fulfil the cognitive expectations and understanding of art of visitors. The exhibition/display format can be enriched with interactive activities, such as games and lucky draws that are aligned with the art theme. The enriched format will help to arouse visitors who have low aesthetic sensitivity and reduce their psychological defenses towards the displayed art. The enriched format will also help to increase the involvement of the visitors with the art pieces, thus bringing them emotional pleasure. A positive experience in the viewing of art work enhances message recall, builds positive perceptions of mall identity and decreases differences in cognitive schema towards art between the visitors and mall developer. The affiliation of shops and art displays is also important to present a consistent mall identity. Mall developers should match the theme of the art displays with the shops that are located in close proximity or have temporary shops that sell merchandise that is related to the art displays. As a result, the inclusion of familiar themes, iconic art displays, and appropriate types of stores in the mall will help increase consumer cognitive congruity and involvement with the art displays, which create a positive shopping experience and provide a distinct mall identity.

6. Limitations and Further Studies

This study has focused on the use of an art-related strategy to establish a distinctive mall identity in the mind-set of young Hong Kong Chinese consumers by interviewing subjects who are in the age group of 18-35. Since different shopping malls have different targeted visitors, thus, future research may consider sampling subjects who are targeted customers of shopping malls with different mall identities. Moreover, the art-related strategy is limited to visual art installation and exhibitions, and other types of arts, such as the performing arts (dance and drama) may also have a significant impact on the perception towards mall identity.

For further studies, the integrated impact of visual and the performing arts on mall identity can be investigated. The combined impact may induce a great extent of emotional responses towards perception of mall identity. It is also suggested that a quantitative study be carried out to test the propositions found in this exploratory study and their influence on the customer decision-making process on mall selection, shopping experience and mall identity.

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Appendix

Questions for the Semi-Structured Interviews

Questions for the art activities held in the malls

- How do you feel about the art activities that you have participated in the shopping mall? (the mall refers to the one the subject visited)

- Please elaborate on your feelings.
- What element in the activity triggered your feeling?
- Please share why you felt that way about that element.

Questions for the development of aesthetic background

- Do you pay attention to art?
- Are you interested in art? If yes, please share your experiences.
- Are you sensitive to art-related elements around you?
- If yes, why are you sensitive? If not, why?
- What is the art-related training that you have received so far?
- Can you share with us the criteria to judge an art piece? Refer to an example.
- How have you developed those criteria? Any influences?

Questions on the impact of art activities on shopping mall identity formation

- After visiting the mall, how do you feel about the atmosphere?
- Did you sense any feelings of artistic perception in yourself? If yes, what makes you feel that? If not, why?
- Can the art exhibits and activities enhance your impression towards the mall? If yes, why is that? If not, why?
- Do the art exhibits and activities make the mall distinctive in comparison with other shopping malls? If yes/no, why?
- Can the art exhibits and activities extend your stay in the mall? If yes, what particular exhibit/ section/ activity is able to do that?

If not, why?

- Can you share with us the overall feeling about the art gallery mall?

Interviewee profiles		
	Female	Male
Gender	28	32
Age (18-24)	17	20
Age (23-35)	11	12
Art-related occupation	10	12