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Courtney Lucas

Capturing the Magic of the Customer Experience at Harrods: An Exploration into Theatrical Performance in Modern Luxury Retail.

Luxury retail strategy centralises around creating desires in a fascinating, compelling way. Increasingly, as many brands attempt to fit within the luxury umbrella, luxury retailers must adopt a unique point of differentiation, not simply in apparent forms such as price and product but within the communication of the philosophy of their brand. Luxury Department Store Harrods fulfils customers' desires by presenting a show, engaging its audience in stories, communicated through spectacular theatrical performance. Moreover the department store, labelled 'The Palace of Knightsbridge' draws on brand heritage and provenance to generate awe and create the 'Harrods Show'. In doing so it enhances the concept of experiential consumption, enriching unique value in the brand, setting Harrods aside from competitors. This paper offers an exploration into the various conceptualisations of retail theatre at Harrods; through a phenomenological study of Luxury customers' and industry professionals' experiences. The paper aims to offer an insight into the practice of Harrods retail theatre, using heritage and innovation as tools to leverage its power and value.

Keywords: Harrods; Luxury; Theatre; Experience; Storytelling; Heritage; Innovation.



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INTRODUCTION

In the ever-changing and commoditised world of luxury retail, customers desire more than just the delivery of tangible products and services (Jin et al. 2012). Increasingly, consumers desire unique, enjoyable and memorable service experiences (Martineau 1958; Walls et al. 2012). This places customer expectations at the forefront of marketing decisions, as traditional strategies revolving around price and quality no longer push the

boundaries of differentiation (Pine and Gilmore 1998; Schmitt 1999; Shaw & Ivens 2002).

These elements of differentiation are most prominently service and experiential qualities, associated with shoppers' choices over the goods themselves (Dennis et al. 2002). The contemporary consumer demands an experience environment, known in the luxury industry as experiential consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Working hand in hand, the execution of this experience impacts on consumer worth, creating experiential value (Holbrook 1994; Schmitt 1999) using customers' own experiences as a tool for increasing engagement and gaining competitive advantage (Dick & Basu 1994; Kotler et al. 2006). Atwal & Williams (2009) assert that experiential value is crucial to the development and execution of effective marketing strategies within the luxury sector. As the concepts of experiential consumption and value are relatively new to literature, a research opportunity presents itself.

This paper seeks to explore how Harrods encourages experiential consumption and value through theatrical performance, driven by the researcher's passion for the luxury sector and industry experience. Harrods has built its retail success on its engagement with customers, being at the core of their desires by going above and beyond to exceed expectations and create the 'Harrods Show'. This research paper seeks to provide valuable insight into the experiences derived from retail theatre aimed at customers as opposed to tourists. Exploring conceptualisations of in-store theatrical performance; storytelling and heritage. The research will draw on both luxury customer and industry professional experiences through a phenomenological study.

"Luxury retail enlists magical and aesthetic principles within and without the store." (Dion & Arnould 2011 p503). Within luxury retail there is an increasing demand for brands to create a compelling and memorable customer experience (Okonkwo 2007). Customers are seeking

"products, communications, and marketing campaigns that dazzle their senses, touch their hearts, and stimulate their minds. They want products, communications, and campaigns that they can relate to and that they can incorporate into their lifestyles" (Schmitt 2000, p57).

Harrods' name has always been synonymous with high levels of luxury and customer service, establishing its reputation on the notion of 'the ultimate shopping experience.' A key element of its successful luxury retailing is through staging the store as a "retail theatre" (Geddes 2011). Existing literature suggests that the magical nature of luxury comes from the creative director (Dion & Arnould 2011). This research will widen the existing research by exploring the magical nature of luxury, by examining the relationship between theatrical performance and customer experience at Harrods. This paper is divided into three sections. First it will explore existing literature, and identify research gaps. Methodological issues will then be addressed and justified. Finally, a discussion and analysis of findings is presented, focusing on three core themes: Stories Communicated through Theatre; Innovations in Luxury Retail and Legacy; Provenance and Heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literature Review will first examine experiential realms of consumption and value. Followed by luxury retail theatre and finally storytelling. Literature will be discussed in relation to Harrods and gaps for new research will be identified to inform methods and justify research.

Experiential Consumption and Value

Consumption experience is a concept widely discussed by a number of scholars particularly within a retail context (Sherry 1998; Shaw & Ivens 2002; Pine & Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 2003; Caru & Cova 2007). Staging customer experiences is a competitive battlefield, demanding retailers to go above and beyond to obtain existing and meet new consumer demands (Pine & Gilmore 1998; Blattberg 1998). As enjoyment and entertainment are increasingly important benefits, valued by customers (Babin et al. 1994; Donovan et al. 1994; Dennis et al. 2013), institutions are positioning themselves as “experience stagers” (Mathwick et al. 2001 cited in Pine & Gilmore 1999). Experiences of this stage must be innovative, unique and memorable (Kotler & Armstrong 2000).

Williams and Glyne (2008) proclaim that consumption experience is based on a two-tier structure of involvement and intensity. Within this, four ‘experiential zones’ are formed via customers’ personal aspirations; entertainment, education, escapist and aesthetic, explored through types of experiences; product experience, shopping and service experience and consumption experience (Addis & Holbrook 2001; Arnould & Zinkhan 2002; Brakus et al. 2009). This builds on existing consumption frameworks (Holbrook & Corfman 1985; Hirschman 1986; Holbrook 1985), asserting that consumer intentions influence experiences, allowing them to become rich in value (Holbrook & Corfman 1985). However, it lacks depth in exploring how this value is created (Lanier & Rader 2015) underlining consumption experiences but not analysing their construction.

Lanier (2008) identifies the importance consumers place on experiences (Holbrook 2005). Seeking multiple benefits (Darden & Dorsch 1990) by discussing the broad range of consumption motives beyond brand choice and purchase behaviour. Existing literature outlines the use of symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic natures of consumption to fulfil experiential benefits recognised as fantasies, feelings and fun elements (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). This creates an ‘extraordinary’ experience, stressing the importance and demand for compelling experiences. In turn, this draws attention to elements of specificity in luxury retail, shaped by cultural and historical heritage (Assouly 2005 cited Dion & Arnould 2011; Kapferer & Bastien 2009). From traditions of provenance, symbolic meaning is attained, constructing value that leverages the functional relationship between brands and customers by association with their lifestyle (Lanier & Rader 2015).

Experiential value is described as the link between value touch-points of brands and target audiences, pre- and post- consumption experience (Schmitt 1999). In more recent literature, it is the core component of customers’ perceptions of value, arising from the consumption experience (Keng & Ting 2009; Davis 2005). Experiential value has developed into a wealth of connotations, but most intrinsic to the retail environment it reflects customers’ perceptions of service excellence, aesthetics of the service environment, escapism, and return on investment (ROI) (Mathwick et al. 2001).

Mathwick et al. (2001, p.40) developed an experiential value scale (EVS) containing four dimensions; aesthetics, escapism, service excellence, and customer ROI, that can be used to

“assess the retail shopping experience in terms that go well beyond the traditional mix of price and quality.”

Recognising that a shopping experience can vary in value, customers are categorised into two groups, symbolising intrinsic and extrinsic values (Mathwick et al. 2001). Consequent of utilitarian consumer behaviour, an *extrinsically orientated shopper* aims

to quickly get through a shopping encounter (Babin et al. 1994). These experiences are often associated to or initiated as “an errand” or “work” as opposed to pleasure (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Sarkar, 2011; Fabio 2014). In contrast, an *intrinsically orientated shopper* is hegemonic and likely to consume subjective and personal experiences for its own sake (Holbrook 1994), reflecting shopping’s potential entertainment and emotional worth (Bhatnagar and Gosh 2004; Bellenger et al. 1976). These intrinsic and extrinsic values are consequential of hedonic and utilitarian shopping values driven from experiential as well as instrumental outcomes (Babin et al. 1994). The elements examine the extent to which products or services meet customers’ expectations, where the value of the service is greater than their investment (Keng et al. 2007). Concluding that throughout experiences, customers react to stimulations with environments and atmospheres in a way that generates value (Wood 2002; Jones & Kim 2010; Yuan & Wu 2008; Wu & Liang 2009). However, to some extent all lack depth in exploring the emotions and engagement of both groups.

Although experiential consumption has been a topic of academic study for a while, existing work has tended to explore the functional assumptions of consumption experiences seeking engagement, but not considering their fit within specific context. This suggests the need to delve into concepts that build experiences (Lanier & Rader 2015), the paper will apply these experiential concepts to Harrods in relation to retail theatre.

Retail Theatre

Sherry et al. (2002 pp567) discuss the concept of a retail space taking the form of a ‘show’;

“in perhaps no other area is spectacle more dramatically purveyed to customers than in the theming of retail spaces.”

Although commoditised to fulfil particular needs, ‘retail theatre’ is a long existing practice where services are transformed into a stage, and goods into props, to create personal and memorable customer experiences (Martineau 1958; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Wolf 1999; Sherry et al. 2002).

Mathwick et al. (2001) examine the importance of service experience, accelerating the notion of retail theatre by emphasising the need to encourage customers to participate in the service experience of a theatrical environment. This is supported by Ritzer (1999) who describes the “new means of consumption” (NMC) as a spectacular environment treated by consumers and participants as sacred and transforming as they are directly involved and relied upon. Arguably, this social form is oppressive and exploitative. However, it is successfully adopted in many retail contexts, particularly at Harrods through theatrical performance. By becoming producer orientated, Harrods are able to build relationships and engage customers, seeking to generate awe around the store and products to attract consumers in a competitive, entertainment-led environment (Dion and Arnould 2011).

Critical scholars suggest that bringing customers to the forefront of the retail stage in a themed environment evokes an occasion of false consciousness and hegemonic domination (Horkheimer & Adorno 1972; Debore 1983; Ritzer 1999; Sherry et al. 2002). This negative image of the retail theatre environment is contrasted in Wolf’s (1999) thesis, suggesting that the ‘entertainmentizing’ of themed retail is accelerated because it satisfies an innate feeling, consequential of entertainment seeping into every aspect of the economy blurring the lines between entertainment and non-entertainment (Kozinets et al. 2002). Although valuable, these conclusions lack depth in exploring the emotions of customers following experiences, drawing generalised conclusions (Wong &

Sohal 2002).

Sherry et al. (2002) examine staged retail at the ESPN Zone Chicago, through observational research. Concluding that retail theatre is staged to create desires to enter, stay and return through a complex combination of architecture and human performance. Kozinets et al (2002) support this hypothesis, stating that retail theatre has wide appeal for customers looking to “linger, play, seek community, learn or grow” (p26). The research categorises brand stores, most significantly the ‘themed flagship brand store’ which offers entertainment-oriented services, through pre-existing entities that ooze heritage and innovation (Kirby & Kent 2010). This presents a justification to expand research, by examining entertainment-orientated services at the most historical department store in the world, Harrods.

The “society of the spectacle”, asserts that society is a stage and we live in a society in which the unreal is celebrated and elevated above the real (Debord 1983). Sherry et al. (2002) devised the concept of “Hypereality” to explore theatrical performance in this society. The concept suggests that the overall aesthetic, from first impressions of the exterior of a building, to the service received inside impacts on the staged perception of retail, creating a larger-than-life liminal state (Turner 1974). This is often promoted through the art of storytelling, taking a subtle form that meets the demands of entertaining and informing consumers (Pine & Gilmore 1999).

Storytelling

Kozinets et al. (2002) describe the concept of storytelling in retail theatre as a ‘present-day incarnation’ of traditional practices. Noting that stores tell stories, he asserts that retail marketers have to pay detailed attention to the aesthetics of storytelling in retail theatre as a process of allowing consumers to make meaning out of their experiences. Storytelling in a luxury retail context is about finding metaphors, creating meaning in life experiences and, above all, executing a structure in which to tell stories that will touch customers personally and emotionally, whilst remaining unique to that particular brand (Danziger 2006). This concept could be directly applied to Harrods, as luxury goods are acquired for what they symbolise (Dubois & Duquesne 1993) creating a need to centralise retail theatre around creating and telling stories in a compelling way.

Gilliam et al. (2013) investigate storytelling during retail sales encounters presenting a storytelling framework for sales staff formulated by ‘entity’ ‘product and ‘digression’. The research concludes stories told from a personal point of view are most likely to influence purchase intentions, due to customer attitudes towards the salesperson, whilst stories told from a business perspective are most likely to influence purchase intentions due to consumer attitudes towards the product. Many researchers have proposed tools to craft storytelling between a brand and a customer (Woodside et al. 2008). Bruner (1990) proposes a two dimensional strategy, the *landscape of action* and the *landscape of consciousness*. The *landscape of action* consists of events that are visible by both sight and imagination. The *landscape of consciousness* allows consumers to delve into the ‘head’ of the brand and explore its characteristics. A brand story that incorporates both of these landscape elements is better than that of a single dimensional concept (Delgadillo & Escalas 2004 cited Woodside et al. 2008). True to the nature of luxury brands, these landscapes should encompass brand ideologies.

Brand ideologies are the

“laces that tie a society together and the forms that define what, for a given society, is “real” an “established order” (Thompson 1982 p65),

supporting the assumption that brand ideology can be used to structure strategic

stories, engaging the customer. Floor (2006) explored retail brand ideology, stressing that storytelling is used to illuminate the position of brand ideologies and heritage in retail experience. Kapferer and Bastien (2012 p93) assert;

“There can be no luxury brand without roots, without a history to provide the brand with a non-commercial aspect. The history constitutes a fabulous treasure through the mythologization that it enables, by creating a sanctum lineage to which each new product can claim.”

Dion and Arnould (2007) investigate luxury retail brand ideologies by exploring the role of creative directors, drawing conclusions that luxury brands use creative directors to channel ideologies. This presents an opportunity for new research, investigating how these ideologies are communicated through the narrative of storytelling, as well as physical features of heritage and provenance through theatrical performance. In relation to experiential consumption, therefore, assembling a narrative transforms an event into an experience, asserting that storytelling is important because it facilitates the creation of memories (Lancer 2008).

Although experiential literature is well researched in a service-based context (Jin et al., 2013), the relationship between consumption and value seeks further exploration (Wolf 1999; Schmitt 1999) as experiential, entertaining aspects of retailing are increasingly important to both the retailer and customers (Kozinets et al. 2002). Research into the effects of customer experiences as a result of storytelling, in a theatrical retail environment (Sherry et al. 2002) would shed new light onto what have tended to be generalised conclusions (Wong & Sohal, 2002). Existing research literature on the legitimacy of luxury goods asserts the obvious, emphasizing such goods' non-essential but prestigious forms (Hines & Bruce 2007) and the threat of reduced perceptions due to increasing mass distribution (Dion & Arnould 2011). However, these conclusions do not explore the ways that luxury retailers overcome uncertainties, using the powerful tool of heritage to communicate messages and engage customers. This presents an opportunity for further exploration into the innovations of luxury retail.

Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research paper, therefore, is to explore how Harrods creates and encourages experiential value and consumption through in-store theatrical performance with the objectives being to:

1. explore the value of storytelling in creating experiences at Harrods.
2. address innovations in luxury retail.
3. explore the use of heritage and provenance stories as tools for leveraging the customer experience.

METHODS

Research Philosophy

The purpose of this paper is to capture experiences of “retail theatre” at Harrods in as much richness and detail as possible whilst unpicking elements that encompass the magic of the store. This was achieved by placing particular emphasis on the intricacies and significance of the retail setting on the consumer experience (Bitner et al., 1990, Rubin & Rubin 1995). To explore emotions and draw on personal experiences, a

qualitative research method of phenomenology was taken. Qualitative research allows the researcher to undertake a “conscious search for meaning and understanding” (Gumesson 2005 p311) with a defined set of processes and assumptions, but with scope for flexibility and innovation (Creswell 1998).

A phenomenological approach to understanding social action (Holstein & Gubrium 2005) allows the researcher to develop an accurate, clear and articulate description and examination of the lived experience from an individual’s perspective (Delaney 2003). In-depth interviews were the chosen approach to research, popular in examining lived experiences (Husserl 1962). By analytically reviewing the essence of meaning without any predetermined assumptions or expectations (Cohen 1987; Manen 1990), findings emerge through interpreting the meanings of experiences and thinking about life experiences perspectives (Powers & Knapp 1995).

Taking into consideration the subjectivity of phenomenological research, a triangulation approach (Berg, 2001) was adopted to achieve a rounded view of the topic, allowing the researcher to interpret rich descriptions of experiences from a number of perspectives. Twelve participants were selected from a variation of industry professionals, an archivist and luxury customers, with the aim of not achieving a large sample that could be generalised (Faugier and Sargeant 1997), but to explore the differentiation of individual experiences from various viewpoints of the industry. With this in mind, industry professional participants (IPP) were selected via a non-probability snowball sample (Babbie 2000), utilising relevant contacts built working in the industry until the sample size of 7 was achieved, including the archivist. Social media sites were used to capture the desired luxury customer participants (LCP). Participants’ ages ranged from 21-56, (see Figure 1), with each working in differing professions, but sharing an interest of luxury retail. From March 2015, one-to-one, in-depth interviews, led by the participants were carried out, with the average interview lasting 44.25 minutes. All interviews were recorded in order to enhance accuracy and reliability in the findings and analysis (Kvale 1994).

Participant	Age	Gender	Type of Participant	Length
1	32	M	Luxury Professional	35 minutes 45 seconds
2	29	F	Luxury Customer	45 minutes 33 seconds
3	28	F	Luxury Customer	55 minutes 43 seconds
4	28	M	Luxury Professional	51 minutes 15 seconds
5	28	F	Luxury Professional	54 minutes 56 seconds
6	30	F	Luxury Professional	33 minutes 06 seconds
7	56	F	Archivist	1 hour 2 minutes
8	26	M	Luxury Professional	46 minutes 13 seconds
9	52	F	Luxury Customer	28 minutes 25 seconds
10	35	M	Luxury Professional	46 minutes 13 seconds
11	22	F	Luxury Customer	28 minutes 59 seconds
12	40	F	Luxury Customer	42 minutes 41 seconds
TOTAL:				9 Hours, 22 minutes 51 seconds

Figure 1. Participant information table

An interview guide was created to inspire exploration of participants’ experiences. This was categorised by sections allowing for, but not limiting the researcher to a structure and direction. However, the guide was rarely utilised, due to the need to explore experiences of participants. Thompson et al. (1989) explain the significance of understanding participants’ experiences, suggesting that experiences are inseparable from the individual elements that make it up. Within the retail environment, this could

be explained with purchasing a pair of shoes from Brand X. The customer's last experience of Brand X will be directly linked with their attitude and experience towards their next purchase.

Within qualitative research, there is a focus on experience as a dynamic process where specific issues stand out in an individual's life while others recede (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). In light of this, participants were asked to expand on their comments, exploring the practical, simple experiences of everyday life (Connell, 2003). This allowed the researcher to go beyond face value meaning and

“uncover the meanings in everyday practice in such a way that they are not destroyed, distorted, decontextualized, trivialized or sentimentalized” (Benner 1985 p6).

Given the ethics of the research consent, all participants prior to the interview signed forms. In addition, full consent for images used in the findings chapter was received. One interview was transcribed in full and the rest were summarized. A table categorising key quotes by theme was collated to focus and support findings.

Limitations can arise in a phenomenological approach. Most prominently, the researcher's own experience can never be escaped (Gadamer 1976). In this study, the researcher's prior experience working at Harrods is significant as personal bias and expectations may limit the researcher to remain open and inquisitive of experiences given by participants, crucial to uncovering the deeper meaning of research (Creswell 2007). However, within findings and analysis, the extent of industry knowledge is useful in unpicking underlying themes, connecting them to broader social histories and discourses (Holstein & Gubrium 2005) whilst keeping the findings as faithful as possible to the experiential raw data. The identification and sensitivity of preconceived notions is imperative in achieving reliable data. This can be accomplished through the method of bracketing (Lopez & Willis 2004), or “unknowing” (Munhall 1994) prior to and during the interview process, through interview summaries and subsequent reflection (Speziale & Carpenter 2007). This action allowed the researcher to stand before participant experiences with an attitude of unknowing, disregarding personal experience, beliefs and knowing (Husserl 1962).

Lopez and Willis (2004) assert that the concept of *being* is intrinsic to research analysis and interpretation of meanings behind experiences (Creswell 1998). Holstein and Gubrium (1998 p30) explain,

“An individual approaches the life world with a stock of knowledge composed of common-sense constructs and categories that are social in origin. These images, theories, ideas, values and attitudes are applied to aspects of experience, making them meaningful.”

Through interpretive phenomenology (Cresswell 2007), the researcher was able to draw conclusions and identify themes. This was achieved by identifying similarities amongst participants' experiences as they emerged in specific contexts. The importance of ensuring there isn't a 'decontextualised experience' is key. From a phenomenological perspective this can be problematic, as decontextualisation takes away from the specific lived experience of the individual leaving generalisation in results, and lack of validity. Sensitivity to this notion was crucial and by embedding larger quotes the researcher was able to capture participants' experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this paper suggest retail theatre can be increasingly lost in practice as 'luxury' is increasingly aimed at the masses, thus devaluing experiential value and

consumption. Results, however, suggest that Harrods aims to create consumption experiences through different channels of theatrical performance. Participants recalled stories and memories of highly emotive experiences with Harrods, allowing the researcher to explore the value of consumption. For luxury shoppers, these stories demonstrated a degree of importance that luxury-shopping experiences play in their everyday lives. Whilst for industry professionals, the importance of remaining ‘industry leading’ emphasised the value of staging an experience.

This section will address three core themes, and embed analysis within a discussion of the existing literature:

1. Stories communicated through theatre
2. Innovations in luxury retail
3. Legacy, provenance and heritage

To identify participants abbreviations are made:

Abbreviation	Meaning
Participants	Reference to more than one participant from a combinations both groups
IPP	Reference to industry professional participants
LCP	Reference to industry luxury customer participants
‘e.g. ‘P4	Reference to specific participant

Figure 2. Participant abbreviations table

Stories communicated through theatre

Research found that the magic of Harrods is captured through stories, communicated through theatrical performance. This is supportive of Ritzer (1999) who suggested that consumers treat a spectacular social environment as sacred and transforming. Existing research claims that the overpowering glitz and glamour of the spectacle in everyday reality devalues the impact of retail theatre (Sherry et al. 2002). However, theatrical performance emerged as a famous aspect of Harrods’ retail success, from a shift in the 1940s towards the ‘Harrods experience’ (P7). This opposes the view that retail theatre is devalued but demonstrates how Harrods use entertainment and spectacle in everyday practice, positioning the store as a stage of entertainment (Sherry et al. 2002) to engage audiences.

Participants’ experiences of Harrods’ window campaigns supported the assumption that theatrical performance is centralised around creating compelling metaphors and life experiences that will touch customers both personally and emotionally (Danziger 2006). This affirms that storytelling is a key aspect of retail theatre, reinforced by P7 who highlighted the shift towards theatrical performance over the last 10-15 years. Participants proclaimed that the Harrods’ window stories are the backbone of theatrical performance by telling an engaging story that is echoed in store, adding value to the Harrods experience. IPP described window campaigns as fulfilling desires in a creative manner;

“Harrods windows always tell a story. They always put on some sort of show in the windows and there is always a theme that goes through the store that ultimately fulfils the customers desires and engages them in the Harrods show” (P1, IPP).

This builds an adaption of existing research of playful and escapist values (Kozinets et al. 2002), emphasising customers’ desires to feel engaged and immersed

(Sherry et al. 2002). Participants described how window stories bring to life the magic of what lies within the store whilst affirming that spectacular windows have been an expectation for customers for decades, as the expectation of performance from a luxury retailer is high. Arguably this contradicts the claim that windows create fantasy-like experiences (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Unger et al. 1983). However, (P2) commented on how customers expect to be taken on a 'fairy-tale like journey', supportive of Debord's (1983) concept of "hyperreality" where the unreal is celebrated and elevated above the real.

Participants supported that "hyperreality" creates a link between escapism, playfulness and education (Pine and Gilmore 1998) by discussing The Handbag Narratives, a window and in-store campaign. Four participants explored their experiences of the campaign, suggestive that the heritage stories of the campaign engaged customers by entertaining and educating them in a playful manner with larger than life models of signature handbags. One participant described:

"...a window campaign filled with handbags, they had exclusive handbags made by a variety of designers and they [...] showed an exclusive, oversized handbag in every window and stories were told. One of them has tiny little bits of equipment, used to make up the handbag hanging down and it really was amazing it showed you [...] effort put into each product [...] its not just about the money that you are spending but the quality that its going into it" (P12, LCP).

This supports Kozinet et al.'s (2002) assumption that theatrical performance is a 'present-day incarnation' of traditional practices, emphasising the need for consumers to make meaning out of their hedonic experiences (Babin et al. 1994) by encouraging them to explore the landscape of action and consciousness (Brunner 1990). IPP addressed the campaign from a business perspective, shedding light on luxury retail strategy by emphasising the impact of strong, exceptional retail theatre as rewarding and essential. However, agreeing that *unique* theatre is increasingly difficult to create (Lindgreen et al. 2012).

All participants agreed that the experiential aspects of the store most successfully capture the audience. Reinforcing this claim, P7 explained how promotion in 1911 positioned West End actresses as sales advisors, representative of a theatre in which the audience is the customer. This is echoed today through performances across departments:

"It's all about the show and it's all about the retail theatre. [...] the stories you are creating around the product and the experience that are the whole part of luxury [...] you have to push the boundaries and you have to create new things to continue to engage the customer because the price is always the challenge. I think it's really important, especially working at Harrods because Harrods is synonymous around the world for customer service. [...] every part of the store is part of this show. I think now we are looking at it in such a refined way [...] People come to us because of the experience" (P6, IPP).

Customer service was a reoccurring theme throughout the research. All participants shared the view of existing literature, that creating compelling customer service is at the core of luxury retail success (Sherry 1998; Shaw & Ivens 2002; Pine & Gilmore 1999, 2007; Schmitt, 2003; Caru & Cova, 2007);

"I think luxury for me is that extra mile service that you receive, [...] so I think for luxury its going above and beyond your expectations

as a customer [...] new things, surprises, doing something new and different. Making that kind of luxury that you are buying into stand out from anything else and making it different. That's why I like shopping at Harrods, because I think now, there are so many different brands out there that there is more choice and ultimately the customer service encourages me to keep coming back. [...] making the customer feel like they are the only ones who have received personal touches [...] how the salmon I am purchasing was caught. Its all part of that excellent customer service" (P12, LCP).

Interestingly, IPP stated that sales associates use the tool of storytelling to bring to life products on offer, a concept that is explored in existing literature (Gilliam et al., 2013). Thus suggesting a visit to Harrods doesn't end without a story, creating a memory (Deighton 1992):

"You don't have to come into the store to buy a £20,000 pound ring. You can come here to find something new, to try something that you have had before. That is why we have to have that very high standard of sales assistants, because without that story, you know there is no impact. Otherwise you are just buying something ordinary and what I love, particularly in my job, you feel it, in some ways like a customer. Those people are choosing the brand they work for and they do, they take such pride in that" (P10, IPP).

Building on existing literature (Dion & Arnold 2011), this theme provides evidence that similarly to a creative director, communication of stories, through theatrical performance transfers value (Melot 1994). As a result, this brings customers to the heart of the magic of Harrods and most importantly induces a "climate of reverence" through a themed retail environment (Dion & Arnold 2011 p5). Findings additionally explore new conclusions, asserting that storytelling in retail theatre does not have to lead to purchases to be impactful. Instead, the experiential value of stories told encourages customers to build an impression and memory of the brand, allowing Harrods to position itself as 'industry first' by using experiential consumption as an innovative competitive advantage.

Innovations in Luxury Retail

Innovation was a reoccurring theme throughout research, supportive of the hypothesis that luxury retailers are producers (Dion & Arnould 2001), and indicating that, by fulfilling customer desires, Harrods claim authority as an innovator in the industry. Key words, such as 'creativity', 'product', 'service', 'aftercare', 'craftsmanship', 'bespoke' and 'unique' were used to describe Harrods' retail environment; however, the notion of 'can't purchase anywhere else' was most popular amongst participants when exploring their experiences. Interestingly, participants noted the expansion of the 'luxury' umbrella, as explored in existing research; highlighting the desire on the high-street to have brands to meet luxury protocol and emphasising the increased pressure luxury brands have to not only reach, but exceed expectations of both existing and new customers (Blattberg 1998).

Supportive of existing research (Jin et al. 2012), findings suggest service expectation resonates more than just the delivery of tangible products and services. IPP identified unique, innovative consumption experiences as relevant to the ever-changing demands of a customer as the most impactful:

"I think it's the creative [...] it's the product, it's the service, it's the continued service so it's not just purchasing something, it's the

after care. I think luxury, luxury brands have excellent aftercare, in every aspect of the world. Not just retail, but also hospitality. I think it's the one off, can't purchase anywhere else, element. And I think it is the material, and the craftsmanship and bespoke uniqueness. The level of detail and provenance and history that it creates well to luxury" (P1, IPP).

The service experience is impactful in creating a 'memorable experience' which participants' highlighted sets Harrods apart from competitors. This is supportive of Mathwick et al. (2001 cited in Pine & Gilmore 1999), who reiterated the demand luxury brands have to redefine themselves as a source of memories rather than goods:

"I think luxury retail offers consumers a memorable experience, and something that when they go away they don't just leave with a purchase but they come away with a memory of incredible customer service, someone that has offered them exceptional product knowledge wherever they have gone to shop for that item" (P2, LCP).

Alongside service, IPP discussed multi-sensory experiences:

"Making the sensory experience is a key focus for Harrods now and it has been over the last year. From a shopping perspective, shoppers can shop anywhere ok. So when they come and actively choose to come a store they want to be mesmerised, they want to feel captivated and they want to feel inspired with the essence of retail theatre that the Internet cannot control" (P4, IPP).

This asserts that Harrods is innovative and, in turn, 'industry-leading' in their approach to the experiential show-style elements of retail, by focusing on new concepts whilst inscribing themselves in longer-term traditions (Assouly 2005 cited Dion & Arnould 2011), with the goal of captivating its audience and creating memories:

"Harrods were the first to do these show type elements in retail, they were the pioneers of that approach. This whole making shopping a big pleasure activity, where shopping is supposed to be a pleasure. That is one of the slogans they used, 'Shopping is a pleasure not a chore'. So the idea that you are spending a day in Harrods, because it is a great place to be and if you spend some money that is a bonus" (P7, Archivist).

IPP paid particular attention to Harrods' position as 'industry leading', exploring the modern, cutting edge, innovative journey that Harrods is constantly on to refresh their offering and keep up with industry and customer demands. A further exploration into this journey by the researcher discovered Harrods' increased activity and collaborations out of the store environment;

"We're industry first for so much. Vogue for example. The fact that it is such an international, young, trendy brand and that we are this historical, mountain almost that has been there forever and we're fitting them - we have got a piece of Vogue in Harrods. It tells people that we are more than just a building and just a shop, because it is that extra thing but for people that haven't been, you can't explain it. You can't put it into words" (P4, IPP).

This journey is supportive of Kozinets et al, (2002) notion of "linger, play, seek community, learn or grow". Contributing to his notion, IPP suggested that these collaborations encourage experiential consumption, as Harrods becomes part of customers' everyday lives. Participants stated that, increasingly, Harrods not only uses

customers as the audience for, but also actors in the 'Harrods show', revolutionising the goal of retail theatre to impress and engage the customer in a new, playful way. One LCP conspicuously commented on the show like elements of recent renovations, suggesting its approaches theatrical performance in a new way, by making the customers the actors in its show:

"The concessions in the new Superbrands for example are in glass boxes. So, every time you go into one you are literally on display, you are part of that concession. Its as though the concession is the window and you can be part of this theatre that whilst you are looking, people are looking at you and wanting to be in your position, which I think makes the brand and the department look so elite" (P11, LCP).

This finding fascinatingly sheds new light on the concept of "themed flagship brand stores" (Kozinets et al 2002), as the offering of Harrods' entertainment-oriented store uses one pre-existing entity - heritage, to leverage another - innovation, by presenting customers as actors in their show. Building on this, P6 commented on Harrods' contemporary way of looking at theatre, aiming to entice the customer over the tourist:

"Retail theatre is not just about having an attraction for tourists, with opera singers and the pet spa its things like the educational window displays carried into store, it's the environment that you're shopping in that makes it theatrical now. So, interiors, staff etc. all of those theatrical things that bring Harrods to life, attracting customers" (P8, IPP).

These refreshed approaches to luxury retail strategy increase engagement by resonating values in new aspects of customers' lifestyles, exposing customers entertainment and emotional worth (Bhatnagar & Gosh 2004; Bellenger et al 1976). This impacts upon intrinsic and extrinsic values (Mathwick et al. 2001) and successfully constructs aura (Holbrook 1994; Schmitt 1999), which enhances experiential consumption. This affirms that the demands of customers are at the forefront of Harrods' innovation in the industry.

Legacy, Provenance and Heritage

Research proclaims that the palatial look of the store captures the theatrical essence of the store through an image of heritage, with 'Harrods' name in lights' (P4). All participants relayed the first time they visited the store as special memory:

"It seemed like this big massive, palace almost. Very regal with the guys opening the door for you, in their [...] amazing suits with their buttons. I was really impressed and taken back by it. It stuck with me because I have never seen it anywhere else, the journey of going up the big gold escalators through all of the different floors was something that struck a cord" (P3, LCP).

Participants stated that the legacy of 'The Palace of Knightsbridge' builds a personality of heritage that differentiates Harrods from any competitors:

"I think that the heritage enhances the atmosphere but makes it more challenging to create the perfect journey for a customer" (P1, IPP).

"It is a unique place, simply because of the size of it and the detail in the store. It's almost like a gallery or a museum isn't it. People go there not just to shop but to see all of the amazing detail" (P3, LCP).

A reoccurring theme from IPP was the ability heritage offers to build on activity in store, highlighting the impact a provenance story can have on customer experiences and its importance in the luxury industry:

“We can delve into the archives, dig up those anecdotes and establish what sort of material we have in terms of imagery, the brochures, provide that to the journalists and it becomes a great package story [...] Heritage is the way that we communicate. I think that it is important to try and reflect it in the present day” (P4, IPP).

Drawing attention to the symbolic use of heritage, this supports the assumption that provenance stories impact value (Assouly 2005 cited Dion & Arnould 2011). Using its provenance of a tool for shaping business practice and communication with customers and staff, P7 claimed Harrods’ brand values have directed strategy for 167 years: ‘British – Luxury – Innovation – Sensation –Service’. These values are embedded in Harrods’ brand motto of ‘anything is possible’ and mission statements, which were recognised amongst participants as instrumental to the image, legacy and experience of the store. This supports existing research, highlighting the importance of building brand legitimacy by stimulating moral ideologies (Arnold et al. 2001; Borghini et al. 2009) asserting customers buy into the brand as well as product. P7 offered insight into the heritage and tradition of Harrods’ slogans:

“The slogan Harrods were using in the 1980s was, ‘The cheapest store in London for everything’. That was what you saw in the adverts up until about 1980. And then, when the Brompton Road front goes up, it becomes ‘The most fashionable resort for shopping’, or ‘The shrine of fashion’ or ‘The most luxurious emporium’. The emphasis is on luxury and the experience, not on value for money, and that shift at exactly that time, 1939 [...] Changing shopping into more of a theatrical experience. It has always been that. Shopping revolves around getting people what they want before they realise they want it” (P7, Archivist).

This finding is simultaneous to findings in theme two. Again, adding to existing literature of offering customers more by fulfilling customers changing desires (Jin et al. 2012). The slogans are supportive that Harrods strives to offer unique, enjoyable and memorable service experiences (Martineau 1958; Walls et al. 2012), creating an offering, intended to not always lead to a purchase, but to put power in creating value and magic around the Harrods brand which reflects consumption value.

Further exploration into provenance found that it leverages Harrods’ ability to build on not only their legacy, but also the brands that the store houses. Participants highlighted the use of exhibition space in recent years. The most recent, ‘Pradasphere’ exhibition was popular amongst LPP, highlighting the space Prada occupied to create a visually and intellectually engaging show for its customer:

“The Pradasphere exhibition was incredible. It offered customers an immersive visual experience. [...] a creative show, to not only display Prada’s beautiful collections in one place, but intellectually engage the intelligent, curious customer in a journey of the heritage story. [...] confirming their position as a super brand” (P6, IPP).

The exhibition reinforces existing research, stressing that successful brands are auratic (Dion and Arnould 2011), by encompassing an engaging, auratic nature, immersing audiences into the world of Prada. This is supportive of Kotler and Armstrong’s (2000) experience conclusions. Presenting a ‘stage of Prada’ that is innovative, unique and memorable, emphasises that heritage and provenance impact on

the meaning of a brand experience. In addition, it adds to the experiential value scale (Mathwick et al. 2001), demonstrating that exploration of heritage adds experiential value.

An interesting concept that arose in various contexts by participants was the 'Harrods Journey'. LCP explored the journey of entering the store:

"Unity at Harrods completely has something to do with the heritage of the store. You can tell when you walk into the store, that from the people on the door, opening the door for you. To the concierge in the middle, to the store staff, to the people who probably work in the stock room, to the people on the 5th floor [...] you can tell that every single person loves to work there, and they want to portray Harrods in the best possible way [...] Which I think is so unique for businesses anywhere" (P11, LCP).

Adding to this, LPP discussed the current 'navigation project' which will restructure navigation around the store, adding ease to customers' shop-floor journey. LPP stressed the significant investment into this project, emphasising how simplicity of the journey around store will impact on a number of business strategies, including customer enjoyment and engagement. This suggests that features of architecture and designs add to theatrical performance, as customers simply need to be directed around the store to witness the show, supported by LCP:

"The magic of Harrods... I think it's the magic, and the service [...] the fact that you went to this building that looks like it has been there since the beginning of time and you saw all the magnificent things, you heard all the enjoyable noises and you smelt all the delicious smells it's a journey going through the store - it really is and it is magical" (P5, IPP).

Furthering this, a number of participants mentioned their more recent experiences in the Harrods' 'Super Brands' department. Interestingly, P4 emphasised that although modern in concept, all designs for new departments are centralised around original architecture and atmospherics. P10 commented on how the walkway around each department creates a journey and show for the customer. In addition to the journey, participants highlighted the segmentation of brands through individual sectioned boutiques. LPP assert this solidifies the essence of each brand's differing values, adding a captivating, luxuriously exclusive feel. LCP on the other hand explored the experience from an enjoyment and ease perspective, suggesting that the layout is similar to a shopping mall, allowing customers to pick which boutique they shop with, evoking escapist values. This argues that through never compromising the consistency of the store, from the personality and brand value to the architectural decisions, Harrods sets itself apart from competitors, using provenance and heritage to position itself as innovative and 'industry leading'.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified a number of consumer and professional-felt experiences that occurred when visiting and working at Harrods. Unlike previous research into luxury retail, the paper draws on personal experiences to highlight the importance of experiential value and consumption derived through differing forms of theatrical performance. Through investigating how experiences resonate with individuals, this paper sheds new, experiential light on existing literature. Themes explored in the findings and analysis tended to significantly overlap, lending themselves to each other.

This presents valuable insight into how Harrods stages theatrical performance by combining tools.

Findings explored the value of storytelling in creating experiences at Harrods. Whilst supportive of existing literature, findings assert that the 'magic' of Harrods is captured through stories of heritage and provenance, communicated through theatrical performance. Experiences of Harrods' retail strategies (particularly window campaigns, exhibitions) determined that theatrical performances centralise around creating compelling metaphors and life experiences in a show like manor that resonate value and worth with the customer; going beyond the protocol of service. Interestingly, research uncovered the increase of customers being used as a tool for engagement, playing the role of actors in the 'Harrods Show' adding to experiential consumption by creating new, magical memories.

Findings affirmed that Harrods position themselves as 'producers' by fulfilling customer's desires and positioning themselves as innovators in the industry. Participants' most valuable experiences were described as "unique, innovative and memorable" (P1, Industry Professional) relevant to the ever-changing demands of a customer and the industry. Ultimately, remaining innovative is subsequent of fulfilling a customer's desire before they even know what it is, reiterating the need to encourage experiential consumption. An interesting conclusion that arose from research is the impact of brand legitimacy on innovation, emphasising that reflecting moral ideologies into new practices and environments enhances experiential value.

An arguably obvious, but extremely powerful, conclusion of research is that Harrods' personality is built on heritage and provenance. Research drew attention to the symbolic use of heritage as a tool for leveraging current activity, demonstrating how old and new approaches are simultaneous. Most significantly, the heritage and provenance of the store allows Harrods to offer activity that is not always intended to lead to a purchase, but to inject power into creating value and magic in the auratic 'Harrods stage', captured through theatrical performance.

This study successfully builds on two, key existing journals. First, Dion and Arnolds' (2007) research on values and ideologies, suggesting that, opposed to the creative director, storytelling is a key aspect of retail theatre. Secondly, on Kozinets et al. (2002) categorisation of stores, by proclaiming that entertainment-oriented stores can use one pre-existing entity i.e. heritage, to leverage another i.e. innovation, again reiterating the claim that concepts work hand in hand to build value.

Overall, the aim of this study was successfully fulfilled. Results found that in order to increase experiential value and encourage experiential consumption, Harrods must offer more than just delivery of tangible product/services, whilst exceeding customers desires by communicating their heritage story in all activity. This is executed by creating an offering through theatrical performance, intended not always to lead to a purchase but to put supremacy in creating value and magic around the Harrods brand and allowing them to proclaim innovation and leadership in the industry.

The analysis of theatrical experience at Harrods has produced a refreshed definition of retail theatre. Asserting a shift from being an attraction for tourists, i.e. in-store opera singers, to a strategic business tool of attracting customers; executed by using heritage and innovation to target and appeal to the changing desires of the luxury customer. This form increases experiential consumption and value, using theatrical performance as a tool for trade and growth.

The sample for this study was luxury customers and professionals of Harrods. To shed new light on the conclusions from this paper, further study should explore other department stores using a larger sample of participants. Additionally, focus on the

'Beyond' rewards scheme and its experiential impact would offer valuable insight into the power of customer experiences. Finally, an interesting area of research would be the architecture of luxury, examining its impact on customer experiences.

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