

MARKETING OUTPUTS AS ART? BRINGING AN AESTHETIC SENSIBILITY TO THE MARKETING CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Marketing is often referred to as “an art” – but is less often referred to as art. Can marketing outputs – advertising, packaging, product design, retail environments, etc. – be considered a form of art? This work will explore the potential for incorporating the theories and concepts of aesthetics in the marketing curriculum, in order to facilitate students’ capacity to interpret marketing outputs and develop effective practical applications. First, we examine the literature in order to explicate the theoretical foundations of aesthetics and their potential to (1) facilitate students’ capacity to interpret marketing outputs with an aesthetic sensibility and (2) to develop effective practical applications based on aesthetic principles. Second, we propose specific recommendations for curricular implementation.

Four theoretical approaches to the study of aesthetic experience are: the traditional, the allegorical (critical), the minimalist, and the pragmatic. The traditional approach represents the “art for art’s sake” mentality, in which aesthetic objects are valued for their intrinsic, self-rewarding value – the aesthetic experience is contemplative, and any pleasure that results is purely hedonic and emotional in nature. The allegorical approach involves an active cognitive response in which the aesthetic experience results in an emancipation from some existing hegemony. The minimalist approach is concerned with the ways in which an individual evaluates aesthetic objects, with emphasis on the criteria used and the dynamics by which those criteria develop. The pragmatic approach holds that all aesthetic and non-aesthetic experiences have a similar structure, and that the experience of art is not

separate from the aesthetic experiences that make up our everyday lives. Each of these theoretical approaches can be applied in a variety of marketing courses and/or topics.

In addition to the application of theoretical aesthetic considerations, we identify several practical considerations that inform the incorporation of marketing aesthetics in the marketing curriculum. First, creativity represents an area of practical marketing application that is directly related to aesthetic sensibility. Aesthetic applications are relevant for the creativity realms of task motivation, cognitive flexibility, disciplinary knowledge, and serendipity.

While creativity represents a broad practical application of aesthetic sensibility, more direct applications of marketing aesthetics can be incorporated in the areas of product design, communications design, and spatial design.

Based on these theoretical and practical aesthetic considerations, we make specific recommendations for incorporating aesthetics across the marketing curriculum.

If we accept that marketing and art are equally important in providing insights into the human condition, perhaps it follows that marketing studies should be pursued outside of their traditional home in schools and departments of business, and be considered part of a general liberal arts education. Perhaps, someday, students will see a listing for “Marketing Appreciation 101” in our course catalogs.

References Available on Request