

## Market-Mediated Authenticity and the Emergence of Modern Branding Practices:

Liberty of London, 1875-1900

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In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, an increasingly consumerized market environment, encouraged firms to pay greater attention to the marketing of their goods and the development of modern branding practices. However, in the literature, the development of these branding practices has remained somewhat obscured by the assertion that brands conform to general characteristics within historical periods (Moore and Reid, 2008). However, as Mercer (2010: 18) notes: “such an argument overlooks nuances and shifts in the types of brands and branding employed over time.” This paper is concerned with understanding these nuances and the historical instantiation of brand building activities. In order to achieve this, we consider the role of the retailer Liberty of London at the emergence of modern branding practices. In particular, we focus on Liberty’s success engaging emergent middle class consumers with its distinctive design values associated with the exoticism of the Orient at a crucial stage in the development of mass consumer culture. Arthur Lasenby Liberty commercially activated the elitist aestheticism of mid-nineteenth century England associated with such as Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris by articulating a vision of market-mediated authenticity. In 1875, Liberty opened his first store in Regent Street and over the next quarter of a century became a major influence on consumer taste. Our findings show that Liberty’s branding practices were encountered at three levels: first, through authoritative advocacy and allegorical encounters within a wide socio-cultural sphere; secondly, through augmented admission and experiential engagement within an iconic retail setting; thirdly, through symbolic substantiation within the consumer’s social and domestic space. We conclude by proposing that this process of brand building, through market-mediated authentication, was linked intrinsically to consumers’ associated experiential imagining within an iconic retail space. Further, we propose the firm’s exploitation of territorial legitimacy to underpin brand validity was a precursor to a wider commercial exploitation of iconic venues of consumption that became increasing evident in the early years of the next century.

*References:*

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