Theorising Brand Aura

Nicholas Alexander*

Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster University,

United Kingdom

nicholas.alexander@lancaster.ac.uk

Anne Marie Doherty

Strathclyde Business School, University of Strathclyde,

United Kingdom

annemarie.doherty@strath.ac.uk

* Corresponding author.

Theorising Brand Aura

Abstract

Purpose – Building on Walter Benjamin's philosophical reflections on aura and authenticity, this article conceptualises and theorises brand aura.

Design/methodology/approach - This article extends understanding of brand aura within the management, marketing and tourism literatures with reference to Benjamin's framing of aura and authenticity in time and space.

Findings – Within a Benjaminian framework this article theorises brand aura and offers a conceptualisation of the antecedents of brand aura. It explores the duality of what is termed here as artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity. It illustrates the central role of consumers' *mémoire involontaire* in the realisation of brand aura. Within this Benjaminian framework, the article explores how artefactual authenticity is preceded by brand essence, while existential authenticity precedes brand essence. Implications for the management of the service encounter are discussed with reference to territorial legitimacy and historical testimony in the context of the firm's role in supporting consumer experiential engagement.

Originality/value - This article advances theoretical understanding of how consumers engage experientially with brand aura and how firms curate brand aura.

Keywords – Brand aura, authenticity, Walter Benjamin, territorial legitimacy, historical testimony, heritage, *mémoire involontaire*

Paper type - Research paper

Introduction

> 'What's this place called?'
> He told me and, on the instant, … an immense silence followed … for he had spoken a name that was so familiar to me, a conjuror's name of such ancient power, that, at its mere sound, the phantoms of those haunted late years began to take flight.'
> (Waugh, 1945: 21)

In this article, we explore Walter Benjamin's writings on aura and authenticity. In so doing, we consider the relationship between those two concepts in order to theorise brand aura. Rather than seeing aura as a component of the brand we adopt a Benjaminian perspective, predicated on a Proustian conceptualisation of *mémoire involontaire*, that envisages brand aura to be the culmination of consumers' experiential engagement with a brand. There is a danger that in isolation, authenticity in a commercial setting becomes a collection of constituent parts and - at times - conflicting entities. If, however, we see authenticity through the lens of brand aura those constituent parts may be better understood, reconciled and integrated.

The relationship between aura and authenticity is recognised in the marketing literature. In the early literature on authenticity, aura emerges as a constituent characteristic of a brand. For example, Beverland and Luxton (2005: 103) refer to aura as "a core brand component because it communicates a sense of authenticity and directly reflects the core values for which the brand stands." They derive this definition of aura from Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003: 21), who see aura as that which "pertains to the presence of a powerful sense of authenticity that original works of art exude". Brown *et al* (2003) place aura alongside other components in their consideration of retro marketing and re-conceptualisation of nostalgia.

However, as Miller (2014: 94) notes, "subsequent research expands the brand authenticity concept into a hierarchy with brand aura at the apex (Alexander, 2009)". "In this conceptualization" characteristics of authenticity such as "heritage" are seen as "an attribute of brand aura" (Miller, 2014: 94). It is in this reversal of emphasis that brand aura emerges as a focal construct in its own right. It is not a component of the brand, it encapsulates the brand; so that, brand aura is "the miasma of meaning surrounding a brand" (Alexander, 2009: 552). Thus, it frames interrelated levels of authenticity: objective product specific measures of authenticity, socially constructed authenticity, and authenticity derived from existential

engagement (Leigh, Peters and Shelton, 2006). In a commercial context, brand aura is created, maintained and developed through the management of authenticity (Alexander, 2009; Wahyuni and Fitriani, 2017; Le, Arcodia, Novais and Kralj, 2019), which is itself predicated on such characteristics as consumer perceptions of heritage, nostalgia, cultural symbolism, sincerity, craftsmanship, quality commitment, and design consistency (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, and Farrelly, 2014: 1096). However, in this conceptualisation of brand aura it is not a purely corporate creation, it is a co-creation that draws on "cultural epicentres" (Alexander, 2009: 558) which facilitate the presentation of "brands as relevant and authentic cultural resources" (Holt, 2002: 84). Thus, this co-creational conceptualisation of brand aura - where aura sits at the apex of other brand components - has implications for authenticity in a market context. As Brunninge and Hartmann (2019: 231) note, "authenticity can never be simply proclaimed" rather "it is construed by the creation of an aura of authenticity." Thus, by understanding brand aura and the sources from which it derives legitimation, we are in a better position to understand the commercial value of authenticity and how it should be expressed in the market.

After two decades of research on authenticity and brand aura, it is timely to revisit the work of Walter Benjamin, whose writings on aura have influenced the conceptualisation of authenticity in management, marketing and tourism research. Benjamin provides a useful framework and vocabulary for theorising brand aura. For example, while Brown *et al* (2003, 21) do not use the term *brand aura*, they "explore aura-based relationships … in the context of consumer dialogue about retro brands." Drawing on Benjamin's work they suggest that aura relates to the existence of authenticity as it is associated with original pieces of art (Brown et al, 2003, 21), a theme which they acknowledge is already present in the marketing literature: "As many scholars note (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Holt 1997; Kozinets 2001, 2002a, b; Peñaloza 2000; Thompson and Tambyah 1999), consumers' search for authenticity is one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing". Thus, within the marketing literature, Brown *et al* (2003) associate Benjamin's concept of aura with objective authenticity, the authenticity of the original piece of art.

In the tourism literature, Rickly-Boyd (2012) takes this understanding one stage further: she adopts "a Benjaminian approach to tourism", exploring "Benjamin's notions of authenticity and aura", further developing themes originally introduced into the tourism literature by MacCannell (1976). Rickly-Boyd (2012) illustrates how aura is bounded by the subject-object dichotomy, reciprocal gaze, ritualistic practices, moments in time and the spatiality of

experience; thereby, showing how aura is both mutable and ultimately elusive. That is, where the subject-object dichotomy conditions the viewer's relationship with the aura of an inanimate object, wherein the subject's gaze is returned by the object. This exploration of aura within the socio-cultural conditions of the tourism experience are helpful, as this contextualised consideration of intersubjectivity extends our understanding of Benjamin's interpretation of aura beyond the artefactual characteristics of the object itself; as emphasised by Brown *et al* (2003). Thus, in a Benjaminian framework, "the aura of objects such as clothing or furniture stands in a metonymic relation to the person who uses them or has been using them" establishing a quality of the habitual through associated and extended practices (Hansen, 2008: 340-1). Here, aura is created by the subject through meaning invested in the object. In turn, this evokes ritual in the context of time and space, where tradition may be interpreted as repetitive experiential practices that enculture personal behavioural engagement with an object. Such ritual occurs at the time and place of an initial engagement with an object as well as through subsequent encounters.

Brown *et al*'s (2003) consideration of aura from a literal, object specific perspective of authenticity in a marketing context, and Rickly-Boyd's (2012) emphasis on the intersubjectivity of aura as it relates to place within a tourism context, provides a basis on which to revisit Benjamin's notions of aura, and a basis on which to develop and theorise the concept of *brand aura* within a commercial and commercialised context. In the following section of the article, we explore Benjamin's thoughts on aura and authenticity, identifying the key concepts explored in his critical and philosophical reflections. This textual analysis provides us with a theoretical frame. In subsequent sections, we explore how the concept of brand aura helps to explain the embedded relationship consumers have with brands and the role of the firm in curating that relationship. In so doing, this article acknowledges the increasing relevance of intangibles in brand differentiation (Keller, 2020); that is, the deeper meaning and associations that consumers seek.

Benjamin's Conceptualisation of Aura

Benjamin's understanding of aura and his conceptualisation of authenticity, from which it is derived, together with the associated concepts of distance, gaze and *mémoire involontaire*, provides a framework for theorising brand aura. In this section we explore his thoughts on these characteristics of aura and plot their development.

We explore three key texts associated with Benjamin and his writings on brand aura and authenticity. First, we consider what is generally considered his seminal work in this area: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (Benjamin, 1936). In addition, we consider "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (Benjamin 1939) and "The Image of Proust" (Benjamin, 1929). Each of these works provides valuable insights on his thinking - including the development of his ideas - about authenticity and aura. As his biographers Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (2014: 8) observe "What is singular about Benjamin as a reader and thinker is the highly oblique application of" a "multilevel philosophical perspective" to the modernity of the everyday. To this description they add, he wrote in "an aphoristic prose form combining philosophical analysis with concrete imagery to yield a signature critical mimesis" in which "thought images" are "arranged according to the principles of avant-garde montage" (Eiland and Jennings, 2014: 3). Embedded within this style and embellished by it, are valuable insights that shed a philosophical light on our shared response to the artefacts of modernity: "Walter Benjamin's work was about nothing if it was not about the relation between our memories and the material world" (Kozinets, 2017: 145).

In his article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (Benjamin, 1936), Benjamin is concerned with authenticity. Writing in the mid-1930s, he contrasts the uniqueness of traditional art forms such as painting and theatre with those technologies that facilitate mechanical reproduction: photography and cinema. Here he is concerned with the provenance and measurability of the original or unique object. In his thinking about the contrast between traditionally produced and mechanically produced objects, he seeks to establish how we should understand authenticity. However, in writing about authenticity, he introduces the notion of aura which extends his framework, and our understanding of the authentic object: what it is, what it represents, and above all what it means to those who engage with it. In his writing, aura is treated as a separate concept to authenticity.

In his discussion of authenticity Benjamin is not content to restrict his thinking to the moment or method of production; although, this is - he recognises - one component of the uniqueness of the authentic. However, in addition, he suggests authenticity is measured by the history of the object itself:

> "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens. This

unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership." (Benjamin, 1936: 169-170)

This proposes two categories of event associated with the original authentic item: first, the moment and place of its creation; second, the events associated with the physical item throughout its journey in time and space. Thus, for Benjamin the "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (Benjamin, 1936: 170); while its provenance is verified through the "patina" that it accumulates during its existence: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (Benjamin, 1936: 171).

It is here that Benjamin begins to move from a measurable artefactual conceptualisation of authenticity to an associated existential existence. The history the object has experienced occurs within both the collective and personal realm; this provides its "historical testimony", which in turn establishes "the authority of the object" (Benjamin, 1936: 171). Therefore, for Benjamin authenticity is dependent upon two conditions: first original production and second historical testimony. It is historical testimony that actions objective authenticity and facilitates the occurrence of aura. An object exudes aura because it has authority or, if preferred, existential authenticity.

In his consideration of aura, Benjamin emphasises the duality of objective authenticity and existential authenticity. In the context and time that he is writing, he is concerned with the inauthentic products of the modern age: "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (Benjamin, 1936: 171). That is, the synthetic object eliminates aura through the diminution of authority. Here, he explores and defines "aura" in the natural state "as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (Benjamin, 1936: 173). He uses distance metaphorically to represent the enhanced experience that is achieved when the subject is "spatially and humanly" removed from the object. In this, distance from the object is important to the authority of the object, so that mass consumption which creates immediacy through the process of reproduction is responsible for "the contemporary decay of the aura" (Benjamin, 1936: 173) and its social bases in the modern and contemporary world of the 1930s. For Benjamin "It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life"; that is, "the desire of

contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly", is a desire which eradicates uniqueness through acceptance of the reproduced form (Benjamin, 1936: 173). Consequently, for him, mass consumption diminishes authenticity and, consequently, the authority of an object.

How authenticity is viewed is important to Benjamin's understanding of aura. While authenticity is objective, the object is unique and historical testimony is evidence of this, aura is framed by the observer:

> "The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both of them, however, were equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, its aura." (Benjamin, 1936: 173-4).

Authenticity may be differently interpreted from the perspective of those with different frameworks of seeing. This may change over time; it may change according to culture and be conceived differently in alternative places. However, it retains an aura nonetheless, because of the meaning and traditions associated with it. These meanings Benjamin associates with ritual: "It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function" (Benjamin, 1936: 174). Here Benjamin returns to the events that surround the object and the place at which those events occur: "the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value" (Benjamin, 1936: 174). Thus, place and ritualistic usage is linked to historical testimony, taking authenticity beyond an object's place of production and including the events and places associated with its journey in space and time. In this, there is a universality to the recognition of uniqueness through ritual and the observer's response to aura: "This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty" (Benjamin, 1936: 174). Thus, object authenticity, through tradition and ritual imbues historical testimony; thereby, enhancing aura through the creation of distance between the observer and the observed.

Thus, our framework of seeing is essentially personal: enhanced by metaphorical distance and - in everyday life - the secularised ritual that augments the authority of an object. Benjamin acknowledges this, even with respect to mechanically produced objects. In photography, "The

cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture" where, "For the last time the aura emanates from … photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face" (Benjamin, 1936: 176). In this Benjamin identifies an essential dimension of aura; that which is lost and remembered.

Benjamin returns to this theme of memory and its role in the creation of aura in his 1939 article "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (Benjamin 1939). Here he is less concerned about the physical authenticity of an object and instead focusses more on the aura that surrounds the object: an aura that is embedded in the experience of an object, where the authority of an object creates the "cult of remembrance". Again, Benjamin offers us two facets of this experience and the traditions in which those experiences are embedded. It exists "in collective existence as well as private life" (Benjamin 1939: 105). It is a product of shared experiences and individual experiences. In this process it becomes an embedded memory of what has been. From the individual standpoint it is an incomplete shared understanding of the collective experience and the repetitious experience of personal engagement. Consequently, "It is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data" (Benjamin 1939: 105).

Drawing on literary representations to develop his framework of understanding of the role of memory in the recognition of aura, Benjamin focusses on *Á la Recherche du temps perdu*, which he regards as Proust's attempt "to produce experience synthetically" (Benjamin 1939: 106). In particular, he notes Proust's recollection of a town from his youth that he had difficulty remembering through his conscious memory; however, when he bites into a patisserie called a *madeleine* he is transported back to that time and place. In this context, he explores the connection between the object and memory. In particular, he notes that Proust "coined the phrase *mémoire involontaire*" (Benjamin 1939: 108), a concept that "bears the marks of the situation which gave rise to it" predicated as it is on "the inventory of the individual" experiencing the recognition of aura. It is through *mémoire involontaire* that the observer perceives aura. Thus, Benjamin begins to explain how aura becomes manifest and moves toward a definition of aura itself: "aura the associations which, at home in the *mémoire involontaire*, tend to cluster around the object of perception" (Benjamin 1939: 139), so that "the distinctive feature of the images that rise from the *mémoire involontaire* is seen in their aura" (Benjamin 1939: 141). This is not voluntary memory which recalls dates and events in a

rational sequence, this is a memory that is conjured up by an object and is involuntarily projected by the object: dependent as it is on the observer's relationship to that object.

Benjamin's ideas around *mémoire involontaire* had been developing for some time. Ten years before his consideration of motifs in Baudelaire, his 1929 reflections on *mémoire involontaire* in "The Image of Proust" (Benjamin, 1929) provide further explanation. In that work he observes that Proust's *mémoire involontaire* is "much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory" (Benjamin, 1929: 150). This involuntary memory is not a conscious attempt to see, rather it is an unconscious confrontation. It is a memory that drops the observer down the wormhole of time: "the rejuvenating force which is a match for the inexorable process of aging. When the past is reflected in the dewy fresh "instant," a painful shock of rejuvenation pulls it together once more" (Benjamin, 1929: 160). So that "the free-floating forms of the *mémoire involontaire* are … in large part isolated"; they are "enigmatically present, visual images" (164), where "the materials of memory no longer appear singly, as images, but tell us about a whole, amorphously and formlessly, indefinitely and weightily" (Benjamin, 1929: 164).

This involuntary memory brings aura into being. However, while *mémoire involontaire* might activate a sense of aura, it does not tell us what the aura is doing. Benjamin addresses this problem in "Motifs in Baudelaire" (Benjamin, 1939) by introducing the idea of 'gaze'. "To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*" (Benjamin, 1939: 141). But here Benjamin, quoting Proust, does not presume to suggest that objects "retain something of the gaze that has rested on them" rather the aura stimulates "the only reality that is valid for the individual, namely, the world of the emotions" (Benjamin, 1939: 142). Essentially, it is the aura of the object that gazes back generated by the emotion of the observer and the enigmatic images of the *mémoire involontaire*.

Brand Aura
In his writings, Benjamin suggests a duality of artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity: in this he challenges our contemporary – early twenty-first century - understanding of brand aura and authenticity. How can his understanding of aura with its associated concepts of artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity (the former

predicated on method of production and the latter in historical testimony) be reconciled with the process of mass consumption and brand meaning?

A reading of Benjamin's thoughts on aura provides two dominant recurrent themes for our theorising of brand aura: time and space. For example, Benjamin discusses the place at which an object is created, providing it with provenance, and the patina it acquires over time, its historical testimony. In order to bring together Benjamin's theorising of aura and authenticity in time and space we use two key terms; the first is territorial legitimacy and the second is historical testimony (see, table 1). Historical testimony we draw directly from Benjamin, while we introduce the term territorial legitimacy to our discussion of brand aura. It is a term that usefully and succinctly brings together those elements discussed by Benjamin that relate to place and facilitates a wider discussion of the legitimacy of place as it relates to commercial activity. Additionally, because Benjamin discusses the physical authenticity of an object as well as the non-physical authenticity implied by historical testimony, we introduce the term artefactual authenticity to encompass discussion of the former. Therefore, while the authenticity literature implicitly identifies artefactual authenticity with respect to the genuine object and cites work by authors such as Fine (2003), the term artefactual authenticity is introduced here in order to explicitly define the authenticity of the physical item and distinguish it from other associated concepts.

Table 1. Here

When conceptualising brand aura within the context of Benjamin's theorising of aura and authenticity in time and space, both territorial legitimacy and historical testimony may be understood on two levels. Territorial legitimacy encompasses both provenance and ritualistic habituation. Where, within a frame of artefactual authenticity, provenance represents the place of origin of the object (its terroir), along with its intrinsic creational characteristics of craftmanship and production values (methods and materials), while ritualistic habituation represents the place, or places, at which the subject (consumer) engages with the object (occasions of secular ritual). Historical testimony encompasses both heritage and consumer emotional investment. Where, within a frame of existential authenticity, heritage represents an object's story (its patina), and emotional investment represents the associations that gaze back at the subject (consumer) from an object consequent to its journey in time and space. Therefore, both territorial legitimacy and historical testimony may be understood in relation to object

creation and curation at the source of production and at a time of consumption by the subject either individually or communally.

Territorial Legitimacy

Territorial legitimacy is derived from provenance and ritualistic habituation. Benjamin's theorising is particularly applicable to commercial activity that occurs within a defined place, where ritualistic practices, moments in time and the spatiality of experience provide a context for memory.

Artefactual authenticity is associated with place in two ways. It is associated with the place of object provenance as illustrated through the production and marketing of fine wines (Beverland and Luxton, 2005). Additionally, it is associated with the place where consumers ritualistically engage with the brand. In Alexander's (2009: 558, 552) work, the brand is placed in "communal space where interpersonal and intrapersonal expressions of authenticity" are defined and experientially connected to the "*terroir*, the soil or earth from which they emanate". In this way, an objective acknowledgement of place is connected with an ethereal sense of belonging which is generated by the consumer's repetitive, ritualised and habitual encounters. While the former derives territorial legitimacy from its place of production, the latter derives territorial legitimacy from ritualistic habituation. The former is permanent, and inherent, the latter ephemeral and acquired; thereby, requiring reinforcement in time and space.

Thus, a fine wine with a clearly identified place of origin has provenance and consequently authenticity. However, for the object to generate brand aura, it must resonate with the subject, the consumer, on a personal or communal level. Brand aura must have territorial legitimacy. The subject must engage ritualistically with the object at a place and at a time that will gaze back at the subject in the future. Therefore, from a commercial perspective, firms are required to sustain the inherent territorial legitimacy represented by provenance and curate the acquisition of territorial legitimacy through ritualistic habituation. The ritualistic qualities of experiential engagement provide the firm with an opportunity to frame and choreograph the process through its service and communication activities; thereby, encasing service and communication in a physical location that symbolically substantiates brand aura.

This process of realisation compliments an understanding in the literature of the front and back stage practices associated with authenticity (Goffman, 1959; MacCannell, 1973). In early work

on authenticity in tourism, MacCannell (1973) - drawing on (Goffman, 1959) - notes the staging of created experiences that are presented to tourists as representations of the genuine experience that occur beyond the consumer's viewpoint. Thus, for example, through the hyper-representation of brand stylistic consistency and commitment to quality "the brand emerges out of the back stage of production onto the front stage of representation", wherein back stage markers of authenticity such as commitment to genuine production methods are presented through the lens of ritualised engagement (Alexander, 2009: 559).

Luxury brands have attempted to achieve this for some considerable period of time through the use of stories designed to substantiate brand values. The incremental long-term international retailing activities of firms such as Tiffany of New York in the Paris and London markets illustrates this process (Alexander and Doherty, 2017). Such locations have provided an opportunity for the enhancement of brand aura where firms draw on their original territorial associations and those of the host market. Thus, firms come together in specific zones of consumption to legitimate their activities. In the luxury sector, the Rue de la Paix, Bond Street, and Fifth Avenue both legitimise, and are legitimised by, luxury consumption activities. The rituals of physically instantiated brand influence and a process of reinforcement through mimetic isomorphism ensues. Therefore, consumers experience experiential engagement with the brand at the point of sale, where the ritual of consumption is performed. The aura of the brand is realised at a place that instantiates the brand's values.

Therefore, brand aura, while it may be readily conceptualised with reference to luxury consumption, it is generated in mass market contexts as well. Alexander (2009) in his work on authenticity and the creation and maintenance of brand aura explicitly seeks to explore a mass market context. He notes:

> "There are, in the mass production of products or services, elements of social construction, commodification and constructed meaning (Gottdiener, 2001) that make it impossible to create an "unmediated experience" in the "absence of cognitive understanding" (Fine, 2003). Rather, while authenticity is not enhanced by overt commercialism, commercial communication is able to create "moral legitimacy" (Beverland, 2005: 460) through conscious marketing efforts to embed the brand within a genuine context."

Therefore, the process of commodification and the erosion of distance lamented by Benjamin, may be addressed through the realisation of territorial legitimacy and in the case of mass market

products in particular, the enhancement of ritualistic habituation. So that while the economics of mass market production may encourage firms to engage in the market mediation of object provenance, the enhancement of ritualised experiential engagement and concomitantly the downplaying of commercial motives will engender the conditions that support the curation of brand aura.

Brand aura is associated with context, both temporal and spatial, while authenticity is closely associated with place. The legitimation of space is important in establishing brand aura, and the realisation of that space is within the capacity of corporate action. Therefore, through the realisation of physical representation, legitimacy may be established, developed, enhanced and curated over time. In Humphreys' (2010) work on territorial legitimacy, she considers the legitimation of mass market casinos in the United States, in particular their establishment and the legitimation process that this engenders. She suggests firms derive territorial legitimacy through "being physically instantiated in some form" (Humphreys, 2010: 503), thereby achieving "normative legitimacy by making the consumption practice" they facilitate "part of an integrated, functioning, and financially solvent market system" (Humphreys, 2010: 504), so that "realization is the practice of adding legitimacy to an entity by virtue of representing it" (Humphreys, 2010: 505). Further, she suggests, this process of legitimation is enhanced through the effects of population density, so that the greater the representation of the physical form the greater the level of legitimacy derived. From this perspective, corporate activity can generate through individual and collective physical representations of their activities: "As an ontological tool, realization determines the awareness of a consumption practice's existence in the world, thereby bolstering cognitive legitimacy" (Humphreys, 2010: 505). In this, the effect of time is fundamental. Realisation may determine awareness, but for legitimacy to be established, there must be a process of cognitive reassessment, supported by accompanying conversations and discourses.

Ritualistic habituation within places of consumption where practices of consumption are reinforced will provide legitimacy. The habituation of consumer rituals associated with a brand will build awareness and engagement. As Benjamin observes: "the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function" (Benjamin, 1936: 174). Otherwise, the provenance value of an object or brand loses its authority and becomes simply another object or brand. This changes only when the consumer is prepared to experientially engage with it. All objects or brands have provenance, but just as "the unique

value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual" (Benjamin, 1936: 174) so the unique value of an "authentic" brand is derived from the rituals that surround it. As Benjamin clearly acknowledges in relation to consumption activity that does not engage with original works of art, ritualistic engagement, "however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty" (Benjamin, 1936: 174). Thus, brand aura is made meaningful by secularised ritualistic engagement, which is itself embedded within an experience at a place in time.

Therefore, for artefactual authenticity to possess territorial legitimacy it must have provenance presented and curated by the firm, but it must also engender habituated consumer experiential engagement through associated consumer practices. Without this secularised ritual the brand merely has a place of origin, it does not have authority. Furthermore, while a brand will always possess a place of origin, it will not - by virtue of its existence alone - attract associated habitual practices. Such practices need to be updated, or they fade away. Brands must become embedded in everyday ritualised practices, if they are to exude brand aura.

We now turn from the objective historicity of the brand as it is presented through artefactual authenticity, where essence precedes existence, to the role of existential authenticity, where existence precedes essence, and the historical testimony created through heritage stories and consumers' emotional investment in a brand.

Historical Testimony

Historical testimony encompasses both brand heritage and the consumer's emotional investment in the brand. Heritage represents an object's story, its patina. Emotional investment represents the consumer's involvement and commitment to the brand through its journey in time and space. Here Benjamin's conceptualisation of aura is fundamental to our understanding of historical testimony. Historical testimony is not just the source and date of an object's production but also its journey through time. This understanding lends a framework to the conceptualisation of brand aura, and the role that objective authenticity and existential authenticity play in its realisation.

However, historical testimony also needs to be understood in relation to Benjamin's use of the term *mémoire involontaire,* where recollection of events within a Proustian perceptual framework are "closer to forgetting than … memory" (Benjamin, 1929: 150). This process of

forgetting is relevant to both the commercial communication of brand heritage and the consumer's emotional response to the brand. Here, historical testimony is selective and is characterised by the conflation of time. Consequently, how brands are remembered challenges an artefactual understanding of authenticity, suggesting that another understanding of authenticity, one that encapsulates the process of forgetting associated with *mémoire involontaire*, has to be introduced when theorising brand aura.

Artefactual authenticity is predicated on facts and it is measurable. Methods and materials of production can be verified to establish whether they maintain tradition or if they have been abandoned in the search for economic advantage: a process that may result in commodification. Therefore, production methods associated with a brand can be objectively evaluated to see if they still conform to the traditional values of craftmanship espoused in brand communication. However, authenticity becomes more problematic when we consider an associated brand story, or the brand's accumulation of meaning over time, its patina. Here, the formal history of a brand is sublimated by the heritage story that the firm seeks to perpetuate. Selectivity is much in evidence. Facts are filtered and synthesised so that key components are mimetically emphasised across brand stories. As Hudson (2011: 1541-2) notes: "brand heritage is not the same as business history", while business history "involves a formal and systematic investigation" that aspires to be "accurate and objective", "brand heritage involves the informal employment of historical themes, narratives and images by practitioners to achieve marketing advantage." In other words, in the communication of heritage, brand histories are consciously and selectively reframed to create brand stories. That does not mean necessarily that they are works of fiction rather that they emphasise elements which seek to authenticate. Drawing on recent research in this area, Pfannes, Meyer, Orth and Rose (2021) suggest brand narratives tend to contain key elements such as date of foundation, people, technology, omni-temporality, conflict, place of foundation, symbols, and values (see: Burghausen and Balmer, 2014; Balmer and Chen, 2017; Kim, Ratneshwar and Thorson, 2017; Sanders and van Krieken, 2018; Balmer and Burghausen, 2019; Pecot and De Barnier, 2019; Pizzi and Scarpi, 2019; Mencarelli, Chaney and Pulh, 2020).

Thus, in the communication of heritage, firms adopt a reductionist approach by removing complexity and emphasising key heritage themes. Memory is formally selected and deselected to create consistency and provide psychologically unchallenging validation. From a heritage branding perspective this reflects market realism, as consumers may find heritage experiences

both engaging and disengaging (Mencarelli, Chaney and Pulh, 2020). Therefore, the firm must sustain an internally and externally validated set of heritage themes.

Consumers emotionally invest in objects and, by extension, brands. Heritage stories are designed to curate that investment, but they are not exclusively or indeed necessarily the predominant influence in a Benjaminian understanding of a consumer's relationship to aura. Here the consumer's existential engagement with the brand, and their understanding of its essence, is crucial to the realisation of brand aura. Through the notion of gaze Benjamin explains the intersubjective qualities of aura. In a brand context, the returned gaze is not intrinsic to the brand, rather it is brought into being by the observer through their emotional relationship to the brand. Rickly-Boyd (2012: 275) describes this as the "subject-object dichotomy": this may be extended and conceptualised as a subject-brand dichotomy. Experiential involvement represents the subject's (consumer's) emotional involvement with an object (brand), consequent to its journey in time and space. However, like Benjamin's ancient Greeks or Medieval clerics, how the consumer interprets authenticity will be teleoaffectively structured (Schatzki, 1996: 2002) by the consumer's relationship to the observed object. Therefore, the gaze that is returned is predicated on both communal and individual understanding of the object.

Here the consumer is primarily concerned with the aura that surrounds a brand, where aura is derived from the consumer's personal and vicarious experience of the brand and where authority stems from an imperfect process of remembering. Because it is embedded in an incomplete understanding of the collective experience and repetitious personal involvement, brand aura is accessed through accumulated and unconscious memory that may be remembered spontaneously through an unexpectedly lucid remembering of past times.

Through his deployment of Proust's *Á la Recherche du temps perdu* to explain how memory serves the recognition of aura, Benjamin provides a layered understanding of the process; the ability of Proust's *madeleine* to create, through involuntary memory, a place that has been impossible to recall accurately through conscious memory. Here the object provides a connection through *mémoire involontaire*, a concept that represents the clustered individual experiences of the object with which the individual emotionally reconnects. It is in that emotional reconnection that the individual recognises aura. In our understanding of brand aura, the brand is represented by an object, just like the *madeleine,* a physical representation of brand

meaning which has been over layered by collective and individual experiences. The lineaments of this process are taken up in foundational work on nostalgia in the consumer research literature. Belk's (1990) consideration of the "Role of Possessions in Constructing and Maintaining a Sense of Past", explores the idea of objects as touchpoints for the past. Quoting Steinbeck's (1939) consideration of meaningful objects in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Belk (1990: 669) discusses how objects reflect back onto us our own past and the past of others who we have known: "Having an extensive or rich sense of past implies that we are able to clearly define ourselves and ground our identity in previous personal or group history."

However, this emotional investment in the past through objects representative of past experiences is different to other streams of research which are founded on a nostalgia which exults the past and objects of the past over those of the present. Drawing on psychology (Davis, 1979) and history (Hobsbawm, 1983; Lowenthal, 1985), Holbrook and Schindler (1991: 330) define that type of nostalgia as "a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth)." As Holbrook (1993: 246) notes, that type of nostalgia represents a "temporal orientation" to the past rather than "bittersweet, wistful feelings that may attend those positive affective responses toward objects"; rather nostalgia is "a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore", which involves a negative view of the present and a positive view of the past. This orientation is reflected in Brown *et al's* (2003) work on retro branding, where aura is a component of the brand.

In contrast, where brand aura stands at the apex (Miller, 2014) of other marketing activity, recollections are central to understanding the emotional investment made by individuals (Steinbeck, 1939) or consumers (Belk, 1990). In Holbrook and Schindler's (1991) definition of nostalgia, there is a conscious consumer orientation towards the past and a conscious decision that objects from that time were better than they are now. This contrast reflects our earlier discussion on the difference between formal history and heritage. Historical testimony in a Benjaminian framework is a product of heritage and emotional involvement. Heritage is a selective reading of the past, and emotional investment draws on a process more akin to forgetting than memory, associated as it is with the rejuvenating effect of free-floating amorphous forms of *mémoire involontaire.*

This distinction is important when we ask what is achieved when involuntary memory brings brand aura into being? For Benjamin in his later work (as noted above) the answer is simple: "To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*" (Benjamin, 1936: 141). Therefore, brand aura is focused through the object that gazes back at the consumer generated by enigmatic images of the *mémoire involontaire* and the emotional involvement of the observer.

Discussion

In this article, building on Benjamin's philosophical reflections on brand aura, we have discussed authenticity in terms of artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity. This dichotomy is reflected in tourism research which recognises a distinction between "object-related authenticity" and "activity-related authenticity" (Wang, 1999: 352; Park, Choi, and Lee, 2019: 101). Within this categorisation framework, objective authenticity and constructive authenticity are brought together as object-related authenticity. Wang (1999: 351) clearly states that "objective and constructive (or symbolic) authenticities" which are associated with physical objects or places are fundamentally unlike the existential experiences that that invoke "personal or intersubjective feelings". Likewise, in the context of aura, Benjamin infers a duality in the relationship between artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity, such that, aura does not exist without the presence of both elements. Within this duality, constructive authenticity is subsumed at the intersection between artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity, where objective authenticity (through ritualistic habituation) and existential authenticity (through consumer emotional investment and sense of self) enables the liminal process of brand aura creation.

Figure 1 Here

Figure 1 diagrammatically represents the relationship between the various elements that support the realisation of brand aura. It identifies those aspects that the firm is able to curate directly and those that sit within the domain of consumer experiential engagement that the firm may influence indirectly. It expresses the role of the firm and the consumer in the creation of brand aura. The firm may directly curate provenance and heritage. Provenance represents brand origin, which embodies artefactual authenticity. Heritage represents brand story, which

expresses existential authenticity. In this way, the firm may communicate factual legitimacy and associated meaning. However, neither territorial legitimacy nor historical testimony will bring into being brand aura in the absence of the consumer's experiential engagement. For brand aura to exist, the brand must gaze back at the consumer through the action of *mémoire involontaire*. The consumer through ritualistic habituation, behaviours in space, behaviours over time, and through emotional investment, will engage experientially with the brand so that individual and communal half-forgotten memories gaze back at the individual.

Curating Brand Aura

The role of the firm is to curate brand aura and facilitate the consumer's ritualistic habituation with an authentic brand over time. In this, the service environment is particularly emphasised. As noted earlier with respect to the luxury store environment, service encounters provide an opportunity for the ritualistic habituation of consumer practices and the reinforcement of heritage themes. Territorial legitimation derives from both the physical origin of the brand as well as the places at which the consumer engages with the brand. This is enhanced by the experience of the service encounter.

In the market, brand aura may be understood as being co-created by the corporate and the community. In normal circumstances this co-creation process is driven by corporate activity; for example, in Alexander's (2009) research, the firm with legal ownership of the brand engages with the community to reinvigorate brand meaning and enhance ritualistic habituation with the product through a co-branding relationship that draws on deep cultural associations. Thus, firms purposefully invite consumers to participate in the co-creation process through both formal and informal mechanisms. Cova, Pace and Skålén (2015) illustrate this process with reference to Alfa Romeo. Here the use of consumers as workforce participants provides the opportunity for corporate values to be challenged and strengthened by consumer values: "working consumers compel marketers to engage in social and emotional labour, which marketers are not accustomed to and try to limit" (Cova, Pace and Skålén, 2015: 682). Thus, the co-creational process, if properly managed and curated, may enhance corporate understanding of emotion derived brand values, ensuring community and corporate conceptions of brand meaning do not diverge. The community may act as an important reservoir of cultural and heritage understanding, and in a service context this role may be reinforced on a daily basis. Goulding and Derbaix's (2019: 552) study of music stores selling vinyl records illustrates this: "these stores are more than just retail outlets; they are social

institutions of genre categorisation and artistic evaluation that organise and promote music in ways that transcend pure profit – they are social spaces where knowledge and feelings are shared".

However, this reciprocal co-creational process is not always present. Divergence of meaning may create alternative sets of brand meaning and consequently authenticity. This will vary across a spectrum from community, through sub-culture to the individual. The brand community may take ownership of brand heritage and by extension define brand aura in their own terms; for example, in Leigh *et al's* (2006: 492) research on MG sports car ownership in the United States, the community appropriates the "orphaned" heritage brand and its traditional brand meaning. While MG offers an example of divergence in community and corporate practices, it shows how corporate change and community adherence to long-established brand meaning may diverge as community rituals take emotional ownership of a brand and define brand aura on their own terms. The much-publicised example of Burberry merchandise being appropriated to a chav subculture in Britain, is further illustration of this (see: Canniford, 2011). Such instances may only be a temporary phenomenon and geographically specific, but it may create confused meaning and diminish brand aura in a communal context; as Carroll (2009:) expresses it, brand meaning may be "subverted by consumers who have hijacked … and reworked it".

Sub-cultural associations may disappear over time; although, individual associations may linger. In the case of MG (Leigh *et al,* 2006), the community preserves and shares – on one level - the reciprocal gaze associated with the subject-object dichotomy discussed by Walter Benjamin. However, while the reciprocal gaze may be a common experience across a community, it is essentially personal: its embeddedness in a metonymic relationship ensures this (Hansen, 2008). Ultimately, *mémoire involontaire* is intensely personal. So, in Cantone, Cova and Testa's (2020: 490) consideration of nostalgia in the movie *'Noi e la Giulia'*, "far from being considered a vintage car by the protagonists and thus generating nostalgic feelings, the Giulia is simply perceived as a second-hand car for poor people"; the object has lost "its former iconicity" and "has vanished from their memory." However, for the owner of the car it is far more: "it is a very dear memory" connected with "his father, whom the car comes to represent, not because it is a Giulia 1300" (Cantone *et al*, 2020: 490). Thus, habitual practices create an aura of brand meaning for the individual, even though a similar – but not the same – metonymic relationship may be common to a community.

Therefore, while authenticity is formally managed within the corporate environment the curation of brand aura is a shared project with brand communities, and ultimately the individual. The fundamental challenge faced by brand managers seeking change is divergence in firm-community/individual perceptions of brand meaning. In the case of the orphaned brand considered by Leigh *et al* (2006) the heritage meaning and the contemporary meaning have separated. Thus, the consumer who values brand tradition becomes the curator of brand aura, albeit it in a heritage-based form. Therefore, once we move from a definition of authenticity as objective fact, authenticity on which brand aura is predicated, is constantly mediated in the marketplace, it involves a conversation between emotional ownership and commercial ownership. That conversation has the capacity to enhance or diminish brand aura.

Generating Experiential Engagement

The consumer determines the reciprocal gaze of brand aura, generated as it is through personal involuntary remembering. The firm is able to provide a context and construct messages that support emotional investment and ritualistic habituation; however, it is the consumer who must feel an emotional relationship with the brand for the creation of brand aura.

Time is essential to the creation of *mémoire involontaire* and hence for the reciprocity of gaze that brand aura represents. However, as Humphreys notes: "Although many studies cite the importance of cultural-historical discourse on consumer behavior (Thompson 2004; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Thompson and Hirschman 1995), few have evaluated the development of such discursive structures historically" (Humphreys, 2010: 491). An understanding of cultural-historical discourse is essential to understanding brand aura. *Mémoire involontaire* requires the elapse of time, and not formally remembered time but forgotten time, reencountered through an object's gaze. This stands at the heart of the commercial predicament associated with historical testimony and its value in the present. As noted above, brand heritage is not brand history. Brand history is factual, representing what actually happened. Brand heritage is by definition presentist. Brand heritage unashamedly sees the past through the lens of the present.

In this there resides a dilemma. The presentism of brand heritage is predicated on evolutionary change but the consumer's adherence to emotionally valued perceptions of the past anchors brand aura. Therefore, the push of progress and the pull of the past creates an inherent tension:

because presentism implicitly prioritises socio-cultural change, wherein the heritage values of the past do not meet the heritage values of the present. This will affect brands differently, but all brands are affected in some way. Some brands will have to respond to socio-cultural change more often than others do. While some will be able to remain embedded in the past, others will have to respond more readily to changing conditions and consumer requirements. A simple expression of this would be mass market compared with luxury brands. The former being more susceptible to changes in fashion than the latter, but neither are immune to it.

Consumers' willingness to engage with artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity will also determine commercial responses to the curation of territorial legitimacy and historical testimony. For some consumers and for some brands artefactual authenticity may be less important than existential authenticity and *vice versa*. For some brands provenance may be reflexive, that is where products are associated with a brand, the brand itself determines their provenance rather than their place of production: "made in Prada" (Tokatli and Kızılgün, 2009). The specific territorial origins of the product may be subsumed in a notion of brand provenance. Likewise, a brand heritage story will omit history that does not enhance consumer emotional engagement, because ultimately the consumer is seeking historical testimony that reinforces their own emotional investment; thus, the aura of the brand gazes back generated by the emotion of the observer and the enigmatic images of the *mémoire involontaire*.

The Service Encounter

The service encounter has a particularly important role in curating brand aura. Territorial legitimacy provides a context for ritualistic habituation, a place in which the consumer may connect and reconnect with the brand, while the existential authenticity of historical testimony may be employed to legitimise the service brand experience. There is nothing new in this process. The practices of legitimation in the retail context are a response to fundamental market requirements, reflecting as they do the fundamental challenge - the representation of artefactual authenticity - in the separation of production and sale. In addressing that challenge, the *maisons spéciales* of internationalising nineteenth century French luxury brands (Alexander and Doherty, 2021) are no different to twenty-first century American flagship stores (Kozinets *et al*, 2002).

However, there are new challenges and opportunities within the contemporary environment. For example, omnichannel retailing tests accepted service management practices, while at the

same time providing an opportunity to curate experiential engagement among customers who feel excluded or unwelcome in traditional service contexts (Dion and Borraz, 2017). Likewise, authenticity offers service providers both new threats and opportunities online. The threat of social media and the destabilising effect it may have on brand assemblages is explored by Rokka and Canniford (2016). They note how "*heterotopian selfie practices …* can destabilize key layers at which brands are assembled" (Rokka and Canniford, 2016: 1808), so that "brand meanings become mobilized and re-territorialized" (Rokka and Canniford, 2016: 1802). However, there are also opportunities: re-territorialization online may benefit brands, where online-only-brands can strive to be "timeless brands that transcend trends and fads, that stay relevant in varied consumption situations" (Sit, Pino and Pichierri, 2021: 1060). In other words, habituation may exist online as well as offline, so long as it is curated appropriately to new contexts of consumer experiential engagement.

Preece, Kerrigan and O'Reilly's (2019) consideration of brand longevity illustrates the power and authority of historical testimony. Focussing on Bond films they are concerned with episodic serial media brands. Drawing on DeLanda (2006), they suggest that "no element of the assemblage is irreplaceable" rather "longevity is the achievement of novelty within a framework of familiarity" (Preece et al, 2019: 331). As discussed above, ritualistic habituation is embedded within the consumer's episodic encounter with a brand. As Hill, Canniford, and Eckhardt's (2021) consideration of interactive, ritualized social atmospheres shows, recurrent events nurture those associations that underpin the emergence of historical testimony in a service landscape. The theatre of consumption provides territorial legitimacy through recurrent encounters. Whether these are serial entertainment brands (Preece, 2019), or sports brands (Alexander, 2009; Hill *et al*, 2021), while the story-line may be different, the framework of experience and association remains constant. The consumer is comforted by familiarity and inspired by innovation.

Further research on brand aura and authenticity in service contexts may build on a range of contexts such as banking (Wahyuni and Fitriani, 2017), tourism (Le, Arcodia, Novais and Kralj, 2019) and retailing. In retailing, omnichannel activity creates opportunities for smaller service providers (Gauri, Jindal, Ratchford, Fox, Bhatnagar, Pandey, Navallo, Fogarty, Carr and Howerton, 2021) who are able to project authenticity and associated brand aura to a much larger and receptive market than was possible previously. Indeed, if authenticity is negatively associated with firm size, this provides considerable opportunity for pure online or

omnichannel curation of authenticity and brand aura (Lude and Prügl, 2018). In this way artefactual authenticity recombines with existential authenticity through online experiential engagement.

Conclusion

At the beginning of our exploration of how Benjamin's understanding of aura and authenticity helps us to understand brand aura, we asked the following question: how can Benjamin's understanding of aura with its associated concepts of artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity be reconciled with the process of mass consumption and brand meaning?

The concept of brand aura addresses a fundamental tension at the heart of our understanding of authenticity. That is the authentic essence of the brand handed down through artefactual authenticity and the existential authenticity that consumers invest in the brand. In the former, essence is intrinsic and precedes its existence as an authentic object, in the latter the perception of authenticity precedes its essence. This paper theorises brand aura and offers a conceptualisation of the antecedents of brand aura. In so doing, it draws on Walter Benjamin's philosophical understanding of aura and authenticity, explores the duality of what is termed here as artefactual authenticity and existential authenticity, and illustrates the central role of consumers' *mémoire involontaire* in the realisation of brand aura. Therefore, we should not see aura as a component of the brand, rather it is the culmination of a process.

Brand aura gazes back at the consumer, and in that moment of intersubjectivity the consumer experiences the essence of the brand as they perceive it emotionally through the lens of *mémoire involontaire*. Here the consumer combines the artefactual authenticity of 'the object' that engenders the emotional response and the existential authenticity that gives it meaning. The artefactual authenticity of the brand exists within a lived experience in time and space, where the artefact's provenance and the consumer's experiential engagement with the brand through a process of ritualistic habituation establishes a relationship which facilitates reciprocal gaze. However, it is the existential authenticity of historical testimony that activates reciprocal gaze through the emotional investment the consumer has in the brand. An emotional investment that is framed within a half-remembered, half-forgotten, personal and communal heritage.

As Benjamin shows, a subject may observe an object's aura and interpret it in different ways according to personal and communal frameworks of understanding. The subject's emotional engagement with the object is intrinsically connected to their remembrance of lost times. However, as far as brand aura is concerned, firm curation of the subject-object relationship is essential for market functionality. Without this formal curation process, aura becomes object specific rather than brand specific. It is the firm's role to ensure brand provenance and brand heritage influences the territorial legitimacy and historical testimony on which brand aura is dependant. It is the firm's role to facilitate ritualistic habituation and emotional investment thought the experiential engagement of the consumer. In this way the firm activates artefactual and existential authenticity in the marketplace; thereby, ensuring a consistent framing of brand aura.

Further research on brand aura would be particularly valuable in the following areas. First, how should territorial legitimacy be managed through the service encounter in an evolving omnichannel environment? Ritualistic habituation on both a personal and inter-personal level reinforces perceptions of artefactual authenticity. A better understanding of the inter-relationship between offline and online encounters would be particularly relevant in this context, providing as it would a more nuanced understanding of the territorial legitimation process. Second, how should historical testimony be curated by heritage-rich firms and how does emotional investment in a brand encourage consumers to respond to fundamental alterations or failures in that curation process? In particular, the role of social encounters in the reinforcement of consumers' perception of the self would be especially valuable in further developing an understanding of existential authenticity and the realisation of brand aura. Both of these research areas speak to the underlying relationship between time and place emphasised in Benjamin's understanding of aura and authenticity.

References

Alexander, N. (2009) 'Brand authentication: creating and maintaining brand auras', *European Journal of Marketing*, 43, 3/4: 551-562.

Alexander, N. and Doherty, AM. (2017) 'The Origins of American International Retailing: Tiffany of New York in London and Paris, 1837-1914', *Business History Review*, 91, 2: 301-328.

Alexander, N. and Doherty, AM. (2021) 'Overcoming Institutional Voids: Maisons Spéciales and the Internationalisation of Proto-Modern Brands', *Business History*, 63, 7: 1079-1112.

Balmer, J. and Burghausen, M. (2019) 'Marketing, the past and corporate heritage', *Marketing Theory*, 19, 2: 217–227.

Balmer, J., and Chen, W. (2017) 'Corporate heritage brands, augmented role identity and customer satisfaction', *European Journal of Marketing*, 51, 9/10: 1510–1521.

Belk, R. (1990) 'The Role of Possessions in Constructing and Maintaining a Sense of Past', in Advances in Consumer Research Volume 17, eds. Marvin E. Goldberg, Gerald Gorn, and Richard W. Pollay, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research: 669-676.

Belk, R. and Costa, J. (1998) 'The Mountain Man Myth: A Contemporary Consuming Fantasy', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25 (December): 218–40.

Benjamin, W. (1929) 'The Image of Proust', *Literarische Welt*, 1929: translated by Harry Zohn, and edited by Hanna Arendt (2019) *Illuminations*, Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston and New York: 149-165.

Benjamin, W. (1936) 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Zeitshrift für Sozialforshung, V, I, 1936: translated by Harry Zohn, and edited by Hanna Arendt (2019) *Illuminations*, Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston and New York: 166-195.

Benjamin, W. (1939) 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', Zeitshrift für Sozialforshung, VIII, 1-2, 1939: translated by Harry Zohn, and edited by Hanna Arendt (2019) *Illuminations*, Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston and New York: 103-148.

Beverland, M. (2005) 'Brand management and the challenge of authenticity', *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14, 7: 460-1.

Beverland, M. and Luxton, S. (2005) 'Managing integrated marketing communication (IMC) through strategic decoupling: How luxury wine firms retain brand leadership while appearing to be wedded to the past', *Journal of Advertising* 34, 4: 103-116.

Brown, S., Kozinets, R. and Sherry, J. (2003) 'Teaching old brands new tricks: retro branding and the revival of brand meaning', *Journal of Marketing*, 67, (July): 19-23.

Brunninge, O. and Hartmann, B. (2019) 'Inventing a past: Corporate heritage as dialectical relationships of past and present', *Marketing Theory*, 19, 2: 229–234.

Burghausen, M., and Balmer, J. (2014) 'Corporate heritage identity management and the multi-modal implementation of a corporate heritage identity' *Journal of Business Research*, 67, 11, 2311–2323.

Canniford, R. (2011) 'How to manage consumer tribes', *Journal of Strategic Marketing,* 19, 7: 591-606.

Cantone L., Cova B. and Testa P. (2020) 'Nostalgia and pastiche in the post-postmodern zeitgeist: The 'postcar' from Italy', *Marketing Theory*, 20, 4: 481-500.

Carroll, A. (2009) 'Brand communications in fashion categories using celebrity endorsement', *Journal of Brand Management,* 17, 2: 146-158.

Cova, B., Pace, S. and Skålén, P. (2015), "Marketing with working consumers: the case of a carmaker and its brand community", Organization, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 682-701.

Davis, F. (1979) *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, New York: Free Press.

DeLanda, M. (2006), A New Philosophy of Society, London: Continuum.

Dion, D. and Borraz, S., (2017) 'Managing status: How luxury brands shape class subjectivities in the service encounter', *Journal of Marketing*, 81, 5: 67-85.

Eiland, H. and Jennings, M. (2014) *Walter Benjamin a Critical Life*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge: MA.

Fine, G. (2003) 'Crafting authenticity: the validation of identity in self-taught art', *Theory and Society*, 32: 153-80.

Gauri, D.K., Jindal, R.P., Ratchford, B., Fox, E., Bhatnagar, A., Pandey, A., Navallo, J.R., Fogarty, J., Carr, S. and Howerton, E., (2021) 'Evolution of retail formats: Past, present, and future. Journal of Retailing', 97, 1: 42-61.

Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY.

Gottdiener, M. (2001) *The Theming of America: American Dreams, Media Fantasies, and Themed Environments*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO.

Goulding, C. and Derbaix, M. (2019) 'Consuming material authenticity in the age of digital reproduction', *European Journal of Marketing*, 53, 3: 545-564.

Hansen, M. (2008) 'Benjamin's Aura', *Critical Inquiry*, 34 (Winter): 336–375.

Hill, T., Canniford, R. and Eckhardt, G. (2021) 'The Roar of the Crowd: How Interaction Ritual Chains Create Social Atmospheres', *Journal of Marketing*. 00222429211023355: 1-19

Hobsbawm, E. (1983), 'Introduction: Inventing Tradition', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-14.

Holbrook, M. (1993) 'Nostalgia and consumption preferences: Some emerging patterns of consumer tastes', *Journal of Consumer Research* 20, 2: 245-256.

Holbrook, M. and Schindler, R. (1991) 'Echoes of the Dear Departed Past: Some Work in Progress on Nostalgia' in *Advances in Consumer Research*, 18, ed. Rebecca H. Holman and Michael R. Solomon, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research: 330-333.

Holt, D. (1997) 'Poststructuralist Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption in Postmodernity', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 23 (March): 326–50.

Holt, D. (2002) 'Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 1: 70-90.

Hudson, B. (2011) 'Brand heritage and the renaissance of Cunard', *European Journal of Marketing*, 45, 9-10: 1538–1556.

Humphreys, A. (2010) 'Semiotic Structure and the Legitimation of Consumption Practices: The Case of Casino Gambling', *Journal of Consumer Research,* 37, 3: 490–510.

Keller, K. (2020) 'Consumer research insights on brands and branding: a JCR curation', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46, 5: 995-1001.

Kim, E., Ratneshwar, S. and Thorson, E. (2017) 'Why narrative ads work: An integrated process explanation', *Journal of Advertising*, 46, 2: 283–296.

Kozinets, R. (2001) 'Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek's Culture of Consumption' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28, 1: 67–88.

Kozinets, R. (2002a) 'Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man,' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (June), 20–38.

Kozinets, R. (2002b) 'The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39 (February): 61–72.

Kozinets, R. (2017) 'Remembering Walter Benjamin, or the death of the last intellectual', In *Canonical Authors in Consumption Theory,* eds Søren Askegaard, Benoît Heilbrunn, Routledge, London: 145-150.

Kozinets, R. Sherry, J., Deberry-Spence, B., Duhachek, S., Nuttavuthisit, K., and Storm, K. (2002) 'Themed Flagships Brand Stores in the New Millennium: Theory, Practice, Prospects', *Journal of Retailing*, 78, 1: 17–29.

Le, T., Arcodia, C., Novais, M., Kralj, A. (2019) 'What we know and do not know about authenticity in dining experiences: A systematic literature review', *Tourism Management*, 74: 258-275.

Leigh, T., Peters, C. and Shelton, J. (2006) 'The consumer quest for authenticity: the multiplicity of meanings within the MG subculture of consumption', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34, 4: 481-93.

Lowenthal, D. (1985), *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lude, M. and Prügl, R. (2018) 'Why the family business brand matters: Brand authenticity and the family firm trust inference', *Journal of Business Research*, 89: 121-134.

MacCannell, D. (1973) 'Staged authenticity: arrangements of social space in tourist settings', *American Journal of Sociology*, 79, 3; 589-603.

MacCannell, D. (1976) *The tourist: A new theory for the leisure class,* New York: Schocken Books.

Mencarelli, R., Chaney, D. and Pulh, M. (2020) 'Consumers' brand heritage experience: Between acceptance and resistance', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36, 1–2: 30–50.

Miller, D. (2014) 'Brand-building and the elements of success: discoveries using historical analyses', *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 17, 2: 92-111

Napoli, J., Dickinson, S., Beverland, M. and Farrelly, F. (2014) 'Measuring Consumer-Based Brand Authenticity', *Journal of Business Research,* 67, 6: 1090–1098.

Park, E., Choi, B. and Lee, T. (2019) 'The role and dimensions of authenticity in heritage tourism', *Tourism Management*, 74: 99-109.

Pecot, F., Valette-Florence, P. and De Barnier, V. (2019) 'Brand heritage as a temporal perception: Conceptualisation, measure and consequences', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 35, 17-18: 1624–1643.

Peñaloza, L. (2000) 'The Commodification of the American West: Marketers' Production of Cultural Meanings at the Trade Show', *Journal of Marketing*, 64 (October): 82–109.

Pfannes, C., Meyer, C., Orth, U. and Rose, G. (2021) 'Brand narratives: Content and consequences among heritage brands', *Psychology & Marketing* 38, 11: 1867-1880.

Pizzi, G. and Scarpi, D. (2019) 'The year of establishment effect on brand heritage and attitudes', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 36, 6: 827–834.

Preece, C., Kerrigan, F. and O'Reilly, D. (2019) 'License to assemble: Theorizing brand longevity', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46, 2: 330-350.

Rickly-Boyd, J. (2012) 'Authenticity and Aura: A Benjaminian Approach to Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39, 1: 269–289.

Rokka, J. and Canniford, R. (2016), 'Heterotopian selfies: how social media destabilizes brand assemblages', *European Journal of Marketing*, 50, 9/10: 1789-1813.

Sanders, J. and van Krieken, K. (2018) 'Exploring narrative structure and hero enactment in brand stories', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9: 1645.

Schatzki, T. (1996) *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schatzki, T. (2002) *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Sit, K.J., Pino, G. and Pichierri, M. (2021) 'Perceived authenticity of online-only brands (OOBs): a quali-quantitative study with online consumers', *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 49, 7: 1045-1066.

Steinbeck, J. (1939), *The Grapes of Wrath*, New York: Viking Press.

Thompson, C. (2004) 'Marketplace Mythology and Discourses of Power', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 1: 162–80.

Thompson, C. and Haytko, D. (1997) 'Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24, 1: 15–42.

Thompson, C. and Hirschman, E. (1995) 'Understanding the Socialized Body: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Consumers' Self-Conceptions', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22, 2: 139–53.

Thompson, C. and Tambyah, S. (1999) 'Trying to Be Cosmopolitan', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 26, 3, 214–41.

Tokatli, N. and Kızılgün, Ö. (2009) 'From Manufacturing Garments for Ready-to-Wear to Designing Collections for Fast Fashion: Evidence from Turkey', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 41, 1:146-162.

Wang, N. (1999) 'Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2): 349–370.

Waugh, E. (1945) *Brideshead Revisited*, London: Penguin Classics, reprinted 2000: 21.

Wahyuni, S. and Fitriani, N. (2017) 'Brand religiosity aura and brand loyalty in Indonesia Islamic banking', *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 8, 3: 361-372.

Table 1. Theoretical Terminology

Term	Meaning
Artefactual authenticity	Physical characteristics associated with provenance and production
Brand aura	That which gazes back at the observer from a brand: generated by the emotion of the observer through the enigmatic images of *mémoire involontaire*
Brand aura curation	Firm based activity supporting a co-creational process through consumer (collective/individual) engagement
Emotional investment	Associations that reflect back at the subject (consumer) from a brand/object consequent to its journey in time and space
Existential authenticity	Experiences associated with consumer emotional investment and sense of self
Gaze	Generated by the enigmatic images of *mémoire involontaire*
Heritage	A firm curated brand story
Historical testimony	Brand/object authority related to time: derived from firm curated brand heritage and consumer emotional investment
Mémoire involontaire	Unconscious associations that cluster around the brand/object through which the observer (consumer) perceives aura
Ritualistic habituation	Place, or places, at which the subject (consumer) periodically engages with a brand/object through a form of secular ritual
Territorial legitimacy	Brand/object authority related to place: derived from firm curated provenance and consumer ritualistic habituation

Figure 1: Antecedents of Brand Aura