

ABSTRACT

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Branding through experiences in the international cosmetics industry: Delineating conceptual territory through brands in space

Cultural products transcend the monetary value of the physical materials that are necessary for their production. They are characterized by sign-values where the aspect and task of branding has become prominent. Branding has accelerated new trends such as the emotional design of objects and the focus on experiences and rituals. It is not about the cultural good itself but its accommodation and the way it informs a biography of a product. Thus, cultural products focus on experience-as-consumption; they are maintained in atmospheres where value is co-created by the consumer. Cultural products are based on an individualized value creation in terms of the hermeneutic perception, interpretation, and experience. However, the how's and where's of branding through experiences are far from clear. This paper offers initial answers from an economic geography-viewpoint.

At the example of the cosmetics industry, I will discuss recent developments in terms of branding through experiences. The cosmetics industry is a very dynamic cultural product industry, as far as brands, products, revenues, and turnover are concerned. In the cosmetics industry, experiences can be summarized as depending on branded products (the being and becoming of desirable objects) and branded atmospheres where those are represented and retailed.

Brands delineate their terrain not only conceptually but also in retail environments. This is not new. However, the paper highlights the sea change as far as general marketing strategies are concerned that was driven by traditional understandings of „beauty“, „prestige“, and „luxury“ towards an emphasis of a coherent “see, feel, and smell” through multi-sensorial experiences. Those are increasingly stressed to secure authenticity, emphasize trust, and represent a brand philosophy. In addition, the dictum and emphasis on branding through experiences determines geographical outcomes. Overall, the paper highlights brands and branding through experiences as mediators of innovation.

The paper elaborates on branding through experiences as an example of a set of practices of distanced and proximate learning in the international cosmetics industry. Thus, the paper contributes to the discourse about knowledge, knowing, and practices in economic geography. It presents empirical material from in-depth interviews with experts from the cosmetics and fragrance industry (2007-2009) as well as participant observation and work-in-practice in the industry.