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PROVIDING TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES THROUGH ART FOUNDATIONS

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR LUXURY FASHION BRANDS

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield

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Copyright statement

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate art foundations as a potential venue for luxury fashion brands to provide a transformative experience. Providing experiences has become one of the main strategies for fashion brands to engage with their consumers. Yet, because of the proliferation of brand experiences, consumers are starting to perceive brands as not authentic anymore. Transformative experiences are believed to be more authentic and meaningful, and luxury fashion brands' image might benefit from offering these kinds of experiences to their customers. Moreover, this is important in the perspective of strengthening the brands' relationship with their consumers, and increasing loyalty towards the brand.

According to the literature, a transformative experience is a 'life-changing' experience; an experience which might lead a person to gain new knowledge, increase self-awareness, perceive a sense of renewal. These kinds of experiences are considered of a more profound impact than other experiences. Hence, they might facilitate the brand in creating a deeper bond with the consumers, and strengthen consumers' loyalty towards the brand. Art is considered a powerful facilitator in providing transformative experiences; although, in the luxury fashion context, art collaborations and brand experiences permeated with arts have become common. Thus, there are some brands which have decided to further invest in art by establishing art foundations characterised by a philanthropic scope. This study looks at these foundations as potential venue to provide transformative experiences.

Based on rapid ethnography as methodology, data were collected through participant observation, two focus groups, and in-depth interviews, and were analysed utilising Template Analysis.

The findings suggest that through a few implementations and improvements, the art foundation owned by the luxury fashion brand could facilitate the fashion brand in providing transformative experiences. These results have informed the creation of a conceptual framework which luxury fashion brands may implement in their foundations' strategies to facilitate these kinds of experiences.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 WHY BRANDS' ART FOUNDATIONS?

This research regards luxury fashion brands and their ownership of private foundations dedicated to the arts. The focus is on understanding how people experience such venues, and in particular, if these venues could be considered productive to provide a transformative experience. Brands are apparently losing their allure of authenticity by providing experiences not deemed significant by the consumer, and the idea is that transformative experiences could restore this allure (Mermiri, 2009). The interest for this topic originated at a point between the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015, when Louis Vuitton and Prada opened two venues dedicated to exhibiting contemporary art collections.

At the opening of the foundations, Bernard Arnault and Miuccia Prada, respectively the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE (LVMH Group – Louis Vuitton's parent company) and the CEO of Prada, stated to the media that their foundations were going "to change the relationship between luxury, fashion, and art" (Kinsella, 2014, p. 3), and they were going to be different from anything else (Catherine Shaw, 2015b), a new institution to engage with people and share ideas (Catherine Shaw, 2015a). These statements imply three significant points.

First, there is the idea that fashion brands are attempting to be more relevant by creating a deeper conversation with a broader audience through the art, as a contrast to the conventional idea of fashion being superficial. Second, by considering the term engagement in the art context (as examined in detail in section 1.7), these statements are presupposing that the brands will initiate an inclusive conversation with the audience aiming to generate some benefits for the parts involved. Hence, inclusivity should be at the centre of these projects, a concept that is very distant from the core characteristic of luxury, and luxury fashion brands (as examined in detail in section 1.4), of being exclusive, unique, and difficult to access. Finally, these brands are challenging other cultural institutions by stating that they will offer a different experience, and by doing so, they are attempting to position themselves as a definer of culture.

These statements initiated the process of investigating concepts such as public engagement (section 1.7), engagement in a marketing and fashion context (section 2.5), luxury fashion brands (section 1.4), and experiences in a cross-context of the luxury fashion industry and art environments (section 2.2). Moreover, the interest in the phenomenon increased by noticing that in the last 30 years there has been an escalation in art investments by luxury fashion brands (as explored in section 2.6). However, it remains unclear whether fashion brands' customers are aware of this phenomenon, and research on how customers think with regards of these foundations has yet to be determined. A more detail contextualisation of this research, and the implication that this phenomenon might have on the luxury fashion industries, are provided in the next section.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

People are increasingly demanding brands to provide them with emotions and experiences to live, more than simply goods to consume (Dunn, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2011). In 2009, Gilmore and Pine initiated a conversation with regards to the experience economy, and on how providing experiences would become progressively crucial for brands aiming to establish a deep relationship with their consumers. As a result, providing experiences has currently become the normality for brands in many different industries (Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006). It is with regards to brand experiences that Atwal and Williams (2009), recalling a concept previously discussed by Bryman (1999), described the Disneyfication of the postmodern society in their works, as the transformation of everyday life in a theme park (Gilmore & Pine, 2009).

 Hence, in the continual progression of marketing studies over the years, authenticity, co-creation, and transformation, have become concepts deemed pivotal for brands to stay relevant to the consumer (Beverland, 2005; Gilmore & Pine, 2009; Malthouse, Calder, Kim, & Vandenbosch, 2016; Mermiri, 2009; K. W. Miller & Mills, 2012a; Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010). In particular, these concepts need to be considered in view of satisfying those consumers that are seeking to develop a deep bond with the brand (Beverland, 2014; Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Mermiri, 2009; Tynan et al., 2010).

Creating a relationship with the consumer might be harder and maybe even more important in the fashion industry, which involves customers who are getting increasingly sophisticated due to an easier access of information (Antéblian, Filser, & Roederer, 2013). The fashion industry might be considered faster than other sectors, and often involves purchases which are mainly related to self-image and self-perception, appearance, social inclusion, and self-acceptance (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Giovannini, Xu, & Thomas, 2015). Even more specifically, the ownership of luxury fashion goods generates some effects on consumers' self-concept (Belk, 1988), and on the consumers' idea of others' perceptions (Fennis, Pruyn, & Maasland, 2005). People, ultimately, might not need the fashion product, but this product brings attached social and cultural meaning for the fashion consumer (Easey, 2002; O'Cass, 2004; Wood, 2005).

Hence, it is possible to consider the fashion purchases as high involvement purchases, and the luxury fashion purchases even more so (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015). As a consequence, building a relationship based on authenticity is essential for luxury fashion brands, which need to consider that higher involvement means loyalty, loyalty means long-lasting relationship, and long-lasting relationships may lead to stable profits for the brand, and endorsement and advocacy by the consumer (Haven, Bernoff, & Glass, 2007).

Specifically, in the luxury fashion context, it is important to highlight that brands are concerned by losing their allure of exclusivity and difficult access (Kapferer, 2015; Radon, 2012). Luxury fashion brands are concentrating their production in mass and affordable products, such as accessories and cosmetics; moreover, they are exploiting marketing strategies such as celebrity endorsement in conjunction with social media platforms, like any other non-luxury fashion brand (Kapferer, 1997; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). They are focusing on addressing those categories of customers interested in showing their new acquired capability of buying luxury goods, such as the middle class or the so-called 'new rich'; thus, brands are selling affordable and mass products to generate some liquidity (Tyrnauer, 2008). In some cases, this has caused some brands to be perceived as easily accessible and less exclusive. In particular, is likely that the wealthy customer, who is buying bespoken luxury products and can afford haute couture, will not be influenced by standard marketing strategies such as advertisement

and celebrity endorsement (Armstrong, 2015; Jones, 2016; Solca, 2016). On the contrary, a different involvement in events organised by the brand, such as sponsorship events, or art exhibitions in the flagship store, might be valuable means to address the luxury fashion consumer (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

It is believed that the way in which luxury fashion brands promote and communicate themselves has evolved to become specific to and distinctive from the marketing strategies employed by mainstream fashion brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). It could be argued that the aims of a luxury fashion brand's communication strategy should be: to generate awareness and simultaneously to maintain an allure of exclusivity (Catry, 2003; Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Radon, 2012; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014); to create desire for the brand, and the lifestyle suggested, by exploiting transmedia storytelling in creating myths based on its history or heritage (Espinoza Petersen, 2014; Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017); to continually enhance the brand image and to generate brand value (Anido Freire & Loussaïef, 2018). "The function of luxury brands is to create dreams, not to answer to problems and needs. […] it sells promotion emotions (self-elevation, pleasure, recognition), not prevention emotions (risk reduction, absence of problem and discomfort)" (Bastien, 2015, p. 7).

Marketing has often been the way in which brands could differentiate themselves from their competitors (Varadarajan & Jayachandran, 1999). Although, it is not the purpose of this research to discuss all of the different strategies a brand might implement to communicate with the consumer, it is possible to argue that many of the tactics which are utilised by luxury fashion brands, after an initial period of exclusivity, are then often implemented also by mainstream brands (Carù, Ostillio, & Leone, 2017; S. Main, 2017). In Chapter 2, explicit references are made to the flagship store and fashion exhibitions as strategies implemented by luxury fashion brands; these are examined specifically because they are functional to this research, and they are key examples in the context of luxury fashion brands' experiences, brand authenticity, and consumer engagement.

Furthermore, luxury fashion brands strive to appear better, more sophisticated, and different than any other brands. Their relationship with the arts, as a form of differentiation, can be considered an example of this attempt. When brands started to intertwine with art, it was a simple collaboration that was allowing brands to be perceived

as more luxurious due to their proximity with artists or artworks (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008; Lam, Lee, & Holland, 2014). However, over time, and as often happen with successful marketing strategies, mainstream brands such as Zara, H&M, Toast, Rag and Bone, started to implement the same tactic and to collaborate with artists. Hence, some of the luxury fashion brands which were pioneers in exploiting the arts for promotional purposes, and for which art mirrors their values and images, decided to transform this art/brand collaboration in something more profound. They chose to present themselves as patrons of the arts, as active influencers of the art landscape, not only as producers of fashion goods (Mendes & Rees-Roberts, 2015; Ryan, 2007). In particular, this research focuses on the phenomenon of luxury fashion brands establishing art foundations; and it does that, by concentrating on their potentiality for being a productive venue to provide transformative experiences.

1.3   GAP IN THE KNOWLEDGE

It is possible that the decision to create a dedicated venue to exhibit contemporary art was made by luxury fashion brands to create a legacy, or to contrast the conventional thinking that fashion is superficial while art is not, or to avoid tax payment. Irrespective of the main reason, this project is not investigating the motives inspiring this phenomenon. Small attention has been given to the phenomenon of luxury fashion brands' art foundations as brand experiences from the consumer's perspective. Scholars analysed this phenomenon as: art investments to increase brand value (Codignola & Rancati, 2016; Zorloni, 2016); a phenomena of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Rivelli, 2017); a mean to enhance brand authenticity (Carù et al., 2017); sponsorship phenomena (Arnaud & Attarça, 2017); elements to define a new luxury (Mendes & Rees-Roberts, 2015); or simply, another example of art/brand relationship (Wu, 2016). Yet, little attention has been given to this phenomenon from the consumer's perspective, and on how the brand is supposedly engaging with individuals through these dedicated venues.

Moreover, there is an increasing trend amongst brands to initiate direct collaborations with consumers in the attempt of being more engaging and authentic. It will be explained that luxury brands cannot embrace tactics that other mainstream brands are starting utilising, such as co-design and co-production, without incurring the risk of endangering

the allure of the luxury product or the luxury brand. As a consequence, and to avoid this risk, this project suggests luxury fashion brands to consider alternative strategies to co-create value with the consumer. In particular, luxury fashion brands could convey transformative experiences to the consumers by exploiting potential engaging venue such as the art foundations. Indeed, it will be explained that transformative experiences might facilitate the consumer/brand relationship by generating loyalty and a deeper bond than other brand experience, hence create more value for the brand, while providing meaning to the consumer.

1.4 CONTEXTUALISING THE LUXURY FASHION BRAND

The term luxury has always been considered as a subjective concept, and currently, there is no overarching consensus in defining what a luxury fashion brand is (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Kapferer, 1998). Albeit this section is not aiming at filling this gap, there are some elements which are identifiable in the literature and are deemed significant to contextualise the concept of luxury fashion brands which undermines the entire project.

There might be a number of reasons responsible for the inability of defining what luxury fashion brand means. First, there is some obstacle in determining what the term luxury itself means (Kovesi, 2015). Second, it is apparently hard identifying unique aspects that are specific to fashion brands as distinct from the wider luxury market (K. W. Miller & Mills, 2012b). Third, the dynamic nature of the fashion industry complicates the understanding of what can be considered luxurious and why (Kapferer, 1998). Lastly, the large range of goods produced, such as accessories, cosmetics, and clothes, generates confusion with regards to what is actually a fashion product (Bain & Company, 2015).

Nonetheless, scholars agree that the identification of distinguishing key factors, may they be objective elements or subjective perceptions in customers' minds (Nueno & Quelch, 1998), could help in finding a unanimously agreed definition (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Okonkwo, 2007). Luxury fashion brands are typically recognised as being characterised by: a clear brand identity, marketing communication, iconic items, the quality of the product and the craftsmanship as part of what is called product integrity (Fionda & Moore, 2009), global reputation, premium price, high visibility, innovative and unique products (Okonkwo, 2007), exclusivity (Phau & Prendergast, 2000).

Albeit the specific characteristics that might define a luxury fashion brand, what generally distinguishes a luxury brand from other brands is that the simple display of it might increase the sense of self-esteem, prestige, and societal belonging in the owner (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). For luxury products, the aesthetic, artistic, and symbolic aspects are more characteristic of the brand's competitive advantage than the functional utility of the good itself (Amatulli et al., 2016). Of all the elements aforementioned, exclusivity is one of the exemplifications that might strengthen the concept of the recognised symbolism of the brand, and preferred by the luxury consumers, over the functional utility (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014). In the fashion industry, is rare to find objective exclusivity in terms of scarcity of the product, while it is more common that brands give the consumer the illusion of scarcity (Catry, 2003). Luxury brands aim to sell every year a broader portfolio of products, in order to earn the highest most possible revenue (Bain & Company, 2015). However, at the same time, they also want to maintain the idea of scarcity and exclusivity of their products (Phau & Prendergast, 2000).

Therefore, to allow consumers to perceive this exclusivity, brands exploit sophisticated marketing techniques aiming to increase awareness of their brand in potential customers; while simultaneously, they keep a tightly controlled distribution of their product, using forms such as limited edition offers (Heine, 2010; Radon, 2012). This generates a high desire for the product, and an allure of elitism. Moreover, there may be a paradigm shift occurring, where exclusivity is considered less in relation to the number of people who can access a brand, and more in context of the type and level of access to the brand allowed to different individuals and groups (Triefus, 2017). Finally, luxury fashion brands are characterised by the idea that while they are selling a product, they are also selling the culture and the heritage of the brand (The Business of Fashion, 2016). This aspect is critical in the context of consumers seeking brand authenticity, a concept that is contextualised in section 1.5, and pivotal in this project.

In conclusion, and for the purpose of this project, is considered a luxury fashion brand a brand which by using sophisticated marketing and communication strategies (Beverland, 2004; Fionda & Moore, 2009; Christopher M. Moore & Birtwistle, 2005; Nueno & Quelch, 1998), its heritage (Christopher M. Moore & Birtwistle, 2005;

Nueno & Quelch, 1998; Okonkwo, 2007) and its identity (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Okonkwo, 2007; Phau & Prendergast, 2000), is able to evoke an authentic perceived idea of exclusivity (Catry, 2003; Phau & Prendergast, 2000), high quality (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014), and a distinctive brand image (K. Keller, 2009; K. W. Miller & Mills, 2012b) in customers' mind.

1.5   CONTEXTUALISING BRAND AUTHENTICITY

As luxury fashion brand is a concept with no univocal definition, also brand authenticity is a term with different connotations. While is not the aim of this project to attempt in defining the concept, there are some commonalities which are possible to identify in the literature, and which will help to contextualise what brand authenticity might signify when its lack will be discussed in section 2.4 of the literature review. Brand authenticity can be considered a subjective concept, which relates more to the perception which the consumer has of authentic, than an objective characteristic of the brand or the product (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Gundlach & Neville, 2012).

In philosophy, a person is authentic when their attitudes, values and motivations reflect the way they have decided to live (Faden & Beauchamp, 1986). Living authentically might be a synonym of being true with the self (Starr, 2008); and true, genuine, real, and unique are just a few of the definitions of authentic that is possible to find on main English dictionaries (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018; Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). All these terms and concepts might be readily applied to the idea of brand authenticity; notably, when brand anthropomorphism (or humanisation of the brand) is a growing phenomenon (Portal, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2018a). Considered as a key aspect of brand image (Ballantyne, Warren, & Nobbs, 2006), and an element that might influence the credibility of a brand identity (Beverland, 2005), authenticity is increasingly deemed crucial in brands' marketing strategies (S. Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr, 2003; Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015).

Continuity and consistency are two critical characteristics which by leading to credibility and reliability might enhance the brand authenticity (Portal, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2018b). More specifically, continuity means that a brand is offering the consumer attributes which are stable over time (Schallehn, Burmann, & Riley, 2014). Consistency refers to

the ability of a brand of reflecting its values and image across all the elements of its marketing mix in a complementary manner (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). By being consistent in all its features, such as the product, the personnel, and the communication strategy, a brand is facilitating consumers' trust and loyalty (Eggers, O'Dwyer, Kraus, Vallaster, & Güldenberg, 2013). As previously mentioned, continuity and consistency are facilitators of credibility and reliability, and generally, an elevated sense of credibility and reliability is associated with brand authenticity (Portal et al., 2018b).

To conclude, for the purpose of this project, a brand is considered authentic, when through brand consistency and continuity (Portal et al., 2018b) it is perceived to be unique (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018), genuine (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018), and true to its values and image (Beverland, 2005).

The importance of brand authenticity for luxury fashion brands (and brands in general) is discussed in section 2.4.

1.6   CONTEXTUALISING TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

For the purpose of this project, a transformative experience of the self is considered any kind of experience – commercially or not-commercially oriented – that might profoundly influence a person's perception in a long-lasting way (Mermiri, 2009). In particular, are deemed as transformative all those experiences which might increase self-consciousness, self-awareness, and self-confidence; might lead people to a sense of achievement, "self-renewal, personal growth and self-discovery" (Arnould & Price, 1993); or might precede a behavioural metamorphosis by shifting a person sentiment towards a situation, a belief, or another person (Kozinets, 2002). Section 3.3.2 will provide a number of examples which will emphasise key aspects which might facilitate transformative experience inside or outside a brand-related context (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017; Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007; Soren, 2009).

1.7   CONTEXTUALISING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The term public engagement is another term which has no univocal definition (Smith & Gallicano, 2015; Taylor & Kent, 2014). The concept of public engagement is mentioned

repeatedly in this project; hence, it needs to be contextualised. In section 2.5, the concept of public engagement will be compared to the similar concept of consumer engagement, which is often used in marketing studies (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Gambetti, Graffigna, & Biraghi, 2012; Sashi, 2012; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). However, it will be shown that for the purpose of this project, the concept of consumer engagement is considered not comprehensive. Particularly, in next paragraphs, there are specific references to examples which derived from art studies, being the relationship brand/art, and the effect of this relationship on the consumer, pivotal to this research.

There is an agreement in considering engagement as a shift from a one-way reception of messages to an active two-way relationship or conversation that might involve a person, or a group of people, in reacting to, generating, and sharing information (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). Specific references are made to users' behaviour on social media (Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012; Paek, Hove, Jung, & Cole, 2013), or user-generated content on social media (Shao, 2009), or Corporate Social Responsibility activities which involve stakeholders (Noland & Phillips, 2010; Taylor & Kent, 2014). In those studies which are focusing on the relationship between a brand and its stakeholders, in a Corporate Social Responsibility context, engagement is deemed "a mechanism to achieve a number of objectives including consent, control, co-operation […] for enhancing trust or as a substitute for true trust, as a discourse to enhance fairness or as a mechanism of corporate governance" (O'Riordan & Fairbrass, 2014, p. 123).

Alternatively, engagement is defined as a mechanism that obliges corporations "to involve stakeholders in identifying, understanding and responding to (sustainability) issues and concerns, and to report, explain and be answerable to stakeholders for decisions, actions and performance" (AccountAbility, 2011, p. 6). What emerges from both the definitions above is the idea that engagement should be a two-way conversation for addressing issues or achieving shared goals, and that this conversation should operate in a spirit of trustworthiness (Men & Tsai, 2016). Engagement is a tool to generate inclusivity between a firm and its stakeholders (AccountAbility, 2011).

Although these definitions might be considered as out of topic because are referring to stakeholders and CSR, and not to art, public, or consumers; it is fundamental to remind that consumers are in fact brands' stakeholders (Fitchett, 2005). Hence, consumers

should be involved in the conversation. Furthermore, by widening the conversation to the public, the actions and the decisions made in this co-operative spirit might contribute to the social capital of the brand (Burt, 2000; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Social capital is here intended as the benefit which derives from "possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

As mentioned in section 1.1, this project is centred on exploring art foundations owned by luxury fashion brands; hence, it is important to consider the concept of engagement, and public engagement, also in the art context. In this context and for the purpose of this project, public engagement is an active participation of both producer and receiver of art (Edmonds, Bilda, & Muller, 2009; Edmonds, Muller, & Connell, 2006) in a two-way conversation (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2006; National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, 2014) with regards to understanding the arts and with the scope of generating benefits and well-being (Belfiore, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Hoey, Zutis, Leuty, & Mihailidis, 2010; Kay, 2000; Phinney, Moody, & Small, 2014). Finally, this conversation has to be free from power structures and hierarchies; the people involved have to act as and perceived to be equals (Belfiore, 2002; Jancovich, 2011; Koskiola, 2014; Lanz & Montanari, 2014; Men & Tsai, 2016).

1.8   AIM & OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to investigate art foundations as a potential venue for luxury fashion brands to provide a transformative experience.

This aim is achieved through the following objectives:

1) To better understand the main characteristics of luxury fashion brands' art foundations, with an emphasis on *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*.

2) To determine the characteristics and the importance of brand experiences in the context of the luxury fashion industry.

3) To establish what a transformation is in the brand experience context.

4) To explore the impact of a transformation as determined by different experiences and expectations.

5) To conceptualise a model for alternative marketing strategies for luxury fashion brands.

1.9 RESEARCH QUESTION

As previously explained, there is a gap in the knowledge regarding possible strategies that luxury fashion brands might implement to make their experiences being perceived more authentic, in the spirit of establishing a deeper relationship with the consumer. Hence, the research question that this project is attempting to answer is the following:

How luxury fashion brands' art foundations could be considered as an alternative to providing consumers with a transformative experience?

1.10 PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to conceptualise a strategy model for providing transformative experiences to the luxury fashion consumer, hence to strengthen the brand-consumer relationship, by exploiting luxury fashion brands' art foundations and deep engagement.

1.11 THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter 1 introduces the context of this study. It presents the background of the research, the contextualisation of specific concepts which are mentioned and discussed throughout the entire thesis, the aim and objectives, the research question, and the purpose of the research are also covered in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the first part of the literature review. The chapter provides a discussion and examples of the importance of brand experiences inside (and outside) the fashion industry and the luxury sector; identifies specific elements which are influencing the brand experience in the luxury fashion context; explains the need for the project to be focused on transformative experiences by discussing concepts such as brand authenticity and consumer engagement; provides the justification for selecting *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* as the focus of this research.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the second part of the literature review. The chapter explores and analyses transformative experiences' characteristics and examples.

Chapter 4 presents a theoretical framework of the research. It shows a graphical representation of the literature review and provides a quick summary of the central concepts discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 5 describes the methodology undermining the entire study, and the methods selected to collect and analyse the data.

Chapter 6 presents all the findings of this study and discuss them. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part is dedicated to discussing the four main themes derived from the analysis of focus groups, participant observation, and interviews with people from *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton*. The second part is dedicated to report and discuss the results of a follow-up email sent to the focus groups' participants a few months after the discussions took place. The last part discusses the findings derived from interviews conducted with experts in public engagement and luxury fashion brands and investigates common practices in cultural institutions with concerns on engaging with the public. At the end of the chapter are presented graphic representations of the experiences lived by the focus groups' participants.

Chapter 7 presents the conceptual model, and outcome, of this research.

Chapter 8 discusses the salient conclusions of the research by summarising the main findings addressed and by cross-referencing them with the literature review. The chapter also identifies limitations and possible further development of the research, and presents the main implication and contribution of the study.

2 EXPERIENCES, AUTHENTICITY & CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide the background for this project, in the context of experiences and with some specific reference to the luxury fashion industry. Each section provides an in-depth analysis of different aspects which are essential to understanding the nature of the art foundations established by luxury fashion brands, in a marketing and branding perspective.

Brands' experiences are considered very important by consumers, but they are no longer perceived as authentic and significant (Gilmore & Pine, 2009; Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006). People require and need an honest and engaging relationship with the brand, where due to this engagement the consumer will feel on a par with the brand. Dedicated venues, and the proximity with the arts, are facilitators in providing more significant experiences. Especially in a luxury context, and in particular in the commercial setting, where the consumer still appreciates a certain level of social distance, art foundations might be the perfect venue to provide a different experience. Further, in Chapter 3, the concept and the importance of transformative experiences, as an alternative to the usual brand experiences offered, will be explored. By providing a transformation of the self, the brand may be able to guarantee a perceived authenticity, a long-lasting relationship, and a deeper level of loyalty towards the brand.

2.2 EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING & BRAND EXPERIENCE

This section explores the reasons behind the increasing implementation of experiences in brands' communication strategies. Specific characteristics of the luxury fashion industry in the context of consumption experience are investigated, and a number of experiential projects organised by luxury fashion brands are provided as examples.

Brand experiences are part of an evolution which is happening in the conspicuous consumption. The conspicuous consumption, term which refers to the purchasing of luxury goods generally made by the leisure class (Veblen, 1899), has always been considered by scholars as a social consumption (Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012), a context-

related purchase (Frank, 2007). Historically, the luxury purchase has been used to show affiliation to specific social categories (Durante & Griskevicius, 2016). More recently, luxury fashion goods as highly branded products are purchased more by the middle class or the "new rich" to show their new acquired status (Tyrnauer, 2008), than by the leisure class. This is especially true in countries where luxury fashion brands are expanding due to the deep significance that displaying brands means, such as China and Russia (Wang, 2015). Moreover, many luxury fashion brands have become more accessible (Catry, 2003), due also to recent trends such as renting luxury goods (Yeoman, 2011), and this is leading to a redefinition of luxury from what is now "mass-luxury" (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014). By producing accessories and affordable items to facilitate liquidity for the firm, luxury fashion brands have reached a level of over-exposure which is undermining their perceived exclusivity (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

It is to redefine luxury as the "real luxury" that brands are moving from providing goods to provide new forms of life style and experiences (Yeoman, 2011). Luxury consumers are moving towards a deeper social awareness, which is transforming also the way they live their luxury consumption (Yeoman, 2011). Important aspects which consumers seek in their new way of experiencing luxury are intelligence, health, and ethical lifestyle (Steedman, 2007); characteristics which consumers consider attractive, authentic and aspirational (Yeoman, 2011). Moreover, the use of time has become more essential than the use of commodities (Steedman, 2007). In this scenario, creative consumption and well-being are being prioritised by the luxury consumer (Di Giacinto & Ferrante, 2007), and it is the reason for many luxury brands for diversifying their offer by providing numerous brand experiences in the leisure and culture industries (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). Finally, the rise of social media has accentuated the social meaning that living experiences has (Hodalska, 2017), which is becoming similar to the social meaning which displaying conspicuous consumption had when Veblen (1899) theorised it.

2.2.1 WHAT IS BRAND EXPERIENCE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Experiences and purchases are often compared in the attempt to define which one is more important to be deemed by the brand. However, to compare the purchase of a good with a lived experience might be thought as incorrect, especially in the case of purchases being evaluated to provide only pleasure, and experiences being considered to always provide

meaning (Schmitt et al., 2015). An interesting example reported to discuss that not all purchases are providing only pleasure and not meaning, is the purchase of luxury goods (Schmitt et al., 2015). Often, by purchasing luxury items a deep meaning of status recognition, social identity, and social inclusion is conveyed to the customer (Cappetta & Gioia, 2006; Husic & Cicic, 2009; Schembri, Merrilees, & Kristiansen, 2010).

Moreover, in the fashion industry, purchases mainly relate to self-image and self-perception, appearance, social inclusion, and self-acceptance (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Giovannini et al., 2015). The ownership of luxury (fashion) goods generates some effects on consumers' self-concept (Annie Jin, 2012; Belk, 1988), and on the consumers' idea of others' perceptions (Fennis et al., 2005). All of these characteristics are considered to influence the decision-making process (Zheng, Baskin, & Peng, 2018). By wearing logos or carrying widely recognisable luxury items, such as Rolex watches or Birkin bags, the consumer might feel self-realised, and integrated into a particular social circle (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Zhang & Kim, 2013).

It is interesting to note that all the aforementioned attributes, which might influence a purchase, together with the increasing need of people for other people's attention (Derber, 2000; Hodalska, 2017; Reed, 2002), might also influence the process which leads a person to decide the kinds of experiences to live (Colton, 1987). Indeed, leisure activities and truism destinations are also often chosen based on the symbolism and the meaning attached to them, and on the effect which is generated on the others' perceptions (Colton, 1987).

Hence, on the one hand, the purchase of an item is not conveying only pleasure, but also a deep meaning (Schmitt et al., 2015). On the other hand, it is not possible to sustain that all experiences are conveying meanings and not only pleasure (Grotts & Widner Johnson, 2013; Schmitt et al., 2015). In this dichotomy between pleasure/meaning and purchase/experience, the brand is arguably seen as the perfect intermediary (Schmitt et al., 2015). Furthermore, Schmitt et al. (2015) argue that a more acceptable duality, than purchases/experiences, might be the juxtaposition between materialism and experientialism, and in this scenario, the brand is deemed to be the one able to provide both pleasure/meaning and materialism/ experientialism.

A brand experience is the "sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments" (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 52). In general terms, providing experiences has become fundamental for brands (Atwal & Williams, 2009). People are considered not to be interested in buying only products anymore, but that they are more happy to spend on experiences (Dunn et al., 2011). Interestingly, what differentiates a brand experience from other forms such as brand attachment or consumer delight, is the possible lack of motivation of the consumer (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). Apparently, an experience might happen even when the consumer is not interested in the brand or has no personal connection to it (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). Moreover, a brand experience is not necessarily based on an emotional response; it can be based, as previously mentioned, on "dynamic sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioural responses" (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013, p. 36).

In the late 1990s, marketers and academics began to suggest that brands shift from traditional marketing strategies to experience-oriented approaches by implementing their communication and promotion tactics (Schmitt, 1999). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were the first to introduce the notion of experience in studies dedicated to consumption. However, it is Schmitt's (1999) seminal work which suggested to brands that everything should be considered as a means for communicating and entertaining the consumer, thus setting the foundations of experiential marketing (McCole, 2004). In particular, by engaging in a meaningful communication with the consumers, brands would benefit from a deeper understanding of consumers' attitudes towards the brand or its product. Hence they would be able to tailor a more meaningful and memorable experience (Schmitt et al., 2015).

Luxury brands have usually employed communication to underline the creative credibility, the exclusive allure, the cultural significance of their products (Atwal & Williams, 2009); and also to achieve the brand resonance level of Keller's Brand Equity Model (K. Keller, 2013) by constructing customers' attachment and loyalty (K. Keller, 2008; McAlexander, Kim, & Roberts, 2003). To reach the level of brand resonance, and together with more common highly visible forms of communication, such as advertising and social media campaigns, luxury brands are increasingly implementing brand experiences in their communication strategies (Atwal & Williams, 2009).

Currently, it is possible to encounter brand experiences or experiential marketing tactics everywhere. In particular, there are two main elements which most of the brands utilise to develop experiences for their consumers, and which make them easily recognisable: Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMS) and Experience Providers (ExPros) (Schmitt, 1999, p. 60). Experiential modules are frameworks composed of five elements: sense, feel, think, act, and relate. These elements need to be considered in modelling the experiential marketing strategy, for example by providing an interactive environment in the retail, or by creating emotional advertisements. Experience Providers, instead, are the means which a brand might exploit to provide the experience, such as communication, co-branding, people, environments (Schmitt, 1999).

In section 2.4, it will be explored that customers do not perceive brand experiences as authentic anymore. This lack of perceived authenticity is due to the excess of experiences provided by a number of brands which continues to rise. The next section includes a list of examples to highlight the variety and increased presence of brand experiences inside and outside the fashion industry.

2.2.2   EXAMPLES OF BRAND EXPERIENCES IN & OUT OF FASHION

There are several examples of experiential marketing and brand experiences, some highly recognisable and some other less. Starbucks is considered to be the master example of experiential marketing (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). The brand has been able to transform the coffee experience worldwide by providing unique environments, theatrical coffee-making and branded cups (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). Other brands which are deemed strongly oriented towards providing experiences are LEGO, Victoria's Secrets, and Apple (Brakus et al., 2009).

With particular reference to the fashion industry, in conjunction with a continued development of the product offered and the materials utilised, luxury brands are continually focusing on proving the consumer with a distinctive service, a diverse shopping environment, higher qualified personnel, and an involving and innovative digital encounter to meet consumers' needs (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). In this scenario, marketing has always been used by brands for differentiating themselves from

their competitors (Varadarajan & Jayachandran, 1999); or for helping the brand in providing customers with a reason to buy things which they do not actually need (Easey, 2002). Hence, over time, luxury fashion brands have developed strategies which are different than the ones implemented on the high-street or by fast fashion brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

In the context of providing experiences, luxury fashion brands tend to diversify their offer by presenting to the consumer an entire range of sensorial opportunities, which generally are not connected to the commercial core of the brand. The following is an illustrative, but not an exhaustive list of luxury fashion brands' experiential strategies.

- Chanel offers a culinary experience at the top floor of its Tokyo flagship store (Hazinedaroğlu, 2012); it provided an art experience in different cities thanks to a mobile art pavilion built by the star architect Zaha Hadid (Etherington, 2008); and it has recently inaugurated a members-only club in New York (Bray, 2017a);
- Tiffany has opened The Blue Box Café in New York, and promoted it by exploiting the well-known 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' film (M. Ward, 2017);
- Versace and Bulgari have invested in the hospitality industry by branding a number of hotels around the world (Gervasio, 2016);
- The Armani's headquarters in Milan offers a whole experience from having lunch to a night partying at the Armani Cafè, while shopping the entire range of products designed by the brand, and the possibility to spend the night in its hotel nearby (Flaccavento, 2017);
- A number of luxury brands, such as Hermès, Ermenegildo Zegna, Prada, Louis Vuitton, tend to utilise their retail and flagship stores as exhibition spaces for art installations (Ong, 2016);
- Brands, such as Burberry and Tiffany, are exploiting the digital world as a platform for co-creating content with the consumers, such as the 'Art of the Trench' and 'Burberry Kisses' experiences, and the 'What Makes True Love' one (Bunz, 2009);
- Brands are also providing educational opportunities, such as: the LVMH Group by sponsoring a professorship at Bocconi Business School in Milan; Gucci by sponsoring a degree at Polimoda School of Fashion in Florence, and by

inaugurating a fashion lab in partnership with Bocconi Business School in Milan (Berezhna, 2017; Wallace, 2017);

- The LVMH Group will open the doors of some of its brands' places of origin during a three-day event called 'Les Journees Particulieres', and the purchase of tickets for the event opened one year in advanced (Diderich, 2017);

- Balenciaga, Alexander McQueen, Dior, Chanel are just a few of the brands which have decided to exhibit their garments in museums and art galleries (Akbareian, 2015; Lowthorpe, 2015);

- Valentino and Dior opted for the production of documentary films to let a wider audience access the brands (Scott, 2015).

All of these examples are the demonstration of how luxury fashion brands are attempting to provide their consumers with a various number of opportunities to make contact with the brand and to feel part of the brand (Colin Shaw & Ivens, 2002).

A critical aspect which might influence peoples' experiences is the place where these experiences are lived (Malpas, 1999). The following section investigates the importance of the place for manipulating experiences (Christopher M. Moore, Doherty, & Doyle, 2010). Specifically, the importance of the flagship store, and the fundamental and particular relationship between the luxury consumer and the brands' salespersons are analysed in the luxury fashion context. These two aspects are crucial to understanding why one of the parameters used to select the art foundations investigated in this project is the type of venue which brands are dedicating to them.

2.3   THE PLACE AS AN EXPERIENCE INFLUENCER

This section is dedicated to exploring the importance which is attached to the physical place in the fashion industry, especially in the luxury sector, and albeit the unrestrainable digitalisation of the society. Explicitly, this project deems the place as a pivotal element for brands in providing significant experiences

The place has been recognised to be a key aspect to manipulate the consumption experience (Mencarelli, 2008; Christopher M. Moore et al., 2010). The product itself is a small component of the entire consumption experience; and the place and the

atmosphere where the purchases occur are a very influential component of the process (Kotler, 1973). The atmosphere and the environment provided in the retail store are an intangible aspect of the brand, a significant element of its identity and of the experience provided to the consumer, and the reasons why customers are still enjoying accessing the physical environment, wherever the actual purchase might occur (C. Anderson, 2004; Dennis, Harris, & Sandhu, 2002; Tice, 2012).

In the luxury fashion context, the flagship store is considered a unique touching point for the brand (Bray, 2017b; Ferrier, 2018; Triefus, 2017), one of the main opportunities to understand how the consumer interacts with the product and with the brand (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Mencarelli, 2008), and the main venue to provide a memorable and significant consumption experience (Kozinets et al., 2004). The most common reasons to invest in the construction of a flagship store are: to enhance the brand identity and to cultivate a relationship with the customers (Arrigo, 2015); to effectively enter in a new market (C. M. Moore et al., 2010). The flagship store can be defined as a brand communicator which through impressive architectures and important art installations might help the brand to emphasise its association with high status (Hansen-Hansen, 2014; Masè & Cedrola, 2017; Naletelich & Paswan, 2018).

More accurately, as "a larger than average speciality retail format in a prominent geographical location, offering the widest and deepest product range within the highest level of store environment and serving to showcase the brand's position, image and values" (Nobbs, Moore, & Sheridan, 2012, p. 922). To emphasise the association of high status mentioned by Hansen-Hansen (2014), luxury fashion retail stores and boutiques are often located adjacent to high rated hotels and restaurants, art galleries and art dealers, and jewellers (Jacobs, 2013). Furthermore, luxury fashion brands continue to invest in transforming their retail stores into shopping cathedrals, eye-catching structures designed by star architects, to enhance the brand's allure of luxury and exclusivity (Fionda & Moore, 2009).

2.3.1 STORE PERSONALITY, BRAND IMAGE, AND CONSUMER EXPERIENCE

The characteristics of the brand generally permeate its flagship stores. These characteristics form what is called the store personality, which is the way people perceive

the store image, allowing a level of differentiation, satisfaction, and loyalty towards the brand (Willems et al., 2012). Furthermore, people tend to associate store personalities with human personalities, and this facilitates a transfer of those same human traits to the brand (Willems et al., 2012). Notably, the humanisation of a store, and as a consequence of a brand, positively influences people evaluation of the brand (Agarwal, 2014), especially for the consumer who might aspire to own a piece of the favourite brand (Arrigo, 2015; Hansen-Hansen, 2014).

There are different ways in which a flagship store can influence the consumer experience: by generating or increasing interest and desire for the brand (Arrigo, 2015); by providing significant experiences which, by conveying the brand's values, might let the consumer exceed the product (Antéblian et al., 2013); by facilitating the achievement of brand recognition (K. Keller, 2013); by enhancing the exclusivity of the brand (Jiang, Gao, Huang, DeWall, & Zhou, 2014); by giving specific access to the brand through the salespersons considered as the brand's knowledge brokers (Cillo, 2005).

In particular, the store can be an effective way to facilitate the consumers' ability in retaining the brand, and to influence their decision-making process (Porter & Claycomb, 1997). Moreover, the store is a perfect place for the additional promotion of the brand; advertisements and merchandising in the store are an effective way to attract peoples' attention and influence their choices while purchasing (K. Keller, 2013). The store can also be the venue for specific PR initiatives and events organised by the brand to promote new products or to provide the loyal customers with something which goes beyond the products, such as cultural initiatives and art exhibitions (Antéblian et al., 2013; Y. Lee, 2014).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, customers are striving to buy more than products; they require luxurious environments which are comprehensive of an entire range of leisure offers (Jacobs, 2013). More importantly, the line which divides the shopping experience with the research for cultural offers is gradually becoming thin and blurred (Moss, 2007; Sisson, 2017; Templeton, 2017), which is why brands are increasingly associating with the arts, also in the commercial environment (Crewe, 2016; Y. Lee, 2014). Finally, the store could be considered as a perfect venue to better understand the consumer and the way in which the brand can continue to be relevant

(Triefus, 2017). Collecting data on customers' purchases might help in understanding the customer's preferences and in providing a better service, or a better product (M. G. Brown, Malott, Dillon, & Keeps, 1980; Selligent, 2017).

The location is another important and powerful element, which may influence consumers' perceptions of the brand (Arrigo, 2015; Christopher M. Moore et al., 2010). People normally visit cities' fashion districts, such as Ginza, Avenue des Champs Elysées, Bond Street, Via Monte Napoleone, to find all the most famous luxury brands located together. Urban brandscape is the term utilised to describe the experiencing of brands whereas a city is experienced (Bellini & Pasquinelli, 2016). This concept derives from the more general definition of brandscape, as the utterly branded life that people are currently living by experiencing brands which, wittingly or unwittingly, are shaping their identities (Sherry, 1998). By participating in an important network of retail stores, brands are benefiting from the agglomeration effects, an effect which also has positive influences on the in-store decision-making process (Oppewal & Holyoake, 2004).

Moreover, when the flagship store is located in the brand's city of origin, the brand and the city are positively influencing each other, by respectively authenticating the brand and creating value for the city (Pasquinelli, 2017). This effect is stronger in cities like Paris, Milan, New York, or London, which are historically considered as fashion capitals (Jansson & Power, 2010; Martínez, 2007; Rantisi, 2004; Steele, 2017). Their history and tourist attractiveness – called 'place-image' – are positively affecting the brand (Tokatli, 2012), while fashion events are increasing awareness towards the city and are developing tourism (Evans, 2007).

2.3.2   ACCESSING THE EXCLUSIVE BRANDS THROUGH FLAGSHIP STORES

In the perspective of the dichotomy of accessibility and exclusivity which permeates a luxury fashion brand, the flagship store might be considered as the exemplification of the two concepts coexisting, while concurrently the allure of luxury which characterised the brand is not undermined. The flagship store is a valid instrument to enhance the brand's exclusivity. In particular, the details of the store layout can strategically help the brand in addressing different people in different ways (Jiang et al., 2014). Although people are attracted by the architectural structure or by the name of the brand, they might be

intimidated by entering the store (Landers, Harrison, & Gillison, 2016; Vu & Jensen, 2010). Moreover, the store might introduce a certain measure of social segregation: ground floor for some, first floor for others; advertising and promotion is for all, but public relations are carefully targeted, such as "personal invitations to meet the designer, the brand perfume nose, or the head wine buyer" (Daye, 2009, p. 1).

Part of the consumers' perceived accessibility to the exclusive luxury brand through the flagship store, is provided by the salespeople who are considered as the brand's knowledge brokers (Cillo, 2005). They represent the brand's qualities, and they are trained to understand the best ways to approach and interact with each consumer (J.-E. Kim, Ju, & Johnson, 2009). It is interesting to note that scholars argue that the way in which luxury consumers perceive the salesperson can influence their attitude towards the brand, but differently if compared to not-luxury purchases (Amatulli & Guido, 2012; Fassnacht & Scharwey, 2015; J.-E. Kim et al., 2009; Maxham, Netemeyer, & Lichtenstein, 2008; Scharwey, 2017; M. K. Ward & Dahl, 2014). Together, these studies indicate that luxury customers are more willing to buy and pay the price if they feel inferior or superior to the salesperson, the average luxury customer does not appreciate to be equal to the salesperson; the idea of a friend-like attitude is apparently appreciated by non-luxury customers instead.

These studies also outline that rejection generally leads people towards an increased aspiration for the brand and elevates their perception of the brand. This happens even when the person (generally not a luxury customer) is actually complaining of the rejection, and tends to be afraid of entering the luxury retail store (M. K. Ward & Dahl, 2014). Thus, reflecting on luxury consumers' preferences for a certain degree of social distance within the commercial setting, it might be worth considering that situations outside the commercial domain, such as sponsorship events or brands' foundations, may encourage the luxury consumer into a deeper relationship with the brand.

Finally, by creating and designing the flagship store in association with star architects, or by decorating and conceiving the retail setting and windows with artists, the consumers' perception of the brand may be positively influenced, and this could generate value for the brand (Crewe, 2016; Hansen-Hansen, 2014; Y. Lee, 2014). Arguably, any form of marketing if strategically combined with a form of art might render the

perception of the brand and strengthen its luxury status, allure of exclusivity, and prestige (Gilmore & Pine, 2009; Jelinek, 2018; Masè & Cedrola, 2017; Naletelich & Paswan, 2018).

2.3.3   REINVENTING THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

Whereas the debate regarding the relevance of the physical store in the modern era continues, luxury fashion brands, above all, have clearly understood that the flagship store is a compelling communication channel and an essential aspect of the brand (Christopher M. Moore & Birtwistle, 2005). For the most, brands' products are easily accessible online, in department stores, or in licenced shops, whereas the flagship store needs to be considered as a meaningful place where the customer is seeking a unique experience and a point of contact with the brand (Triefus, 2017). By providing experiences not entirely commercially-oriented, luxury brands might generate new feelings and emotions in their customers, and a renewed sense of loyalty and aspiration for the brand (Jiang et al., 2014).

Brands have to completely reinvent the shopping experience to attract consumers and provide what they are seeking (Solca, 2017). One of the main experts' suggestions for a renewed experience is to understand how the customer journey is structured and to modify or to improve all the different components of this structure (Stephens, 2017). The following examples are highlighting luxury fashion brands' efforts to provide experiences which are exceeding the mere purchase of the product. Luxury brands are discerning that people desire to visit their flagship stores is not strictly connected to the purchase of a good anymore (Antéblian et al., 2013).

An excellent example of the brands' endeavour in shifting the flagship store paradigm and in reforming the shopping experience is Burberry. Since 2012, the brand has particularly invested in the digital integration of its London flagship store by providing the consumers with a number of new features (Cartner-Morley, 2012). They introduced QR codes on the products' tags which allow the consumers to access the information of a product immediately online. The brand installed smart-mirrors in the fitting rooms for clients to browse a different range of products digitally, while physically trying a model. Finally, they provide an interactive environment where certain products activate the

nearest wall-screen, and this will show specific contents such as the history of the product, catwalks involving the product, the making process (McBride, 2014; A. Moore, 2015).

The Burberry successful example arguably shows how a brand can completely rethink the shopping experience for its customers, by understanding the customer's desire for an authentic and all-encompassing experience (Kotter, 2013; Shannon, 2017). Restructuring the flagship store based on re-thinking the customer journey is an expensive practice, but apparently enables the brand to attain an effective and integrated communication strategy (Stephens, 2017). Other examples of renewed flagship stores which are worth mentioning are the new Louis Vuitton flagship store in Paris, the new Prada flagship store in Miami, and the new Gucci Garden in Florence.

The renewed Louis Vuitton flagship store in Paris is located in Place Vendôme, a square with a high concentration of luxury brand stores, and it is the same building where the brand opened its first retail store, so strategically linked to its heritage. Peter Marino has redesigned it, a famous 'retail-architect' who has designed, amongst others, stores for: Dior in London and Seoul, Bulgari in London and New York, and other Louis Vuitton spaces in Los Angeles and Soho. The new Parisian flagship store provides the customer with the latest and customised products, and coherently with the most recent image which the brand is conveying, the display of a number of artworks (Bray, 2017b). Prada's new store in Miami, inaugurated during the Art Basel Miami Beach, which is one of the most famous art shows in America, although nowadays is interestingly considered mainly a fashion event than an art one (Loiseau, 2017). The store has an art-deco-inspired design which attempts to appear coherent with the surroundings of Miami Beach. The brand is trying to become more personal for the consumer by providing different countries with a dedicated and coherent offer which reflects their culture (Blanks, 2017).

The concept of cultural coherence is also part of the new strategy applied by Gucci. The brand's new store in Florence, called Gucci Garden, is located in Piazza della Signoria, in the refurbished building formerly known as Gucci Museo, and it is a flagship store which provides a unique offer to its customers (Reuters, 2018). In the new store, there is the possibility to customise Gucci's products, there are all the pieces of the latest collections, and there are memorabilia sold exclusively in this store, in an attempt to

incentive visits and to enhance exclusivity (Triefus, 2017). Moreover, part of the flagship store has been internally decorated by artists who have collaborated with the brand since 2015, and who have been discovered by the brand on social media. Finally, to provide a unique and encompassing experience which enhances the brand's Florentine heritage and culture, the new store has a 50-seat restaurant run by a 3-star Michelin chef (Triefus, 2017). It is interesting to note that, in the perspective of allowing the brand to be accessible without undermining its allure of exclusivity, the restaurant has unexpected affordable prices (Ferrier, 2018).

Art exhibitions and cultural initiatives inside the store (Louis Vuitton, Prada, Gucci), the transformation of the store spaces in interactive spaces where products are not at the core (Nordstrom), digital integration of the physical space (Burberry), are all endeavours of rethinking the store in the modern era. People strive to live sensorial and intellectual experiences, to connect with people and the brand, and the store is still considering by many as a suitable place to create a relationship with the consumer (Arrigo, 2015; Manlow & Nobbs, 2013; Triefus, 2017). It is notable that several brands have a specific interest in exhibiting contemporary art in-store, arguably intrigued by the idea that scholars consider the proximity of a brand with art as a way of being perceived as more luxurious and authentic (Chailan, 2018; Gilmore & Pine, 2009; Hansen-Hansen, 2014; Zorloni, 2016). This relationship between different forms of art and business is called 'artification' (Masè & Cedrola, 2017)

According to Amatulli and Guido (2012), by dedicating part of a brand's flagship store to cultural and artistic experiences and by hiring experts and educated personnel, the association between the brand and the cultural values should be more straightforward in the customers' minds. Nevertheless, the logic of the market which is permeating the modern society is undermining the authenticity of the artistic offer (Kozinets, 2002). Furthermore, if artification is not coherent with the brand identity, there is the risk of deteriorating the situation and of losing credibility (Jelinek, 2018). The exhibition of art within a commercial venue has become increasingly frequent; hence, it might start to be perceived as progressively less authentic.

This perceived lack of authenticity might impair the cultural value conveyed by the art to the brand, especially considering that also fast-fashion and high-street brands, such

Zara, H&M, and Rag and Bone, have started to implement artistic collaboration in their strategies (Carù et al., 2017). Thus, it is not clear yet, the effect which a not entirely branded and non-commercial experience provided in a brand-controlled environment might have on the perception which the consumer has of the authenticity and the allure of luxury of the brand.

2.4   LACK OF AUTHENTICITY OF BRAND EXPERIENCES

This section explores how the exponential growth of experiences provided by brands is making consumers distrust the authenticity of the experience, and to what extent this lack of authenticity might undermine costumers' loyalty.

A brand which is providing experiences or is utilising experiential marketing, has often been the exemplification of hyper-reality, or the so-called Disneyfication – or Disneyization (Bryman, 1999), of the postmodern society (Atwal and Williams, 2009). Disneyfication is a term which derives from the assumption that Disney with its theme parks has been the first brand able to capitalise on the hypothesis that by experiencing a brand people are happier to spend time and money in its proximity (or places) (Jansen-Verbeke, 1991). Most of the brands which have provided, or are providing, experiences have applied the same paradigm, and therefore, the experience economy often is referred to as the Disneyfication of society, as the transformation of everyday life in a theme park (Gilmore & Pine, 2009).

However, consumers are changing their habits, which puts to question the authenticity and the reality these brands offer "where it once seemed unique and authentic, it now seems ubiquitous and inauthentic" (Gilmore & Pine, 2009, p. 5). Uniqueness and authenticity are something pivotal also in the fashion landscape (Alipour & Sabzikaran, 2018). Recently, and mainly because of easier access to technology, the consumer attitude towards the shopping experience has dramatically changed. In particular, the fashion consumer has become increasingly informed and sophisticated; thus, is requiring brands to express more authenticity through each one of their forms of communication (Antéblian et al., 2013). Whereas authenticity has become a customer's requirement, it is essential to consider the following aspects. Not all consumers are keen to experience the brand in a commercial environment (Kozinets, 2002); not all consumers accept

experiential marketing and brand experience as a trait of authenticity (Gilmore & Pine, 2009); and there are studies claiming that consumers who mostly seek experiences in commercial settings are commonly less keen to spend money (Rosenbaum, Otalora, & Ramírez, 2016).

Therefore, it is still not clear if, in the luxury fashion context, brands should focus on tailoring sophisticated commercial-oriented experiences or should attempt to differentiate their strategies. Nonetheless, by focusing on less commercial-oriented circumstances, brands might facilitate the engagement with the consumers in a more authentically perceived, and meaningful connotation (Pine & Gilmore, 2016; Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Engagement which might translate in positive Word of Mouth (WOM), or Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM), which is generally deemed one of the most effective way a brand has to promote itself freely and in a more authentically perceived manner, due to its consumer-led nature (E. Keller, 2007; Ng, David, & Dagger, 2011; Subramanian, 2018)

Besides, experiential marketing has started to be deemed another attempt of affecting marketing which is no longer effective towards customers. Together with other forms of marketing strategies, experiential marketing might be considered as a failure in understanding that consumers are now immune to the message brands are sending through their implementation (Gilmore & Pine, 2002). By suggesting that brands should start to create an experience together with the customers, Gilmore and Pine (2002) have anticipated a current trend of brand/consumer collaborations. Some brands have adopted techniques of value co-creation, or product co-design, with the consumer, as their primary marketing strategies. Exemplifications of co-creation and co-design, as a tool to provide transformative experiences, will be explored more in depth in section 3.3.1.

The next section analyses another specific aspect considered critical in providing brand experiences: consumer engagement. Engagement is a concept deemed hardly definable, and the next section will investigate it from two different perspectives. On the one hand, it is analysed how the term engagement is utilised in the literature related to brand experiences and consumption experiences. On the other hand, the concept of consumer engagement is compared to the similar one of public engagement, which is contextualised

in section 1.7. The lack of a two-way dialogue in the commercial context will be highlighted as the main reasons for the seemingly misuse of the term engagement.

Consumer engagement is particularly relevant in the context of the relationship existing between luxury fashion brands and their consumers. Historically, this relationship has been based on the need for the brand of controlling the way in which the brand is presented to the public and the way the brand is experienced (Doyle, Moore, Doherty, & Hamilton, 2008; H. Kim, 2012). Flagship stores have been the most utilised channel for brands to exercise a level of control which would have been difficult to achieve through other channels (Christopher M Moore, Birtwistle, & Burt, 2004). However, as explained in section 2.2, the conspicuous consumption is evolving by moving away from merely experiencing commodities, towards experiencing culture and well-being (Bronner, 2018). This evolution is leading consumers towards experiencing the brand outside the conventional "brand places" such as the flagship store, and as a consequence, the level of control exercise by the brand in orienting the consumer on how to live the brand experience will be harder to achieve.

Luxury fashion brands should consider this evolution in the conspicuous consumption as an opportunity to evolve their relationship with the consumer. Specifically, through consumer engagement brands could rethink their relationship with the consumer as a relationship between peers (Triefus, 2017), where transparency in communication might facilitate the consumer contribution in creating the brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2010). By doing so, brands might restore their authenticity and might create a new form of loyalty which will result in strengthening their relationship with the consumer (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018).

2.5   CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

This section is dedicated to investigating the importance that consumer engagement plays in providing authentic experiences. In particular, when engagement is considered not as entertaining the consumer, but as a two-way dialogue aimed to build a relationship brand/consumer.

In the context of creating an experience along with the consumers, Consumer Engagement (CE) is a pivotal aspect which might facilitate the experience to be perceived as more authentic. Consumer engagement can be considered an evolution of relationship marketing (Gambetti et al., 2012) or more appropriately, a fundamental component of relationship marketing (Vivek et al., 2012). Hitherto, CE is mainly mentioned in studies dedicated to online brand-consumers' relationships (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2013), by considering online channels, such as social media or website, one of the easiest tool to connect and interact with the consumer (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016).

Interaction, challenges, and engagement are pivotal to succeed in providing a positive, and possibly significant, experience to customers (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). Scholars through online ethnographic studies have understood that consumers are inclined to shape their consumer culture through social media or brand communities (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). Nonetheless, this research is interested in brand opportunities of CE offline, as stores and other 'brand's places' are still considered fundamental to generate great connections with consumers (Triefus, 2017). On the one hand, offline venues are still advantageous to strengthen attachment and loyalty towards the brand (J. Kim & Kim, 2014); on the other hand, they facilitate informing the brand of the customer's preferences and attitude (Amatulli & Guido, 2012).

Brands are focusing many of their energies in providing experiences, and they have been suggested by marketers and academics to initiate engaging more with the consumers, where engagement is seen as a way to facilitate a deeper and more effective consumer/brand relationship (Gambetti et al., 2012). Consumer engagement develops at the moment that consumers establish a deep emotional bond with the brand (Vivek et al., 2012). Through CE, the consumers' role is enhanced by being involved in the process of value co-creation (Dessart et al., 2015). Moreover, CE transforms the consumer into a fan of the brand, due to the strong relationships created, which may bring him/her to energetically promote the brand and its products (Sashi, 2012). These are the main reasons why engagement is essential to take into account while planning marketing strategies.

Brand resonance is one of the most desirable states a brand might aspire to in the customers' mind (K. Keller, 2013). At this stage, the bond between brand and customer is deep and psychological; it has been transformed into brand loyalty which then translates into a relationship with the brand. Brand resonance is deemed composed of four factors: loyalty, attachment, community, and engagement (K. Keller, 2001). Of these four elements, the engagement one is often used to describe the interaction which the consumer has with the brand, but not the other way around (K. Keller, 2008; J. Kim & Kim, 2014); as a one-way relationship and not a two-way dialogue, as defined in section 1.7.

By considering the consumer as a person, there should be no difference between the notion of consumer engagement and public engagement. The word 'engagement' often has been employed in a basic and literal manner as a vehicle to provide pleasure, more than in a deep and significant manner as a tool to provide meaning. The consumer should be considered as being a co-producer rather than simply a 'target' (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), as a pivotal actor in a two-way communication with the brand, and oriented towards generating benefits in a spirit of co-creation of knowledge (Giannachi et al., 2014).

An illustrative example which considers engagement from the consumer's contribution point of view, more than considering engagement as a mutual interaction, is the "Engagement Metrics" (Haven et al., 2007) represented in Table 1. This model is composed of four elements. First, Involvement, which is a measurable aspect of the relationship that a person has with a brand: for example, the presence of a person in a brand's touchpoints. The second element is Interaction, a person's activities with a brand, such as creating content or asking for information. The third element is Intimacy, which refers to a person's affection for a brand. The last element is Influence, which is the likelihood of a person's advocacy of the brand, such as word of mouth. This final stage is the one which can be measured considering a person's brand awareness and loyalty (Haven et al., 2007).

All these elements are valid to describe the consumer relationship with the brand; however, the model is missing to introduce elements which describe the brand relationship with the consumer. It should be considered not only what are the benefits which the consumer is bringing to the brand, but also the benefits which the brand could

bring to the consumer (Triefus, 2017). To evaluate the depth of the consumer/brand relationship, an improvement of the product or the service provided should not be deemed as the only way a brand has to contribute to this relationship. Values, authenticity, and meaning, for example, should be considered in the model as part of the brand's input and contribution to the relationship (Gilmore & Pine, 2009); this will facilitate to recognise an in-depth engagement, as defined in section 1.7.
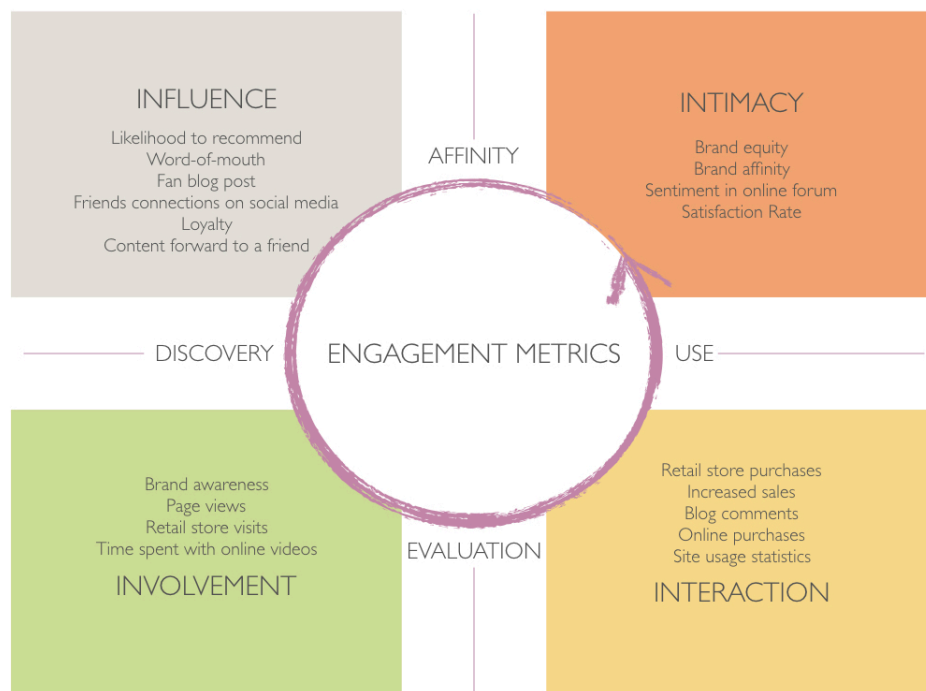
Table 1 - Engagement Metrics - Adaptation (Haven et al., 2007).

The term 'engagement' in its deeper connotation is present in some online brands communities' studies (Dessart et al., 2015) and in Corporate Social Responsibility studies (O'Riordan & Fairbrass, 2014; Tang, Hull, & Rothenberg, 2012), but rarely in consumer engagement studies and even more rarely with regards to luxury fashion brands. The successful implementation of an in-depth engagement in the online communities and CSR circumstances might encourage brands to pursue a two-way communication also in other cases.

With reference to online brands communities' studies, it is possible to identify the use of the term engagement as contextualised in section 1.7. A number of aspects have been identified by Darmody and Kedzior (2009) as explanatory of the success of online

communities' engagement, and as detailed below. By being able to recreate the same conditions, a more profound engagement might occur offline as it is happening online.

- Online environment facilitates people to act as they are someone else, or to interpret a character. This acting might lead people to reduce their inhibitions in interacting and connecting with others. In section 3.3.2.2, it is explained that playing roles is also a facilitator of transformative experiences. Any constructed experience provided by brands, such as workshops in retail stores, sensorial experiences, co-design events, might easily reproduce the same environment where people feel free to experiment as they are aware that they will probably never reencounter the participants (Arnould & Price, 1993).

- Building relationships among consumers might happen easily in virtual communities, in part because people feel safer to engage with other people behind a screen, and also because virtual communities are dedicated to specific and shared interests. Workshops or interactive experiences held in environments such as brands' headquarters, flagship stores, museums, or public places, might generate the same feeling of safety in people. The shared interest in interacting with the brand and other people, or for gathering new knowledge is a key element to facilitate engagement (Smilansky, 2017).

- Social networks are altering the way people merge their off-line and online lives, and this is leading to a general changing in self-consciousness and in relationship management. This aspect is influencing the online engagement, but it could easily be exploited to influence the offline engagement.

With regards to the CSR implementation of engagement, there are CSR international standards dedicated to stakeholders' engagement conceived as a two-way process. These standards refer to trustworthy relationships with the stakeholders, which can be built through engagement with the aims of: improving the community in which a company is operating; involving different stakeholders in different managerial phases; being connected with the encompassing reality; and knowing needs of all the parts involved with the company (AccountAbility, 2011). Thus, considering the successful implementation of engagement in its more profound connotation online and in CSR activities, luxury fashion brands might consider broadening their engagement techniques

outside of these boundaries and transform consumption and brand experiences from mere forms of entertainment to opportunity for a two-way exchange with consumers.

Next section investigates brands' use of art as a stratagem to be perceived as more authentic and to maintain the allure of luxury which permeates the brand. In particular, the section focuses on two main trends of art-related experience provided by brands. The first is the tendency of organising fashion exhibitions in significant cultural venues and well-known museums. These exhibitions are a likely attempt to exploit a brand spill-over from the 'solemn' art world to the 'superficial' fashion world. The second is the trend of establishing art foundations. The section dedicated to this latest aspect explains why art foundations are the primary focus of this project, and the criteria applied to decide of concentrating the analysis on *Fondazione Prada*, and *Fondation Louis Vuitton*.

2.6   ART TO RENDER AUTHENTICITY

Consumer engagement is important to allow an experience to be perceived as authentic, and as mentioned in section 2.5, art is a powerful tool to render authenticity to the brand. Moreover, as anticipated in section 2.4 non-branded or non-commercial venues might facilitate the brand in overcoming the lack of authenticity perceived by consumers in living the brand experience. The following sections will explore two luxury fashion brands' attempts to provide their consumers with alternative experiences: fashion exhibitions in museums, and the ownership of art foundations. These experiences are both not commercially oriented, they are taking place in venues which might facilitate consumer engagement, and they are related to the arts. Hence, they might be perceived as being more authentic than others. Finally, it will be explained has been decided to focus this project only on art foundations, as potential venues to provide consumers with more meaningful experiences.

2.6.1   FASHION EXHIBITIONS IN ART MUSEUMS

Very little has been dedicated by scholars to investigate the effectiveness which a fashion exhibition in museums, or art galleries, might have on enhancing the brand image (Skjulstad, 2014; Steele, 2008); especially considering the perspective of a non-commercial, and not entirely branded experience, provided in an environment which is not controlled by the brand (Jelinek, 2018). For the purpose of this project, fashion

exhibitions are considered as a very evocative communication tool (de la Haye & Horsley, 2018; O'Neill, 2018), particularly in the context of the place as an experience's influencer. Moreover, the coalescence of luxury fashion brands with art museums might convey the cultural cachet, and creative significance of art to the brands in a sophisticated manner, and might enhance the exclusivity of the product by transforming the fashion item in an artefact (Choi & Lewis, 2018).

Museums of costume or design have always exhibited fashion garments and accessories by considering them as tools for historical researches (S. Miller, 2007). Lately, there is a difference in the kinds of exhibitions provided to the public, and also in the types of venues which are granting space to fashion (Koda & Glasscock, 2014). Most of the exhibitions dedicated to fashion items are now retrospectives of a single fashion brand, instead of thematic/historical displays involving several designers. Often, brand-dedicated exhibitions have been controversially received and judged as an outrage and a not very sophisticated form of advertisement (F. Anderson, 2000; Kimmelman, 2005). Most of the critics were oriented towards the museum and the curatorial team in the broader context of considering fashion, not as a form of art, but just a commercial business (Craik, 2003). Of fashion being or not a form of art has always been a lively debate, however fashion exhibitions in museums are not fiercely judged anymore; on the contrary, the great affluence of audience, and the favourable attention of media, have made fashion exhibitions growing at a rapid rate (Deeny, 2017; Lowthorpe, 2015).

Fashion exhibitions might be a very active form of communication for the brand which can associate its image with the sophisticated and intellectual environment provided by museums (Choi & Lewis, 2018). Furthermore, at the same time, they have been an instrument for museums to augment their footfall, to attract different audiences, and to reach those people who regularly do not attend museums (Delhaye & Bergvelt, 2012; Skjulstad, 2014). Moreover, fashion exhibitions are attracting tourists to visit museums, which generally may be not a first choice, such as the FIT Museum in New York, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, the Saatchi Gallery in London, just to mention a few. In this win-win situation, brands are enhancing their allure of exclusivity, uniqueness, and sophistication by exhibiting in museums and by being adjacent to artworks (Chailan, 2018; Choi & Lewis, 2018; de la Haye & Horsley, 2018; Jelinek, 2018; Masè & Cedrola, 2017).

As previously mentioned, there has been an increasing number of successful fashion exhibitions, and the trend has been growing at a rapid rate. Particularly, since the big success of Alexander McQueen's exhibition "Savage Beauty" at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 2015 (and at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art before in 2011) which welcomed approximately 493,043 visitors (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015). Since then, several other brands have taken advantage of the public appreciation for fashion by organising retrospectives in collaboration with relevant institutions. The following is an illustrative, but not an exhaustive list of the most popular exhibitions of the last three years.

- "Yves Saint Laurent: Style is Eternal" at The Bowes Museum Durham in 2015 which counted more than 70,000 people (Kennedy, 2015).

- "Mademoiselle Privé" at Saatchi Gallery London in 2015 regarding Coco Chanel origins and work had a significant media coverage (audience numbers are hard to quantify because of free entrance) and the peculiarity of being curated by Chanel creative director Karl Lagerfeld and not by a curatorial team (Cartner-Morley, 2015; Silva, 2015).

- "The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk" exhibition which has been on a worldwide tour since 2011, and which attracted more than a million visitors (Hart, 2015).

- Victor and Rolf exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne (Guilbault, 2016)

- An exhibition dedicated to Missoni, his textiles and artworks, at the Fashion and Textile Museum in London (Cochrane, 2016).

- "Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion" exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (White, 2017)

- "70-years of Dior" in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris – sponsored by Swarovski as the McQueen exhibition (Marriott, 2017).

- "Je Suis Couturier", a homage exhibition to Azzedine Alaïa held in the building which has been his home and studio in Paris (Menkes, 2018).

By happening in a non-commercial and engaging environment like a museum, for example, the brand is providing an experience which might be more meaningful and

memorable for the consumer than the one offered in the flagship store (Choi & Lewis, 2018; Kozinets, 2002). Yet, by being held in an art institution, there might be some confusion on the extent of the brand's involvement in the decisions regarding the exhibitions; even if brands in this situation usually operate in concert with the museum (Harper's Bazaar UK, 2015). Hence, these fashion exhibitions might affect more people's perception of the museum than their perception of the brand.

Moreover, the display of fashion products might recall in the public a direct relation to the commercial environment. Hence, these exhibitions might risk to be perceived as a mere form of advertisement, particularly if the 'artification' is not part of the brand identity (Jelinek, 2018). Here it is not questioned that fashion exhibitions might have a potentially positive impact on the consumers or the public, but whether in a brand experience context, the shadow of a commercial scope might affect the opportunity to enhance a sense of authenticity of the brand and of the experience.

Next section investigates another example of brand experience provided by luxury fashion brands: the ownership of art foundations. By being dedicated exclusively to the arts and not to the fashion product, and by exhibiting in different venues not related to a commercial environment, art foundations might be perceived as being more significant and more authentic experiences.

2.6.2   LUXURY BRANDS' FOUNDATIONS

As mentioned in the previous section, another alternative experience provided by luxury fashion brands is the opportunity for consumers to enjoy art exhibitions or performances. In particular, this section focuses on art foundations owned by luxury fashion brands, as non-commercial and art related venues to provide experiences. These are different than fashion exhibitions in museums, which are dedicated to the fashion product. Art foundations generally are sponsoring or hosting exhibitions or performances devoted to various forms of art (Masè & Cedrola, 2017). Similar to fashion exhibitions organised by museums, the art foundations considered in this project usually are holding their events in non-commercial venues, or in specifically dedicated venues. Finally, brands typically justify investing in the arts, and establishing foundations, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility policy (Kottasz, Bennett, Savani, & Ali-Choudhury,

2008). By showing an apparent involvement within communities, and a grade of social concern, brands are attempting to manifest a higher sense of responsibility and a deeper degree of authenticity (Anido Freire & Loussaïef, 2018).

As mentioned in section 2.6, art has to be considered as a tool to render authenticity in the brand (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). Private foundations owned by brands, as well as any other adjacency of brand's places and products to any form of art, might enable the brand to be perceived as being more authentic (Carù et al., 2017). Thus, a group of major players in the luxury fashion industry have substantially increased their investment in art (Mendes & Rees-Roberts, 2015; Saca, 2013) in a variety of forms: by commissioning emerging or well-established artists to create customised artworks (Codignola & Rancati, 2016; Ryan, 2007); by refurbishing historical sites and buildings in major capital cities (Amed, 2015); or by creating dedicated venues for exhibiting their own art collections (Rivelli, 2017).

To better understand the difference between art foundations and any other art-related projects which fashion brands might invest in, it is useful to look at how Zorloni (2016) framed the art/brand relationship in her work. The author differentiated brands' projects according to two elements: frequency, which is defined as the duration of a project or commitment; the role of art, which is described as the purpose of implementing art into the business. Based on these two dimensions, the author identified the following possible scenarios:

- Art Interventions – a very short (2/3 weeks) collaboration in the form of workshops or specially commissioned works, such as Marc Jacobs and Takashi Murakami for Louis Vuitton spring/summer collection in 2003 (Luna & Viscardi, 2009);
- Art Project – a programmed and integrated collaboration which tends typically to produce an artistic output that can be tangible (Chanel exhibition pavilion design by Zaha Hadid (Etherington, 2008)) or intangible (Hugo Boss art prize composed by a monetary reward and the opportunity for a solo exhibition and the Guggenheim in New York (Zorloni, 2013));

- Art Programme – a long-term initiative which encompasses a variety of projects and initiatives, such as Louis Vuitton usage of art that is imbuing entire areas of the brand hence becoming part of its business model (Zorloni, 2016);
- Art as a Cause – the business support to the arts is independent of the core commercial business, such as Cartier foundation (Zorloni, 2016);
- Art as a Marketing Tool – artistic projects and concepts become part of the core of the marketing strategy to enhance the brand performances, such as Montblanc, and Gucci lately (Berlinger, 2017).

The aforementioned scenarios are then framed and summarised by Zorloni (2016) in an easy-to-read graph that is shown in Table 2. This model is constructed on the two dimensions of the scale of commitment, and the business purpose. The author has identified four main categories which are summarising the art/brand relationship, inclusive of but not limited to the scenarios previously mentioned.

	BUSINESS COLLABORATIONS	FOUNDATIONS
LONG-TERM COMMITMENT		
SHORT-TERM COMMITMENT	ENTERTAINMENT	ART PATRONAGE
	BUSINESS PURPOSE	CULTURAL PURPOSE
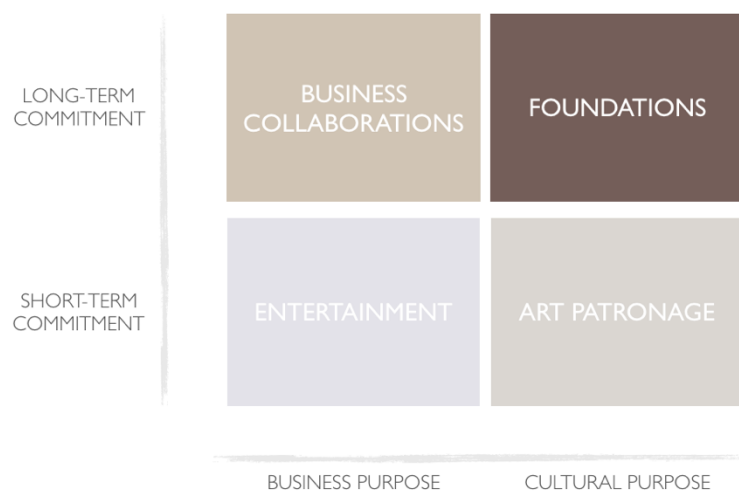
Table 2 - Art/Brands relationship – Adaptation (Zorloni, 2016).

According to this model, art foundations owned by luxury fashion brands have to be considered as a long-term commitment of the brand towards the art, and the community. Moreover, they are regarded as characteristic of brands which are exploiting art not only for business purposes, but also for cultural purposes. This model strengthens the idea that art-related and non-commercial experiences might be different than other brand experiences provided, such as exhibitions of art in the flagship store. The cultural purpose

of the brand expressed through these initiatives might be what allows these experiences to be perceived as more authentic.

As mentioned in section 2.6, the usage of art to render authenticity has to be coherent with the brand's values. This project focuses on two main brands which have long invested in art, Prada and Louis Vuitton. These two brands have distinctive characteristics and diversities, which they express in their products, and usually throughout their art choices for their brand experiences – Picasso for Louis Vuitton, and William N. Copley for Prada (Costa, 2017; Neuendorf, 2016). On the one hand, Louis Vuitton is a brand-oriented towards heritage, and a mix between classic and modern, and it is considered simple and mainstream (Biography Editors, 2014; Catawiki, 2018; N. Main, 2017). The brand's declared main values are: "unique savoir-faire, a carefully preserved heritage and a dynamic engagement with modernity […] creativity and innovation, deliver excellence, cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit" (LVMH, n.d.).

On the other hand, Prada is keener to challenge the consumer and to be perceived as a complex brand (citation from *Fondazione Prada* interview in section 6.1.2.1.1). Its declared values are: "uncompromised quality, freedom of creative expression […] an innovative approach, which draws inspiration from an unconventional analysis of society […] style statements born from the passionate examination of disciplines that are, at times, apparently far from fashion, such as art, film and photography, resulting into creations that reinterpret reality from unusual perspectives" (PradaGroup, 2018).

It is interesting to note that Zorloni (2016) provides a representation of values, personality, and opportunity traits which brands can enhance through the exploitation of different forms of arts (tab. 3). By considering this representation, and the brands' values mentioned above, it is possible to say that Prada and Louis Vuitton's exploitation of art is coherent with the brand, and with their usual form of communications; although it is still unclear if the consumer perceives this coherence. By exploring the characteristics of brands' foundations in next sections, it will be made clear why Prada and Louis Vuitton foundations have been selected as core samples for this project.

	CONTEMPORARY ART	PHOTOGRAPHY	ANCIENT ART
VALUES EXPRESSED	OPENNESS, DYNAMISM, INNOVATION	SOPHISTICATION, STYLE, CLASS	DURABILITY, RELIABILITY, STABILITY
PERSONALITY	ADVANCED, DYNAMIC, TRENDY	MODERN	CLASSIC, TRADITIONAL
OPPORTUNITY	LAUNCH OF NEW PRODUCTS	POSITIONING ON NEW MARKET	CORPORATE CAMPAIGN

Table 3 - Different traits which brands can enhance through different kinds of arts.

The majority of the foundations analysed have identified their missions in: the promotion and enhancement of the arts and the cultural heritage; the facilitation of accessibility to the arts and engagement for the public; the fostering of creativity and experimentation (Fondation d'Entreprise Hermes, 2015; Fondazione Ferragamo, 2013; LVMH, 2014). By promoting the arts and preserving the cultural heritage, these brands are attempting to connect with their communities, to appear socially responsible, and to become inclusive towards a wider public by maintaining the allure of exclusivity of their commercial core. As previously mentioned, most foundations are accounted for by brands as CSR activities (PradaGroup, 2015).

By exploring their programmes and characteristics, it is possible to determine some shared elements and some specific differences among the most known luxury fashion brands' art foundations. Three main aspects which are commonly present in cultural organisations, are present also in the brands' foundations. Hence, differences and similarities have been framed within the following three aspects: the artistic programme which they are promoting towards the public; the educational activities which they provide, as part of their secondary programme; and the space utilised to facilitate a wider audience to access to their programmes (The British Museum, 2017). This final

aspect, as explained in section 2.3, has also to be considered crucial in the evaluation of brand experiences. The following sections are dedicated to exploring art foundations' main characteristics according to each of these three elements. In the end, it will be highlighted that *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada* has been chosen as the only two sharing the same characteristics in all of the three aspects considered.

The next sections investigate whether particular aspects of art institutions (tab. 4) can also be recognised in luxury fashion brands' art foundations.
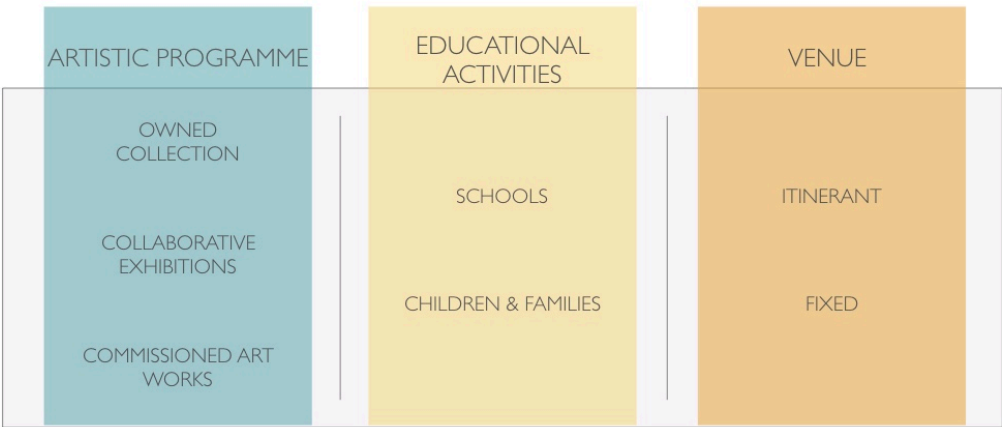
Table 4 - Art institutions' aspects investigated in analysing luxury fashion brands' art foundations

2.6.2.1 THE ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

The majority of cultural institutions have their artistic programmes structured according to a three-elements 'formula', even if not always all the elements are present in all programmes. The brands' foundations have been analysed according to this 'formula', and *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* are the only two to apply it in its totality. The three elements part of this 'formula' are: the ownership of a private collection of both famous artworks and specially commissioned pieces; the constant sponsorship of new art pieces through the patronage of well-established or emerging artists; the organisation, during the year, of special exhibitions, generally in collaboration with other well-established art institutions (Korn, n.d.; Moriarty & Weight, 2008).

Examples of special exhibitions are: *Fondation Louis Vuitton* exhibition "Keys to a passion", which is hosting paintings temporary landed by the Museum of Modern art in New York (Verner, 2015); *Fondation Louis Vuitton* exhibition of the Russian

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Chatchoukine private collection "Icônes De L'Art Moderne", exhibited for the first time outside Russia (Neuendorf, 2016); *Fondation Louis Vuitton* exhibition "Etre Moderne", dedicated to the MoMa and organised in partnership with the New Yorker institution (Stirling, 2017); or the "William N. Copley" retrospective, organised by *Fondazione Prada* in collaboration with the Menil Collection of Houston (Costa, 2017).

As anticipated, in the attempt of grouping the foundations according to some shared and comparable characteristics, most of the luxury fashion brands' art foundations' programmes were analysed to identify the three-elements part of the 'formula' above mentioned. Only two foundations were recognised as structuring their programmes according to that 'formula': *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada.* Other foundations' programmes are presenting one or two elements of the 'formula', but not all the three elements. *Fondazione Zegna* and *Fondazione Nicola Trussardi Trussardi*, for example, do not own a private collection, but they are commissioning artworks (Fondazione Zegna, n.d.).

As previously mentioned, this 'formula' is generally used by museums and art galleries to set their artistic programmes. Hence, by adopting it, these brands' foundations are appealing to the audience and to the media as trustworthy art organisations (Bew, 2018). Moreover, by collaborating with well-established institutions, they are enhancing their credibility and their image as definers of culture on the art scene, and this is also indicated by the recognition they are receiving from highly qualified art magazines, such as Frieze or ArtNet (Casavecchia, 2017; Childs, 2017).

To conclude and for the sake of completeness, the primary forms of art promoted by the luxury fashion brands' foundations are fine art and visual arts in a contemporary context, albeit there are other forms of art or artistic expressions promoted by brands' foundations (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Artistic expressions promoted by luxury fashion brands' art foundations.

2.6.2.2 EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Together with their main artistic programme, a number of foundations are offering secondary activities which have an educational end. Generally, these activities are dedicated to children and young scholars. These secondary programmes are worth mentioning because they are often implemented also by museums and other art institutions, with the aim of generating and disseminating knowledge and skills in the light of being inclusive towards the wider audience possible.

In this spirit, foundations such as *Fondation Hermès*, *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, and *Fondazione Prada* have claimed that their educational programmes are aiming to stimulate creativity, curiosity, and to cater new skills by providing workshops and classes which are addressing the youngest (Fondation d'Entreprise Hermes, 2015; Fondazione Prada, 2015). However, different than other foundations, *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* have organised these programmes in a similar way. By involving children, schools, and families in a series of activities they want to be recognised as cultural leaders and to be considered as legitimate competitors of any other art institutions.

2.6.2.3 VENUE

As previously mentioned, the place is a critical factor in designing an experience. In light of this, the third and final element that has been considered in this exploration, is the venue which is dedicated to the foundations. As for the previous two factors, also in

this case, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada* are to be considered similar. They are the only two brands' foundations with a specific dedicated venue. The buildings that are hosting the two foundations have another characteristic in common, they have been built (Fondation Louis Vuitton by Frank Gehry) or re-designed (Fondazione Prada by Rem Koolhaas) by star-architects (Barnes, 2017; Ouroussoff, 2012).

As mentioned in section 2.3, during the years, impressive architectural projects have been implemented by a number of brands as a strategy to provide consumers with significant brand experiences in the retail store (Arnaud & Attarça, 2017; Luna & Viscardi, 2009; Ryan, 2007). The same strategy has been applied by Prada and Louis Vuitton to enhance the experience of visiting their foundations, and interestingly, by commissioning the projects to architects already very familiar with the brands (Galinsky, 2005; Neuendorf, 2014).

By contrast, for example, *Fondazione Trussardi* had a dedicated venue from 1996 to 2003, and then decided to exhibit commissioned installations in Milan's streets and buildings. These buildings are specifically chosen and renewed according to the particular installation committed at that moment. One of the most famous/affronting artworks the brand has exhibited in area of Milan, which is subjected to heavy traffic, was the '*psychological lab in real life*' by Maurizio Cattelan, Piazza XXIV Maggio (Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, 2010). Another common venue for hosting the foundation's art collection is the flagship store, and brands such as *Fondation Hermès* or *Fondazione Zegna*, have capitalised on their flagship stores worldwide to host their collections (CPP Luxury - Business of Luxury, 2012; Skinner, 2014)

In light of this exploration, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada* are the only two foundations among those analysed, that are sharing all the following characteristics: the artistic programme structured according to the three-elements 'formula'; educational activities dedicated to school and children; and a specific dedicated venue to host the foundations. As previously mentioned, these are key characteristics of many art institutions. By structuring their foundations according to these characteristics, Prada and Louis Vuitton are attempting to be accredited as proper cultural institutions; not only as brands which are investing in art, but also as brands with a cultural purpose

(Rivelli, 2017; Zorloni, 2016). Thus, by deciding to present a cultural offer under the form of a contemporary art museum, both Prada and Louis Vuitton have the opportunity to provide the public (and the potential customer) with a unique experience.

The two brands have continuously insisted that the art foundations are entirely unconnected to their core commercial business. However, through their institutional communications, it emerges that the foundations are part of the brands' Corporate Social Responsibility activities, hence not totally unrelated to the brand (LVMH, 2014; PradaGroup, 2015). Moreover, part of their private collections has been often used in the brands' flagship stores to provide a particular and sophisticated consumption experience to their customers (MyArtGuide, 2016; Rock & Progetto Prada, 2009). Furthermore, Louis Vuitton has hosted an exhibition dedicated to the foundation's building in its flagship store in Venice (Nuzzi, 2016). Finally, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* has been used by the brand to host its fashion shows (Judah, 2014). Arguably, they are attempting to keep the concept of the brand and the foundation separate, so to be considered as serious players on the art scene, but it is a conundrum yet if the foundations are still being judged by many as a brand's marketing tool (Foulkes, 2014).

2.7   SUMMARY

Most of this chapter investigated how the consumer might differently perceive commercial or non-commercial experiences. However, distinguishing between commercial and cultural offer might become difficult if cultural experiences start to be described as consumption experiences, and museums are starting to employ marketing strategies generally implemented by corporations (Chronis, 2005; Kemp, 2015). There is a thin and blurred line between what is considered commercially oriented and what is not, or what can be considered mainly meaningful or only pleasurable. To regain authenticity, and to overcome these dichotomies, brands might consider providing a different kind of experience: transformative experiences. Despite the correlation or not with the fashion brand, these types of experiences might facilitate brand loyalty and a deep relationship, by enriching the consumer of a new sense of the self (Mermiri, 2009).

Brand experiences are considered very important; by providing a memorable experience to their customers, brands are increasing their chances to create a deep relationship; thus,

they are increasing consumers' loyalty and reaching the most desired level of brand resonance. However, due to an excess of experiences provided by any brand, brand experiences have started to be perceived as not authentic. Luxury fashion brands which have always strived to communicate with their consumers in alternative ways, have attempted to regain authenticity by associating their initiatives with the arts, and by providing these experiences also in non-commercial venues.

In the seminal work of Gilmore and Pine (2009), which anticipated the need for brands to invest in experiences, the final part is dedicated to the provision that experiences would have been soon insufficient in the optic of appearing authentic and deeply engaging with the consumer. Mermiri (2009), in the same book, argues that by exploiting arts, brands should focus on providing experiences which are transformative for the person. Experiences which are not only being memorable, but which might also lead the person to a change of the self. According to the author, these kinds of experiences might create a more profound bond with the brand.

Next chapter focuses on investigating the meaning of transformation of the self, and provides examples of transformative experiences. By understanding what a transformative experience is, it will be possible to identify which of the existing brand experiences could be transformative for the consumer. It is anticipated that art foundations, because of their perceived authenticity as cultural institutions, and their distance from the commercial environment, might be the venues which facilitate the brand to potentially provide transformative experiences to the luxury consumer.

3 TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores experiences which are called transformative; those experiences which might convey an inner change to the person involved, such as an increased self-awareness, a sense of self-renewal, the gaining of new knowledge. As explored in the previous chapter, consumers are asking brands to be more authentic, to stand for specific values, and to permeate their business with those values. Long lasting and deep relationships might be built through consumer engagement and by providing a more authentic kind of experience. People who, by living an experience, are improving their knowledge, or are feeling a sense of achievement, tend to create a deeper bond with the provider of the experience. Furthermore, the effect of these experiences might be more profound when they happen in a non-commercial environment, and are not strictly related to a specific product. Finally, the use of art as part of the experience is considered as being one of the most effective ways to provide a transformation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a non-commercial environment and the proximity with the art are facilitating the experience to be more authentic. In this chapter, it will be explained that these two elements are among those which might facilitate an experience to be also transformative.

3.2 FROM EXPERIENCE TO TRANSFORMATION

As mentioned in the previous chapter, consumers are increasingly happier to spend money on experiences than on products. They are looking for memorable events or situations which might help them to build long-lasting memories (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). However, because of the exponential increase of experiences provided by brands, there is the need to ensure that what is delivered to the consumers can be perceived as authentic (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Portal et al., 2018b). Notably, authenticity is pivotal to develop brand trust and brand love, which are initial components to build consumers' loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Many brands are attempting to provide experiences and to enhance authenticity through their products and promotion activities. Nonetheless, Gilmore and Pine (2009) in their seminal work suggest that brands should take a step further by providing not only authentic experiences, but also transformative experiences.

Transformation through an experience might be acquired when the business is offering not only a product or service, but when the whole experience is providing a meaning in which the consumer can identify (Mermiri, 2009). Once the experience is perceived as meaningful, it might lead the consumer to an inner change, and consequently, to a transformation. It is notable that the arts might facilitate this process (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). By providing meaning through the experience, brands might facilitate the consumer's transformation (Mermiri, 2009). This derives from the idea that by providing meaning, consumers might satisfy the need of self-actualisation suggested by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943); therefore, they might live a transformation of the self (Mermiri, 2009). This cause-effect process between providing meaning, satisfying the need of self-actualisation, and being transformed is represented in Figure 2 (Mermiri, 2009).
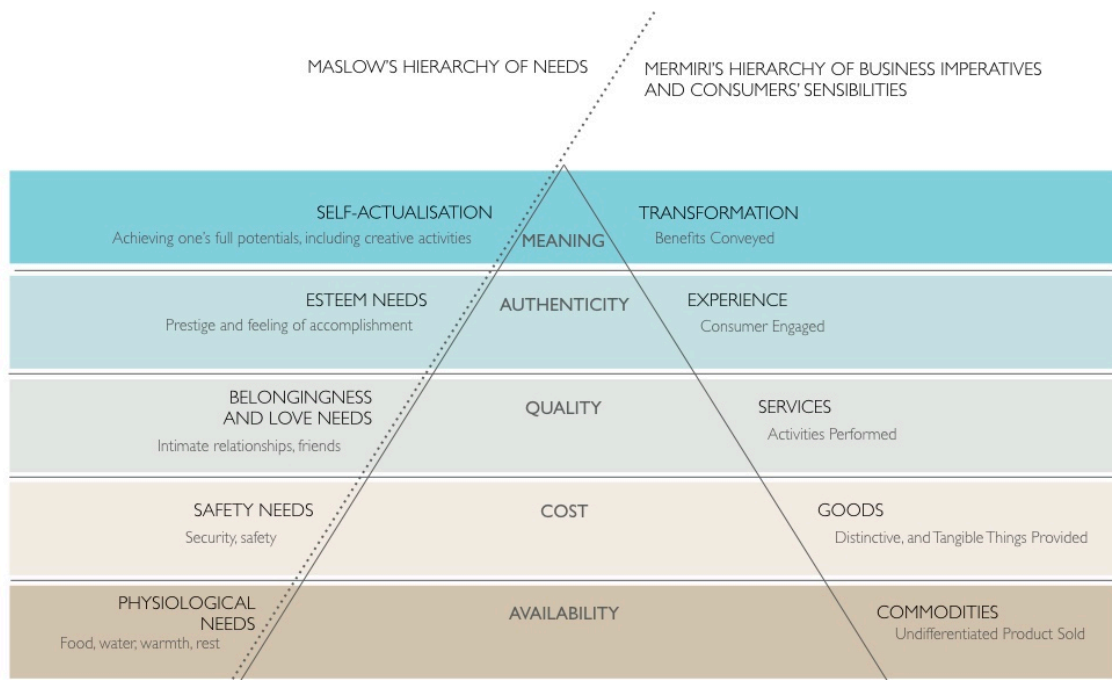
Figure 2 - "Hierarchy of Business Imperatives and Consumer Sensibilities" - Adaptation (Mermiri, 2009, p.78).

Experiences, which might be particularly intense, positive, and enjoyable (Arnould & Price, 1993), have been classified as: peak experiences (Maslow, 1964), peak performances (Privette, 1983), flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), extraordinary experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993), and transcendent experiences (Schouten et al., 2007). Shared characteristics among all these kinds of experiences are the involvement, the perceived value, and the absorption which a person might feel while living them

(Privette, 1983). Flow experiences are considered to be more transient and less lasting in the long term, and more related to fun (Privette, 1983); while peak experiences are supposed to be more powerful and able to lay in the deepest part of the self, generally associated to a religious event (Maslow, 1964).

However, for the purpose of this project, it is not essential to distinguish between peak experience and flow experience. On the contrary, because in a specific event a person might live both a flow and a peak experience (Privette, 1983), for this project it is deemed more critical the impact caused on the person by these experiences, than the specific type of experience the person might have lived. The reason for deciding to focus on the impact and not on the kind of experience derives from the idea that all these kinds of experiences might be transformative of the self, consequently, the distinction between the flow, peak, or transcendent is not crucial for the purpose of this project (Arnould & Price, 1993; Schouten et al., 2007; Soren, 2009).

The next section explores the characteristics which an experience needs to present to be classified as transformative of the self.

3.3   DEGREE AND NATURE OF TRANSFORMATION

It is possible to frame the impact which an experience might generate on people into a three-dimensional representation, which might facilitate the identification of transformative experiences. The three elements to consider are: the nature of the experience, the duration of the experience, and the effect or the meaning of the experience, as represented in Figure 3 (Mermiri, 2009).

The transient transformation has to be considered as an authentic experience which generates some emotion, but its effect does not last long enough to cause a significant life-altering, or a shifting in the person's way of thinking (Privette, 1983). Hence, at this stage, the experience cannot be considered as transformative (Mermiri, 2009). Hitherto, most of the brand experiences provided by brands, or exemplified in the previous chapter, might be viewed as transient, hence non-transformative (Mermiri, 2009). Thought-provoking experiences (Fig. 3) may or may not be transformative, depending on the duration of the effect generated (Mermiri, 2009). However, the ideal stage to achieve, to

ensure a transformative experience, is the life-altering one (Fig. 3). Brands interested in creating a deeper bond with their consumer, and characterised by being meaningful and long-lasting, should aspire to provide life-altering experiences (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). In particular, the transformation is stronger when the experience is interactive; and by being a stronger transformation, also the bond generated with the brand might acquire strength (Gilmore & Pine, 2009).
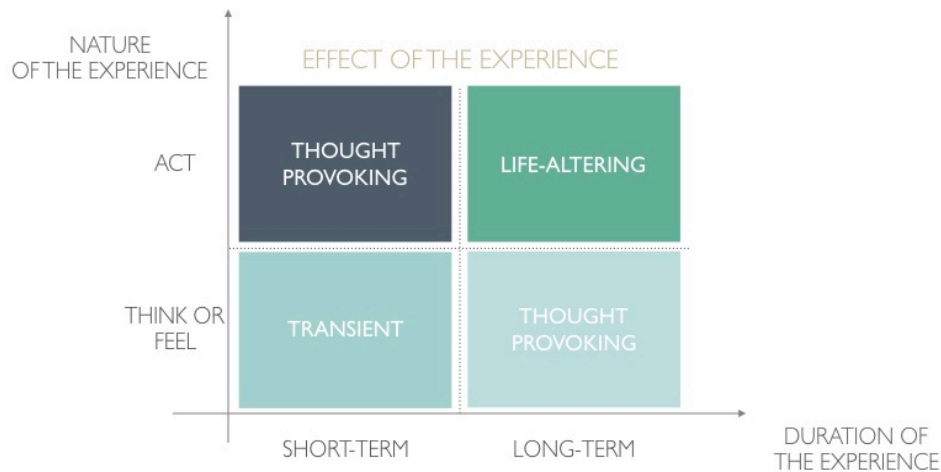
Figure 3 - Transformation Metrix - Adaptation (Mermiri, 2009, p. 81).

Society is moving towards an economy where the consumer is shifting from being passive to being an active contributor to the business (Harmeling et al., 2017). This paradigm shift as to be deemed an opportunity to create a long-lasting and engaging relationship with the consumer (Harmeling et al., 2017). To this extent, a number of attempts to involve the consumer in brand's core processes have been made, for example, through co-creation of values or content, co-production, or transformative design. In particular, transformative design is a discipline which can be associated with the main scope of public engagement, as well as to many CSR standards, as reported in section 1.7. A number of scholars have collected a series of examples on how transformation design could help in changing the societal way of thinking by moving towards a more sustainable, moral, ethical, inclusive, and value-oriented economy (Bentham, 2017; Brand & Rocchi, 2011; Carù & Cova, 2007; Cottam, Burns, Vanstone, & Winhall, 2006; Jonas, Zerwas, & Anshelm, 2016; Sangiorgi, 2011).

Moreover, all these studies refer explicitly to the transformation economy as explained by Mermiri (2009), as well as they refer to the concepts of co-design and co-creation

with the consumers. Finally, transformation design should bring consumer and producer together in co-creating a different market aimed to generate public well-being (L. Miller, 2015). However, a transformative experience might be provided not only as a result of implementing forms of transformative design, but also as a result of a consumer/brand collaboration which involves the entire process, the whole brand, such as marketing choices, communication strategies, branding tactics (Mermiri, 2009). Consumers are more and more attentive to what a brand stands for, hence, values should be at the core of the brands' business models more than ever, and they should enhance the provided experiences (Triefus, 2017).

3.3.1 EXAMPLES OF BRANDED TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Hitherto, brands' attempts at providing transformative experiences are mainly related to the co-design of the product, or the co-creation of promotional content. With reference to the first, different brands have started inviting consumers to participate in the exclusive process of designing a product or a service (Carù & Cova, 2007). One of the main examples is Adidas latest business plan, which is considering 'open source' strategies as a pivotal part of its future development (Adidas, 2017). According to the brand, this strategy is a collaboration on the product, or on branding and marketing practices, with partners, celebrities, athletes, and also customers (Adidas, 2017).

Another example which is interesting to note is Maison Margiela's initiative to involve students in co-designing and decorating the interior of its new store in Milan (Carosi, 2018). Other examples of brands, which are considering the positive effect of creating users' communities aimed at sharing ideas and co-create products or services, are: Lego, DHL, Made.com, and Manchester City Football Club (Milbrath, 2016). Co-design and co-creation experiences can be considered mainly as transformative because of the profound effect which participating in these projects might have on the consumer (Borgerson, Schroeder, & Wu, 2014; Carù & Cova, 2007; Harmeling et al., 2017; Trotto & Hummels, 2013)

There are also interesting examples of transformation due to brands' initiatives in collaboration with the arts. Selfridges and other brands, with the collaboration of institutions such as the Tate or the Royal Albert Hall, have slowly transformed peoples'

perceptions towards graffiti, and the art landscape, by association their brands with urban artists (Mermiri, 2009). Nissan's collaboration with the Tate Modern has led the youngsters to engage in exploring East London art scene by being transported by a Qashqai. Edding Pens organisation of an 'art battle' among underground artists have led to the development of a new product (Mermiri, 2009).

Nokia had organised two different initiatives to generate interest in their consumers, and to consolidate one of the brand core value, which is of 'connecting people'. One campaign was called "Secret Cinema", and it was a treasure hunt dedicated to cinema enthusiasts who, by following a text message received on the day of the event, were guided towards a secret location. Similarly, the brand had encouraged Londoners to become photographers of the city and of other Londoners as an initiative to launch a brand-new store. By challenging the consumers in following text clues, or in becoming 'professional' photographers, the brand has encouraged people towards a transformation due to self-renewal, while enhancing its values and generating publicity and brand awareness (Mermiri, 2009).

Another common practice to involve consumers in creating brands' value, while providing a potentially transformative experience, is User-Generated Content (UGC). Burberry and Tiffany campaigns to generate digital content and brand value co-creation, mentioned in the list of brands' experiences of section 2.2.2, are two in a long list of examples (Blanchard, 2017; Watson, 2017). Generally, because of the specific characteristics of the luxury product, luxury brands tend to collaborate with consumers to create brand's value more than to co-design products – and that is how it should remain (Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schreier, 2010; Tynan et al., 2010).

Nonetheless, UGC is a practice which has been implemented by many mainstream brands, hence not a unique strategy for luxury brands (S. Main, 2017). Some examples of mainstream brands' successful campaigns are: Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign, which involved consumers and 'normal people' in the creation of communication material for the brand (Dove, n.d.); Loews Hotels' contest #TravelForReal, which asked people to share their real travel experience and used the material provided to develop advertisements (Gianatasio, 2015); Levis' campaign "Live in Levi's", which involved people and celebrities in sharing their everyday stories while wearing Levis jeans (Luk,

2016). All these brand/product related examples of co-creation and co-design might have facilitated a transformative experience for the consumer.

Next section discusses some examples, which are deemed crucial to define some main characteristics of transformative experiences. Among other key aspects, will be highlighted that the more an experience is commercially driven, or branded, the less it might be transformative (Kozinets, 2002), and that art-related initiatives might facilitate a transformative experience (Mermiri, 2009).

3.3.2 KEY ASPECTS TO FACILITATE A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Several studies have dedicated attention to transformative experiences, and their effect on people. There are different aspects which have been considered by scholars in identifying an effective transformative experience (Arnould & Price, 1993; Kozinets, 2002; Mermiri, 2009). Nonetheless, two are the points of reference which most of these studies consider explicative of what is a transformation. The first is the figure of the pilgrim who, through religion, lives an introspective journey which turns into self-discovery, and an acquired awareness of the self (Maslow, 1964). The second is the rite of passage, as any phase of a person's life which implies a significant change, such as childhood, puberty, marriage, or pregnancy (Van Gennep, 1960).

These two examples are considered as a cornerstone in transformative experiences' studies; different situations are analysed, and their effects on people are compared to the effects generated by Maslow's and Van Gennep's situations (Arnould & Price, 1993). Most of the examples in the literature explored in the following sections are less momentous and most of the time lead to a milder transformation; yet, they are considered significant for the purpose of this project. Any of the following examples are examined in the light of representative elements which are significant to determine whether an experience is transformative.

3.3.2.1 INITIATIVES WHICH ARE NON-COMMERCIAL, WITH INTERPERSONAL EXCHANGE, AND FACILITATED BY AN 'EXPERT'

In Arnould and Price (1993) seminal work, the participation in extreme sports, such as rafting, is discussed and considered as a potentially transformative experience. The authors classify these kinds of experiences as extraordinary experiences, characterised

by being facilitated by the presence of interpersonal interactions. In these situations, the transformation occurs due to the combination of a number of factors. First, the prolonged contact with nature. Second, the presence of an experienced guide who, through a specific narrative, helps participants to transcend the commercial aspect of the experience. Last, the intensity of the experience, which challenges some aspects of the perceived self, such as the sense of control and awareness, or the feeling of power (Arnould & Price, 1993).

Rafting experiences might generate a sense of self-renewal, of personal growth, of self-discovery, of awareness, and of achievement; all outcomes which distinguish a transformative experience from other experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Bosangit & Demangeot, 2016; Kozinets, 2002). A profound change might occur to the people involved because the experience provides absorption and integration, personal control over the situation, and newness of perception; all factors which facilitate to forget the commercial side of the experience, and allow people to remember it in the long-term (Arnould & Price, 1993).

3.3.2.2   INITIATIVES LIVED WITH A (BRAND) COMMUNITY

Another kind of experience called transcendent might lead to a transformation whether commercially-oriented or not. In particular, Schouten et al.'s (2007) study focuses on experiences lived inside brand communities. The authors specifically explored events dedicated to Jeep cars, and Harley-Davidson motorcycles. Even if most of these experiences have to be considered flow experiences, during the events some customers experienced a peak, which led to a transformation due to self-renewal, an increased self-confidence, or self-awareness (Schouten et al., 2007). Moreover, by living these transcendent experiences within a brand community, customers have strengthened their relationship with the brand and within each other (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998; Mermiri, 2009). A prolonged interaction with a product can bring the consumer to master the product (Schouten et al., 2007). Furthermore, by sharing the experience with other consumers, challenges, interaction, excitement, and new discoveries have led the consumers to a sense of acquired knowledge, which made them feel different, and in some case transformed (Schouten et al., 2007).

Noteworthy, in these kinds of situations, the brand as an entity becomes an abstract concept in the background of the experience, and this helps the people involved to perceive the experience as authentic. Yet, connections which are deriving from these kinds of experiences are seen as more lasting and stronger than the traditional approaches aimed to generate brand loyalty (Mermiri, 2009; Ourahmoune, 2016). This strength is also due to the positive effect which derives by humanising a brand (Fournier, 1998), and the stronger satisfaction which results by sharing an experience with a community (McAlexander et al., 2003), or by being part of a community with shared values and interests (Syrjälä, 2016). Sharing positive or negative experiences with other people might facilitate identity construction and self-development, both outcomes deemed phases which constitute a transformation (Bosangit & Demangeot, 2016).

Furthermore, a direct participation in branded (or product related) activities might stimulate two feelings: the feeling of emotional ownership of the brand (It is mine); and the one deriving from a more lasting experience, which leads towards a transformation of the participant (I am) (Harmeling et al., 2017). This feeling of 'I am' is more profound of any kind of feeling derived by owning something, because it is generated by living an experiential initiative which requires an emotional investment, and a psychological response (Harmeling et al., 2017). As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 2, both a product and an experience might generate meaning, and both might provoke a certain level of transformation (Schmitt et al., 2015). However, because the change caused by an experience is not depending on the presence of an external object or item (a product), the transformation, or change which occurred, might be more profound and long-lasting (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Another notable example of transformative experience is what Belk and Costa (1998) have analysed during the re-enacting of a specific historical event (or cultural tradition) with a community. According to the authors, the feeling of freedom that derives from living a fantasy, or by interpreting a character, might sometimes lead to a transformation. Although other researchers do not agree (Cohen & Taylor, 2003), Belk and Costa (1998) ethnographic research has identified in this kind of experiences a way for people to pursuing meaning, sometimes with significant similarities to rites of passage, and to pursuing meaning is a pivotal aspect of a life-changing experience (Mermiri, 2009). Moreover, the idea of impersonating someone else, or hiding the self behind a costume,

is something which for some people, in specific contexts, is liberating and transformative (Velocci, 2018).

3.3.2.3 INITIATIVES WHICH ARE NON-COMMERCIAL, LIVED WITH A COMMUNITY, AND ART-RELATED

It is significant to highlight that, to provide transformative experiences is important an environment perceived as non-commercially-oriented (Arnould & Price, 1993), and critical to this regard is the example of the "Burning Man" event analysed by Kozinets (2002). During this event, people are invited to gather in the desert and to bring some of their belongings to be burnt during a final cathartic moment. The idea which permeates the event is that belongings can be considered as an extended self, and through this experiment of burning them, people can live a moment of self-consciousness (Kozinets, 2002). Moreover, a non-commercial/non-branded experience might be perceived as more authentic when lived with a community which is based on shared ideals and objectives. The ideals of sharing and caring, which are at the origin of these communities, and the non-commercial environment, might lead to a long-lasting transformation (Kozinets, 2002).

As discussed in section 2.4, the current market is more focused on extracting value than on creating value (Grönroos, 2004), while consumers are pleading brands for the opposite to happen (McKinnon, 2017). Hence, a direct link with the market might make an experience appear weaker than a community-based experience, which is considered to be driven by a mutual benefit (Kozinets, 2002). Furthermore, brand communities might forget about the brand while living a very powerful experience; and by being based on sharing and caring, brand communities are more likely to generate strong and authentic relationships (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten et al., 2007). Another critical element is the idea that a place considered merely as a place, a location, and not as a market or as related to market elements and mechanisms, might facilitate transformations and social experimentations (Kozinets, 2002).

3.3.2.4 INITIATIVES WHICH ARE NON-COMMERCIAL, AND ART-RELATED

From Kozinets' (2002) study of the "Burning Man" event, derives also the idea that art could be a very effective tool to lead towards a transformation. During the event, people are encouraged to re-create and express their identity through the arts, and art is

distracting people from any commercial aspect because it is a tool for self-expression, and not a product (Kozinets, 2002).

> "The market logics of productivity and efficiency had undermined people's ability and motivation to engage in authentically transformational self-expression and artistic creativity […] Art must remain outside the market in order to remain fertile, genuinely creative and capable of serving as an agent of self-transformation" (Kozinets, 2002, pp. 33-34).

With reference to art as a tool for self-expression, Elliot's (2016) work dedicated to crafting reports on the effectiveness of art as a transformative tool, and how the making process might also be considered as transformative. By experiencing the art, people might live a transformation which could be emotional, cognitive, or spiritual, and this derives from the idea that artworks are an instrument for introspection, reasoning, and personal growth. The making of art reflects the person's desire for authenticity, and allow the person to reflect on the spiritual and intuitive aspects of his/her subconscious (Elliot, 2016). By considering the idea mentioned in section 1.5, that people tend to humanise brands (Fournier, 1998), art, as an enhancer of human qualities, might be a powerful means to create a deep bond with people, and this might also happen when the art is simply 'consumed' in a museum, instead of created (Soren, 2009).

3.4 SUMMARY

Consumers are seeking brands' authenticity. Co-design and co-creation are considered by many as a genuine way to appear authentic at the eye of the consumer. In all the examples of co-creation and co-design mentioned in this chapter, people were encouraged in different ways to develop new skills, and to improve themselves. By collaborating with the brand in the creation of a new product, or promotional materials, most of the people involved have lived a transformative experience due to self-renewal (Mermiri, 2009).

Consumers are continuing to be involved in any sort of initiatives with the final scope for the brand of strengthening a bond of trust and loyalty. In the luxury context, co-design is inadmissible because of the specific characteristics of the luxury product (Fuchs et al.,

2010), whereas value co-creation is an affordable and effective practice (Tynan et al., 2010). However, hitherto, many of the initiatives launched by brands are not uniquely of the luxury fashion industry. Hence, for luxury fashion brands is fundamental to focus on new and alternative strategies to provide consumers with a transformation, to maintain an advantage on competitors and mainstream brands, and to enhance their allure of exclusivity (Gilmore & Pine, 2009).

To be transformative, an experience needs to convey a deep and long-lasting change in the people involved. This change might be in the way of thinking or acting towards something, or in the way people feel with regard to themselves. As reported in this chapter, to facilitate a transformation, the experience should require a level of interaction with a purpose; should happen outside a commercial environment; should be lived with a group of people who shares common interests; should involve emotions more than the sense of ownership; and it should happen in the proximity to the arts.

Next chapter provides and describes Figure 4 which is the graphical representation of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 in the form of a theoretical framework.

4   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
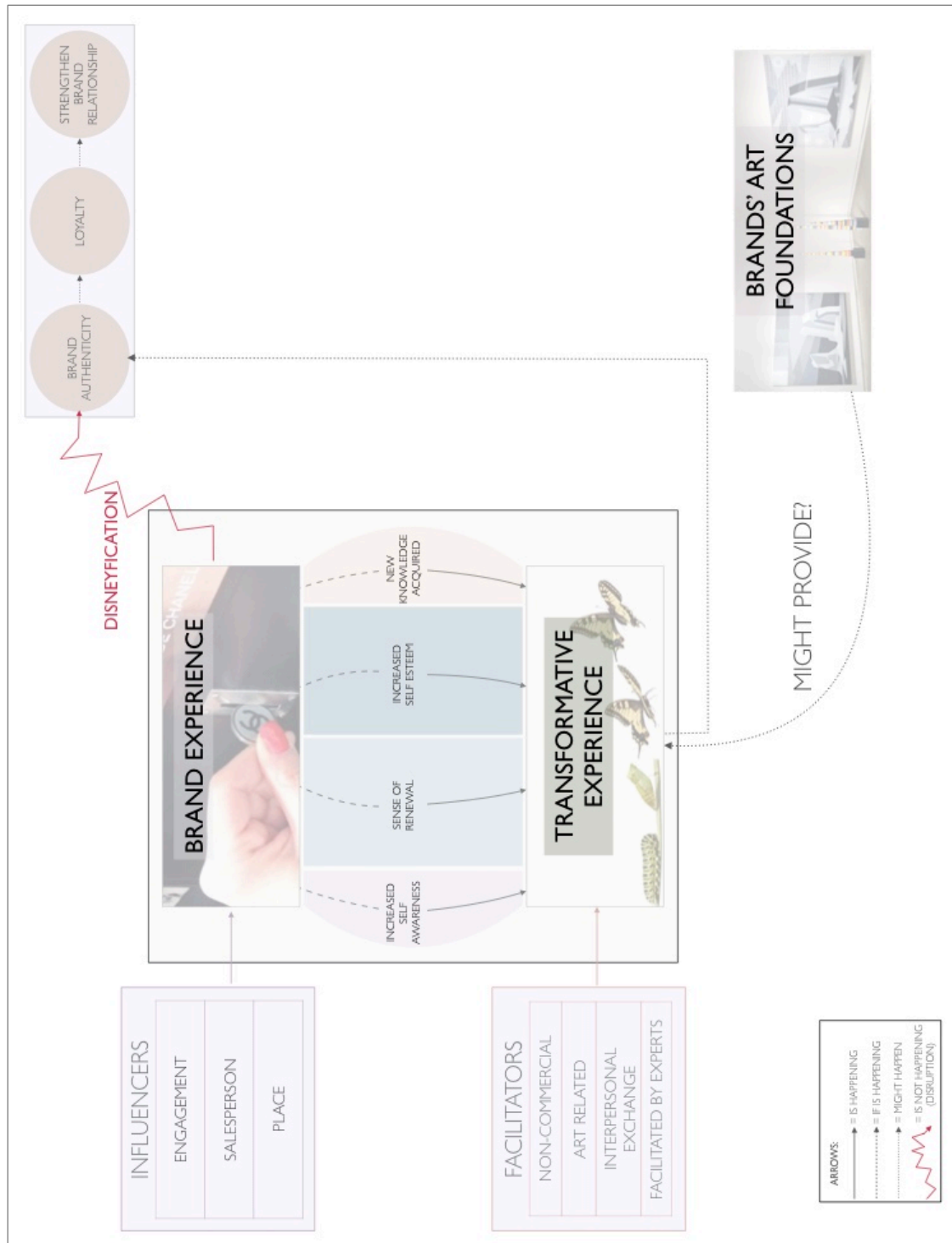
Figure 4 – Theoretical Framework - Graphic representation of the Literature Review

Figure 4 graphically represents the literature review discussed in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 3. The central rectangle represents the relation between the brand experience and the transformative experience. In particular, if one of the four conditions shown in the middle of the rectangle occurs during the experience, consequently, the experience can be considered as transformative, as discussed in section 3.3.2 (and its sub-sections). While, it is not guaranteed that an experience generates one of the four conditions necessary, it is quite definitive that each one of the conditions generate a transformation of the self. Hence, the brand experience in the rectangle is connected to the conditions with a dashed line; and on the contrary, the conditions are linked to the transformative experience with a straight line.

On the top left of the central rectangle, there are listed three main influencers of the brand experience which, as reported in section 2.5, and 2.3 (and its sub-sections), could generate either a positive or a negative effect. Even when these elements are influencing the experience in a positive way, this could be not sufficient to make the experience being perceived as authentic. With this regard, on the top right of the framework, the disruption between the brand experience and the brand authenticity is represented by a red arrow. As explained in section 2.4, brand experiences are losing their authenticity mainly due to the Disneyfication of the society. Everything has become an experience, a theme park, and people are starting to demand brands to provide them with more authenticity and meaning. As highlighted in section 1.5, brand authenticity is pivotal to generate loyalty in the consumers, and eventually strengthen the relationship with them, and this 'chain reaction' is shown in the top right rectangle of the framework.

To overcome the lack of authenticity, brands should start to provide transformative experiences, an experience which is considered more authentic and meaningful than others, as discussed in section 3.2. This positive effect is represented in the framework by the dotted arrow which connects the transformative experience rectangle with the brand authenticity circle. However, this line which links the two is a dotted line, since it is not guaranteed for a transformative experience to always lead to brand authenticity. On the bottom left of the framework instead, there are listed the elements which might facilitate a transformative experience to happen. They are called facilitators because they generate a positive effect by helping the transformation to happen, as examined in section 3.3.2 (and its sub-sections).

Finally, by considering all these facilitators (section 3.3.2), and by analysing some of the main brand experiences provided in the luxury fashion industry (Chapter 2), luxury fashion brands' art foundations were identified as a potential venue to provide transformative experience. Finding how these venues could provide this kind of experience is the research question of this study, and is graphically represented in the framework by a dotted arrow which connects the art foundations with the transformative experience.

Next chapter provides the details related to the methodology and the methods utilised in this study.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines all the methodological choices made during this project. This study is based on a rapid ethnographic approach. Participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups were the methods selected to collect the data, and Template Analysis was the method used to analyse them.

The first section of the chapter provides an overview on the theoretical choices at the base of this project, such as the reason for using rapid ethnography, or the reason to analyse the phenomenon through a qualitative data collection.

Further sections explain the sampling and the choices made, method by method, while the final section illustrates the technique used to analyse all the data collected.

5.1.1 RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The study aims to investigate art foundations as a venue for luxury fashion brands to provide a transformative experience to their customers. A qualitative approach based on rapid ethnography was applied. The following list summarises the methods utilised for the data collection.

- Four semi-structured in-depth interviews with experts in public engagement, and professionals from the fashion industry; and a structured interview made by email with an expert in public engagement. This initial set of interviews aimed to validate the definitions of luxury fashion brands and public engagement provided in Chapter 1, and to provide concrete examples of public engagement activities at the end of Chapter 6. Reasons for the necessity of providing these examples will be clarified in section 5.2.2.

- Participant observation. The researcher observed for two years on different occasions both *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*. Participant observation was focusing on a number of aspects. The first was hospitality, as explained in section 2.2 (and its sub-sections), an experience can be positively or negatively influenced by the moment people are welcomed. The second aspect observed was the kind of audience met while visiting the foundations, in an

attempt at understanding their 'customers'. Third, the kind of art exhibited, and the amount/quality of information provided during the visits, considered both as fundamental to let the audience feel engaged. Fourth and final aspect observed was the promotional strategies applied by the foundations, and the existence of an eventual connection with the fashion brand. This final aspect was mainly observed through social media, brands' websites, and newspapers.

- Two interviews with employees and associates of the foundations, aiming to better understand the phenomenon.
  - A semi-structured in-depth interview with both a manager and a curator of *Fondazione Prada*;
  - A semi-structured interview with an associate of *Fondation Louis Vuitton*. It is important to highlight that the person interviewed specified since the beginning that she was not speaking in the name of the foundation to preserve the her client's privileges. However, by having a long professional experience in working and collaborating with museums, her opinion is considered of value for this research.

- Two focus groups, each one composed of five participants. One group was asked to visit *Fondazione Prada*, the second group was invited to visit *Fondation Louis Vuitton*. During their visits, they had to follow guidelines containing a list of tasks to achieve. These guidelines were created on the base of the observation exercise, to ensure that all participants were visiting the place by noticing and observing details. These guidelines aimed to facilitate the discussion and help the participants to recall their memories during the focus group. All details with regards to the focus groups and these guidelines will be provided in section 5.2.3. Finally, a follow-up email was sent to all the participants a few months after the focus groups had taken place. This email was constituted of two questions only, and it aimed to evaluate the duration of the impact which the experience had generated on people.

All data, except for the first set of interviews, were analysed through Template Analysis; the first set of interviews was analysed through a qualitative content analysis method.

5.1.2 PROJECT'S PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

From a philosophical perspective, this study is looking at people as 'social actors' who are creating meanings, not as phenomena (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). For this reason, Interpretivism is the philosophy underpinning this research. This philosophy is based on the idea that people and their worlds cannot be studied as physical phenomena, and that it is not possible to explain the reality with universal and definite rules. Any human being is creating and experiencing a specific social world which any time is different from other people's world. Therefore, different backgrounds, beliefs, circumstances, and times are shaping different realities, and any person is giving to this reality a specific and distinctive meaning (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). Hence, the methodology and the methods applied in this research are considering any single person as a unique contributor to the evaluation of the kinds of experiences which *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* are providing through their foundations.

This project utilises rapid ethnography as methodology. Handwerker's (2001) work argues the need for more efficient ethnographic tactics which may require a shorter timeframe than traditional ethnographic approaches. The needs deriving from the velocity of the society's pace led the author to develop rapid ethnography as a methodology which applies ethnographic methods but adopts a shorter and well-defined timeline. As for traditional ethnography, also rapid ethnography is a way of conducting research where the main aim is to understand the social meaning and experiences of people in a specific setting, but in a shorter time (Handwerker, 2001). Due to the nature of the phenomenon investigated in this project, rapid ethnography has been considered the best methodology to apply.

Rapid ethnography allowed the researcher to exploit ethnographic approaches such as participant observation, but in a shorter timeframe than traditional ethnography generally requires. Hence, this methodology allowed the researcher to reach an intense and deep knowledge of the phenomenon (Pink & Morgan, 2013) via a more suitable timeframe for the PhD process. Ethnography has been extensively utilised in enquiries orientated towards evaluating people's experiences, and also to analyse organisations, as it will be explained in section 5.2.1. Moreover, section 5.2.1 will show that significant results on the matter of organisation researches can be achieved also in shorter timeframe utilising rapid ethnography tactics.

This project is based on an abduction approach, an approach which continues to move back and forth between theory and data (Saunders et al., 2016), and the theory forms together with the data collection (Flick, 2014). The first participant observation happened immediately at the beginning of this project, with a little knowledge with regards to the foundations. After every observation, there has been an increasing knowledge of the theory regarding brand experiences, experiential marketing, consumer engagement, public engagement, and transformative experiences. Once the observation exercise ended, it was possible to set the focus groups. During the focus groups, the participants' experience of visiting the foundations was discussed; visits which followed specific guidelines created on the base of the participant observation. Hence, the two focus groups have to be considered not only as a form of experience's evaluation, but also as a form of validation of the participant observation (Saunders et al., 2016).

All the data collected for this study are qualitative, and they were obtained through different methods, as listed at the beginning of this chapter, and further detailed in the following sections. Quantitative data were considered not valuable to evaluate the quality, the impact, and the characteristics of people experiencing the luxury fashion brands' art foundations. Table 5 shows how the methods used to collect data are instrumental to achieve the objectives set in section 1.8.

	OBJECTIVES	METHODS
OBJECTIVE 1	To better understand the main characteristics of luxury fashion brands' art foundation, with an emphasis on *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*	• LITERATURE REVIEW • PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION • INTERVIEWS WITH *FONDAZIONE PRADA'S* MANAGEMENT AND *FONDATION LOUIS VUITTON'S* ASSOCIATE
OBJECTIVE 2	To determine the characteristics and the importance of brand experiences in the context of the luxury fashion industry.	• LITERATURE REVIEW • INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS
OBJECTIVE 3	To establish what a transformation is in the brand experience context	• LITERATURE REVIEW • PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION • FOCUS GROUPS
OBJECTIVE 4	To explore the impact of a transformation as determined by different experiences and expectations.	• LITERATURE REVIEW • PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION • FOCUS GROUPS
OBJECTIVE 5	To conceptualise a model for alternative marketing strategies for luxury fashion brands.	• LITERATURE REVIEW • PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION • INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND LUXURY FASHION BRANDS • FOCUS GROUPS • INTERVIEW WITH *FONDAZIONE PRADA'S* MANAGEMENT AND *FONDATION LOUIS VUITTON'S* ASSOCIATE

Table 5 - Methods utilised to achieve the Objectives set in Chapter 1.

There is a continuous debate with regards to the appropriateness of qualitative methods in generating reliable and validated data (Saunders et al., 2016). It is often considered that a research which is not reliable (replicable to the purpose of obtaining the same data) is not valid. However, all data collected for this research are reflecting "reality at the time they were collected" (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 398) and they are not meant to be replicable. The detailed description of all the choices made with regards to the methodology applied, and the reasons behind those choices, would help others to replicate the study. However, because the focus of the research is on a flexible and dynamic phenomenon, it is possible that future results will differ from what reported in this thesis.

This project investigates a specific phenomenon which is happening in a particular moment in time, and for this reason, with regards to its 'time-horizon', it is deemed a cross-sectional study (Saunders et al., 2016).

5.2 RESEARCH METHODS

5.2.1 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation is one of the fundamental methods utilised in this project to collect data, and it is the method most used in ethnographic (Brewer, 2000) and rapid ethnographic studies (Handwerker, 2001). The two foundations selected, as the focus of this observation, were selected according to specific criteria which are explained in the following section. The exercise lasted for two years, from September 2015 to April 2017, and during this period, both foundations were visited six times each. During the participant observation, detailed notes, and a number of pictures and videos, were taken. The focus of the exercise was to observe the foundation as a whole, from the public perspective. By being part of the public, the researcher observed different aspects of experiencing *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*, such as: the venue, the location, the atmosphere provided, the kinds of exhibitions held, the attendants, the information provided, other people's interaction with the foundations, facilities and services provided.

The use of ethnography, and in particular of observation and participant observation, is not new to evaluate visitors' museum experiences (Goulding, 2000; Warren, 2011),

researchers' experience of art installations (Hawkins, 2010), people's interaction with places (O'Toole & Were, 2008), or social interaction in an artistic contexts (Kompatsiaris, 2014). Ethnography – sometimes called embedded – and observation are also used by academics, and non-academic communities, in marketing researches (Goulding, 2005; Visconti, 2010), and organisational studies (Coles, 2012; Lewis & Russell, 2011; Pycock & Bowers, 1996). Finally, rapid ethnography has been used for business studies regarding entrepreneurship (Ranabahu, 2017), organisations' studies (Vindrola-Padros & Vindrola-Padros, 2018), international managerial case studies (Baines & Cunningham, 2013), and corporate environments researches (Isaacs, 2012).

5.2.1.1   SAMPLING

The main reasons to choose *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* as the focus of this study were presented in section 2.6.2 (and its sub-sections). The current section summarises the main aspects which led to that choice. Secondary research has been used to analyse art foundations owned by well-established luxury fashion brands. This process was necessary to identify shared characteristics and main differences in the attempt of comparing the foundations. At the end of the process, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada* resulted in being the only two whit very similar features and organisational structures, and were chosen for this research.

The first distinction made was between private foundations (i.e. permanently-established physical and non-physical entities with an open-ended operation and perhaps vague purpose) and long-term art/cultural projects (i.e. permanent and semi-permanent initiatives serving a specific and limited operation and purpose) (Zorloni, 2016). To the first category belonged brands such as Salvatore Ferragamo, Hermes, Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Loewe. In the second category, there are projects such as "Fendi for Fountains" and "Gucci Museo" (today called "Gucci Garden"). Examples of the first category were deemed most relevant to this study due to their ongoing operation, higher profile, and the consequent, presumably more significant, financial and human capital employed by the brands in their establishment.

Once this distinction was made, the second part of the selection process examined the type of art which brands are promoting. For example, some of them focus on contemporary art (Louis Vuitton, Trussardi, Prada); while some other brands are focused

on photography and poetry (Loewe), or cinema and music (Fendi and Cartier, respectively). Brands which are sponsoring contemporary art were preferred, and the reasons are twofold. First, contemporary art is brands' most frequent choice when they decide to sponsor artistic projects, both long- or short-term (as exemplified in section 2.6). Second, is a form of art which is often utilised to promote fashion initiatives and projects, inside and outside the retail store (as exemplified in section 2.6). This second aspect might allow potential comparisons between the commercial-oriented experience and the cultural-oriented experience.

A third level of analysis involved examining the educational programs which are supported by these foundations. The most common is the creation of specific projects dedicated to children's education, such as "Accademia dei Bambini" in *Fondazione Prada*; or Hermès's projects. This element has been considered important because providing educational programs is one of the main aspects of museums, and some of the brands' foundations are aspiring to be recognised as museums by the public opinion, as reported in section 1.1.

The final step of this enquiry, and the one which determined a significant difference between *Fondazione Prada*, *Fondation Louis Vuitton,* and the other foundations, regards the existence and/or the kind of venue utilised by the brands for their institutions. As explained in section 2.3, the place is a very powerful influencer of people's experiences, particularly in the luxury fashion context. Hence, evaluating the kind of venue which is typically used or is dedicated to the foundations was deemed pivotal. *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* resulted as the only two foundations with a dedicated venue. Moreover, in both cases 'star architects' were selected to design the buildings: Frank Gehry for *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, and Rem Koolhaas for *Fondazione Prada*.

To conclude, secondary research allowed to decide to focus this study on art foundations owned by luxury fashion brands which are aiming to be perceived as museums by promoting contemporary art in dedicated venues. The result of this analysis led to focusing on *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada.*

5.2.2   INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured and in-depth semi-structured interviews (N. Lee & Lings, 2008) were conducted on different occasions and with different scopes. The use of in-depth interviews is considered very effective to investigate people's experiences and opinions (Taube & Warnaby, 2017). A set of four in-depth semi-structured interviews, together with a structured interview by email, were conducted by involving experts of both luxury fashion brands and public engagement. The scope of the first set of interviews was to validate the definitions of public engagement and luxury fashion brands provided in the Chapter 1, as well as to discuss experts' opinions with regards to the increasing trend of art foundations established by luxury fashion brands. These interviews were concentrating on three main questions/themes: what is a luxury fashion brand, what is public engagement, and what is the participants' opinion with regards to private art foundations owned by luxury fashion brands. What emerged from the interviews will be reported in section 6.3 (and its sub-sections). Furthermore, these interviews were providing an overview of how cultural institutions operate in an inclusive and engaging perspective, considering this perspective of inclusiveness as a facilitator of transformative experiences. Experts' examples and professionals' knowledge will be a prompt to create the conceptual model of this project (Chapter 7 - fig. 40).

An in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with two employees of *Fondazione Prada*: a product manager, and a curator. This interview aimed to better understand the foundation as a phenomenon, its organisation, and its correlation with the fashion brand. With the idea of achieving the same aim, a semi-structured interview was also conducted with an associate of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* (this was the only possible contact related to this foundation). As explained in the introduction of this chapter, this associate never spoke in the name of the foundation, but a broad professional knowledge of museums and public relations made the participant being considered valuable for this project. This set of interviews has been analysed together with field notes (section 5.2.1), and the data collected through the focus groups (section 5.2.3), aiming to provide a detailed picture of the service the foundations are providing compared to what is the visitors' perceptions.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. To avoid losing meaning due to a different language, those interviews which were conducted in Italian were not integrally

translated. Parts of these conversations were translated to provide a significant number of citations in Chapter 6.

5.2.2.1   SAMPLING

Participants of the first set of interviews were selected via a multistage cluster sampling (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2016).

First, a list of possible clusters in the UK was selected by scoping the Internet and via other professional networks, such as fashion magazines, museums, art galleries, association dedicated to public engagement, members of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, fashion brands, the British Fashion Council, fashion bloggers and influencers, fashion academic journals. Second, one person per each cluster was selected randomly, or based on the possibility to access an email address. Third, an invitation letter was sent by email to all the people selected. This letter explained the aim of the project, asking for a meeting of 20 minutes length, and it contained the two definitions (section 1.4 and 1.7) highlighting that that would be the main topic of the interview. Finally, interviews were conducted with those people who replied to the email.

Except for one of the participants, all were delighted to appear in this research renouncing to anonymity. The participants in the in-depth semi-structured interviews were: the director of a fashion museum in London, the Public Engagement Manager of the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, one of the co-curator of the "What is Luxury?" exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2015, and the Head of Events at the British Fashion Council. The participant to the structured interview by email was the Deputy Director of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). Due to their status, their working context, and professional expertise, all the participants were considered essential for contributing to this project.

Finally, the participants of the second set of interviews, people directly or indirectly associated to *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, were selected via a convenient sampling (Hair et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2016).

5.2.3   FOCUS GROUPS

As previously mentioned, participant observation sometimes is considered a method too subjective and at risk of being biased. In the attempt of minimised these effects, two focus groups were organised with a twofold aim: to collect people impressions and feelings which emerged by visiting the foundations; to validate or refute the observations made. To achieve this aim, the focus groups were organised by implementing the mystery shopper technique in the participants' visits, a method utilised in marketing and service evaluations (Wilson, 1998).

In the last thirty years, the mystery shopper technique has been used in various sectors and with different scopes: to evaluate service quality and user-customer satisfaction in the public sector (Jacob, Schiffino, & Biard, 2016); to measure the effectiveness of training programmes (Morrison, Colman, & Preston, 1997); to check on equal treatment of consumers (Morrall, 1994); to evaluate employees' performances (J. Douglas, 2015). Most importantly, it has been used also to evaluate people's experiences in: retail stores and hotels (Wilson, 1998), restaurants (Liu, Chou, Gan, & Tu, 2015), public libraries (Calvert, 2005), public interactions during science events (Peterman & Young, 2015), and especially visitors' services in museums (Kirchberg, 2000). Finally, it is important to highlight that, generally, experts and researchers are being used as mystery shoppers. However, there are few examples where non-experts were employed, people who could easily be part of the phenomenon studied, such as: students to evaluate universities (A. Douglas & Douglas, 2006), teenagers to map alcohol sales to underage (Gosselt, van Hoof, de Jong, & Prinsen, 2007), and also volunteers to evaluate public services (Calvert, 2005).

It was decided to apply the mystery shopper technique in this research for different reasons. First, it is a technique extensively used in services and experiences evaluations, as above mentioned, which is the main reason for the participants' exercise. Second, it is a technique based on participant observation, hence the data derived by the participants' exercise might validate, or not, the data derived by the researcher's participant observation (Saunders et al., 2016). Moreover, mystery shopper is proven to be a suitable method for measuring performances as extensively exemplified in the previous paragraph. Finally, this technique allows different people to observe specific situations with the idea of achieving a determined aim, but without influencing the behaviour of

the observee (Gosselt et al., 2007; Peterman & Young, 2015; Van Der Wiele, Hesselink, & Van Iwaarden, 2005).

Hence, five participants were asked to visit *Fondazione Prada* in Milan, and five participants were asked to visit *Fondation Louis Vuitton* in Paris, as 'mystery shoppers', or better as 'mystery visitors'. Ten participants might be considered a small number, but as previously said, this research is based on a philosophy which recognises each experience as valid to shape the reality and not generalizable (Saunders et al., 2016). Moreover, the right size of a focus group has always been debated, albite five to eight participants has been recognised as a right number (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Krueger & Casey, 2014).

During the observation exercise, interesting patterns were noticed, such as the difficulty for people to find the bathroom or a path to follow in *Fondazione Prada*, or the general unawareness (of the researcher as well) or carelessness with regards to the role played by the attendants in the *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s rooms. Thus, to verify if these observations were shared, and to ensure that the participants were visiting the two places thoroughly, guidelines providing a list of tasks were sent to all the participants (Appendix 1). These guidelines were created also to avoid the typical risk of participants forgetting details (J. Douglas, 2015), as a prompt for the focus group discussion, to ensure an high-level of attention in designing the process for data gathering and the reporting process (Wiele, Hesselink, & Iwaarden, 2005), and to avoid the risk of having participants not trained adequately, or trained with biases (Leeds, 1992; Wilson, 1998). This list of tasks with evaluation questions was not used as a stand-alone tool for gathering data. All the notes which participants wrote on the paper were used only as a prompt for the discussions. These guidelines were simple notes to guide the visitors during the exercise, and then they were used as an aid for recall their memories during the focus groups. Appendix 2 shows an example of how the participants utilised the guidelines during their experiences.

During the focus groups, the questions asked were aimed at understanding people's interaction with the foundations, their previous experiences with museums and art galleries, and their opinions regarding the fashion brands and how (if) the existence of

the foundation influences their perception of the brand. The general line of enquiry during the focus groups was primarily concentrating on investigating three main aspects:

- People's overall experience of visiting the foundations: if they are willing to visit again, and if yes, why; if they have enjoyed it and why; if they had positive/negative comments on the experience.
- People's previous knowledge of the fashion brands and the foundations: if they have been there before; prior opinion of the brand; their perception of the brand or the foundations; specific changes in their perception, after the visit
- People's general experience of art galleries and museums, and opinion on luxury brands.

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed for analysis. To avoid losing meaning due to a different language, focus groups which were conducted in Italian were not integrally translated, except for the quotes provided in Chapter 6.

Specific outcomes were not anticipated by being the nature of this exercise that of collecting people's feelings and thoughts with regards to the foundations. Moreover, based on the interpretivist philosophical approach adopted in this study, which any human being is creating and experiencing a specific social world which at any time is different from other people's worlds, by having specific expectation on the outcome, would not only bias the exercise, but it would be against the philosophical principle of this research.

Finally, to further evaluate the impact generated by the experience, a follow-up email was sent to all the participants a few months after the focus groups.

5.2.3.1   SAMPLING

The sampling utilised for both focus groups was a convenient sampling method (Hair et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2016). The group shows homogeneity with a sufficient variation (Krueger, 1994) to allow differentiated opinions and facilitate a dynamic and inclusive discussion (Bloor et al., 2001). All 10 participants received an email with the same attached document which contains the guidelines on how to conduct the visit. The document containing the guidelines was accompanied with a cover letter which explained the scope of the exercise to all participants in a consistent way. One of the primary

purposes of the guidelines was to facilitate the discussion which took place after the visits in the form of a focus group.

As first thing during the focus group, the participants were asked to present themselves telling their names, age, professions, and the number of times that they usually visit museums or galleries' exhibitions during the year. All the 10 participants were Italian, and their characteristics, mentioned above, are described in the following Figure 5 and Figure 6.

Fondazione Prada's visitors:
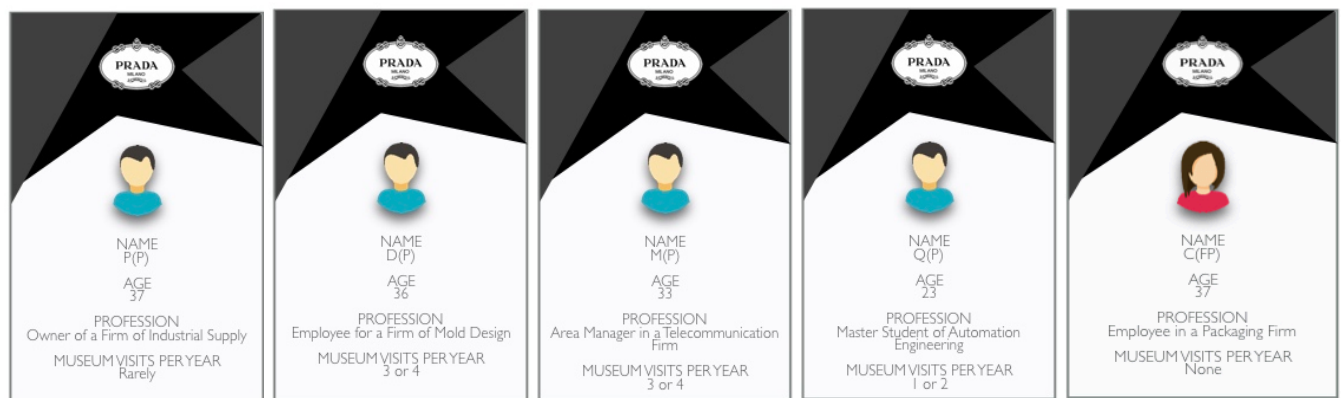
Figure 5 - Graphic representation of *Fondazione Prada* participants' characteristics.

Fondation Louis Vuitton's visitors:
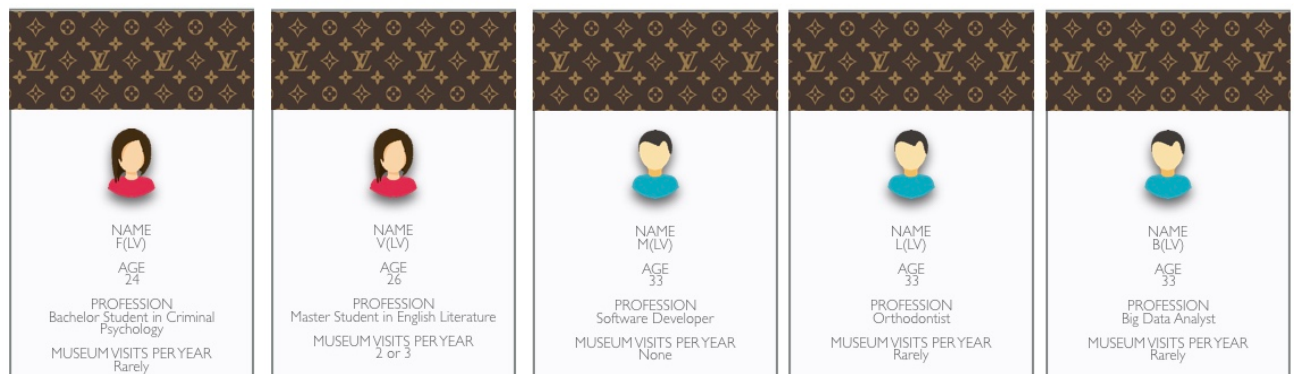
Figure 6 - Graphic representation of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* participants' characteristics.

5.3 BENEFITS & LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

Benefits of the approaches applied include:

- Participant observation allowed to explore what people do or say in their everyday life environment. In particular, the observation allowed the observer to investigate, among other things, how the foundations' employees interact with the public in a real-life situation. No sensitive data or people were observed that could bring to ethical issues.

- In-depth interviews with experts allowed the validation of this project's contextualisation of the concepts of public engagement, and luxury fashion brand. Moreover, they strengthened the understanding of these two concepts, and of the professionals' opinion regarding the art foundations. These interviews were also facilitating the construction of the conceptual model presented in Chapter 7.

- In-depth interviews allowed a deep insight into the foundations' structure, activities, strategies, and mission. The iterative process of interviews and observations let the researcher strengthen the understanding of the foundations' dynamics.

- In-depth interviews allowed avoiding biases in the observation, which might be generated from reviewing the literature, and allowed a better understanding of the context in which the foundations are operating, and how they perceive themselves. This perception is then combined with all the other data gathered to answer the research question.

- Focus groups allowed the researcher to compare the data derived from the participant observation with other people's perception of the foundations. Moreover, this comparison might be considered as a tool of validation of the observation results and a way of limiting biases.

- The guidelines created for the participants' visit are based on the researcher's observation process. Being the guidelines very structured allowed the researcher to avoid participants' bias.

Limitations to this methodology include:

- A more formal and co-operative access to the foundations due to the brands' collaboration could have provided an easier access to a bigger sample of participants for a deeper evaluation of people's experiences due to a major

number of focus groups possible.

- The phenomenon investigated is new and fluid, implying that further investigations over an extended period of time could return a different outcome.

- Participant observation and in-depth interviews do not allow to generalise the findings, as well as the philosophical position of this study.

5.4 ANALYSIS METHOD

The first set of interviews conducted with experts in fashion and public engagement were analysed using a qualitative content analysis process (R. Brooks & Waters, 2015; Bryman, 2016). The interviewees were approached to discuss their opinions on the definitions of the concepts provided in the Introduction chapter (section 1.4 and 1.7): luxury fashion brand, and public engagement. Moreover, they were asked to express an opinion regarding the luxury fashion brands' art foundations. Hence, the data were analysed following these three main themes to derive experts' views, and as a sort of validation of the definitions mentioned above.

Interviews with managers and associates to the foundations, field notes, and focus groups transcriptions where all analysed applying the Template Analysis method. Template Analysis is a form of thematic analysis. The main characteristic of this method is the development of a coding template, which is typically created on the base of a small subset of data. The template is then applied to all the other data (J. Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015). The template in this project was created on the basis of the field notes set of data, and then was refined and revised during the analysis of the other data. Template analysis is a flexible approach which differs from other thematic approaches by not suggesting in advance a set of coding levels, and not insisting on distinguishing between descriptive and interpretive themes (J. Brooks et al., 2015). Finally, this method of analysis can be applied to different sets of data, from interview transcriptions to diary entries and focus groups. All these characteristics made the Template Analysis the preferred method of analysis for this project.

NVivo software was used to facilitate the coding process. Examples of the coding process are presented in Appendix 3.

5.5 SUMMARY

This research is designed through rapid ethnography, as methodology. As explained in this chapter, data were collected through different types of methods and by involving different kinds of people. Participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups were all essential to derive the results of this study. Finally, template analysis was chosen as the method for data analysis, especially for its flexibility. Next chapter is presenting the findings, and the discussion of them, as a whole. The analysed data, and the literature review are informing the discussion.

6   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first is an extended analysis of the data derived from the following data collections: the researcher's participant observation; the two focus groups conducted after the participants' sample visited the two foundations; the interviews conducted, one with two members of *Fondazione Prada* management, and the other with the associate manager of *Fondation Louis Vuitton*. The analysis aims to provide a deep evaluation of the experience of visiting the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*.

The second part of this chapter presents the results of a follow-up email sent to all of the participants to establish the depth of the effect of the transformation, occurred during the experience, and the duration of the impact.

The third part of the chapter reports what emerged from the four interviews conducted with experts in both fashion brands and cultural institutions. The purpose of this last set of interviews was mainly to understand what public engagement is in the art context, and to collect key examples of activities which museums implement to initiate a two-way dialogue with the public. This part of the chapter aims to determine a point of reference to establish if the foundations are actually engaging with their public, or if they could do more to generate new knowledge, or benefits. Indeed, a deeper engagement with the public might facilitate the experience to lead an individual to be transformed.

The final part of the chapter is the graphic representation of the experience which the focus groups' participants lived in *Fondazione Prada* (fig.38) and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* (fig. 39). These models aim to provide a visual mapping of the participants' journey in reference to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 4 (fig. 4), in the attempt of answering the research question.

To conclude, the whole chapter is an in-depth analysis which aims to evaluate if luxury fashion brands are already exploiting their art foundations as a venue to provide a transformative experience to the public; or if they are unaware of the potential which those venues have, or they are aware, though not taking advantage of this opportunity.

6.1 PART 1 - EXPERIENCE ANALYSIS

The first part of this chapter is organised according to the four themes which have emerged from the template analysis, as reported in section 5.4 and exemplified in Appendix 3. The themes are as follow:

- PERCEPTION – This theme collects all the data regarding any previous (to the experience) knowledge or thoughts regarding *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, the brands, the art, and the luxury sector.
- PLACE – This theme collects all the data referring to the location and the accessibility of the foundations, general impressions regarding the structure, and the presence and quality of employees and informative materials inside the foundations.
- BEHAVIOUR – This theme collects all data regarding the way people live and experience the place.
- IMPACT – This theme collects all data regarding the kind (if any) of effect which the experience has generated on the participants.

Each one of the abovementioned themes is presented in this chapter according to other essential sub-themes which emerged during the coding phase of this project, as shown in Appendix 3. As a general rule, each one of the sub-themes is discussed by considering *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada* experiences together. Hence, the findings are generalised for the two, unless some specific and important diversity emerged during the analysis, and it is considered worth discussing it by separating one foundation from the other. Moreover, the findings are presented by following the chronological order which occurs during an ordinary consumption experience, by considering the visit to a museum as such (Goulding, 2000).

The consumption experience is generally divided into four main phases: during the first phase, the consumer is retrieving information (before); during the second one, the consumer is buying the product, or the experience (during); in the third phase, the consumer is enjoying the purchase (during); and in the final one, the consumer might remember the experience as positive and initiating to become loyal (after) (Antéblian et al., 2013; Arnould, Price, & Zinkhan, 2004; Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). Hence, the

findings are discussed starting from the 'before' the experience; then there are sections dedicated to the 'during' the experience phase; and finally, section 6.1.4 is dedicated to the 'after' phase. This structure of the analysis facilitates the understanding of the experience, and how people are consuming it, as a whole.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the researcher before starting the participant observation was sharing some of the participants' characteristics, such as: a predisposition to not understanding contemporary art, rarely visiting museums, and rarely accessing a flagship store. These are all aspects which were discussed during the two focus groups. However, on the contrary to all the participants, the observer had an in-depth knowledge with regards to fashion, fashion exhibitions, the brands, and the art foundations. Albite this acquired knowledge, the observation exercise was not biased. The fact that many aspects derived from the focus groups, from people without the researcher's same knowledge, were very similar to what emerged from the observation, might be deemed as a validation of the lack of biases.

To facilitate the presentation of the results, names in the chapter are coded as follows:

- The two participants to *Fondazione Prada*'s interview are coded as P(int1) and P(int2).
- The interviewee associated with *Fondation Louis Vuitton* is coded as LV(int1).
- The participants to *Fondazione Prada*'s focus group: D(FP), C(FP), P(FP), Q(FP), M(FP);
- The participants to *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s focus group: B(FLV), V(FLV), M(FLV), F(FLV), L(FLV).

Next section is showing and discussing the findings related to the first theme derived from the analysis.

6.1.1   PERCEPTION

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to the theme labelled as 'Perception', and aims to investigate the relationship which participants have (if any) with the arts, the fashion industry, museums visits, the luxury sector, and their pre-existing knowledge of the brands' foundations. The analysis of people's knowledge and feelings towards these

topics, allows to better understand the participants' attitude before and during the exercise; and likely, to better interpret the possible impact caused by this kind of experience. Furthermore, profiling the participants might help in identifying potential elements which characterise a particular predisposition towards being transformed by this type of experience. Finally, this section contains also some elements which emerged during the interview with *Fondazione Prada*'s management. These elements are discussed in the light of providing some examples on the way the foundation sees itself compared to how people perceive it.

The main subthemes analysed in this section are: considerations regarding the arts; considerations towards the luxury sector; pre-existing knowledge regarding the existence of luxury brands' art foundations; potential opinions on Prada and Louis Vuitton as brands; possible existing expectations and biases before the visit.

6.1.1.1   FEELINGS TOWARDS THE ARTS

The first thing asked all the participants at the beginning of their focus group was to introduce themselves to the others, by telling their names, their ages, the sector they are working in or the kind of job they have, and the frequency with which they visit museums along the year. This information was considered fundamental to capture a potentially biased attitude of the participants towards the experience. Of all the participants, only D(FP) and M(FP) admitted to appreciating contemporary art; while V(FLV) said to loving art but definitely not contemporary art. F(FLV) instead, enjoys art, and although she said to prefer other styles, she did not entirely exclude contemporary art. One of the main reasons which the participants discussed while admitting to disliking contemporary art, is the apparent difficulty which they are facing in understanding it. Moreover, because of this feeling, most of the participants thought that contemporary art is elitist, and accessible only by intellectuals.

During the discussion regarding people feelings towards the arts, some preconceptions emerged. First, the idea that the meaning of a Van Gogh or a Monet is very clear and accessible. This bias possibly derives from the fact that all participants have studied art history at school, a subject always taught in Italians high schools (as prescribed by the law (Miur, 2009)). Indeed, all participants declared to having studied artistic movements like impressionism or romanticism during high school. Although they may not remember

all of the details regarding Van Gogh's work, or the real meanings behind Picasso's blue period, it appears that the simple memory of having studied the subject makes them feel more confident towards that kind of art, and apparently makes them appreciate it more.

On the contrary, the majority of the participants consider contemporary art more difficult to understand, potentially because they did not previously study it. This incomprehension of the subject is what apparently lead them to dislike this kind of art. Moreover, due to the inability to easily unveiling contemporary art's meaning, some of the participants consider it even hard to define as art, as expressed by C(FP) during the focus group:

> *"There was even the usual black painting with the red line that you say, 'I can do that too', those kinds of things (artworks)."*
>
> *- C(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group -*

D(FP) and M(FP) were the only two participants who openly admitted to appreciating contemporary art, and are also the two people who usually attend museums more frequently during the year. The appreciation for contemporary art and a more frequent museum attendance cannot be considered as a cause-effect situation, but perhaps by frequently visiting museums a person may acquire particular knowledge which might facilitate an open mind towards any form of art.

As previously mentioned, and with regards to a person's feelings towards contemporary art, another critical aspect which emerged from this initial phase of the focus groups. B(FLV) and M(FLV) admitted of disliking art as a whole due to the mere fact of not understanding it, and here art was referred by the two as paintings, sculptures, and artistic installations despite the style. From this admission, a second notable preconception emerged regarding the way these two participants generally look at the art lovers, meaning someone who is particularly appreciative of the art. Not minding that in the room F(FLV) and V(FLV) just admitted loving art, M(FLV) described that in his mind he pictures art lovers as follows:

"[…] I see them as a group apart, with a lifestyle very different from mine. Maybe is a stereotype, but I see the intellectual, a bit snobbish, posh, dressed in the right way, that maybe it is wealthier than me, that maybe can afford a Louis Vuitton. I do this association, very basic."

- M(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

As previously mentioned, F(FLV) and V(FLV) were in the same room and had just admitted appreciating art. They are two people with similar habits and interests to M(FLV), and apparently not particularly "snobbish" or "posh". Thus, it is possible to say that, M(FLV) is showing a bias regarding art lovers, by considering these kinds of people very differ from himself, although likely they are not. Seemingly, because M(FLV) considers art very distant from the types of things he likes, he is consequently considering also the people who like it as very different from himself.

This particular aspect is important to note because, further in this chapter, it is shown that preconceptions towards the art, or the fashion world, like the one shows by M(FLV), are not necessarily a limitation to a transformative experience. Likewise, the appreciation for art, or fashion, or the analysed brands, is not an essential pre-condition to guarantee a transformation to happen. As discussed in section 1.6, any kind of experience which is providing a transformation of the self, due to the acquirement of new knowledge, or an increasing of self-awareness, has to be considered as a transformative experience. There is no evidence that some characteristics of a person might facilitate or limit this transformation to happen *a priori*.

Continuing the conversation, M(FLV) also admitted that:

"I'm not telling you that I've visited the MoMa in New York. I'm telling you that I've seen the Starry Night (Van Gogh's) because is a famous painting, and that I've seen the Warhol's because they are famous, and that's it."

- M(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group –

As reported in section 2.2.1, as it happens with regards to the fashion consumption, also with regards to choosing leisure activities often people base the choice on the attention which they could receive from others, and on the others' perception. People like to conform, to feel socially accepted, to be part of a community or a group, and they do not like to be judged by others (section 2.2.1). Hence, what M(FLV) shared, the act of visiting a museum only for seeing a very famous work of art, is not strange. People want to be able to show others that they are not different, that they can be part of their group. This attitude, which normally characterises people's clothing choices, is also increasingly characteristic of people's cultural and experiential choices, and is often fuelled by social media (Hodalska, 2017). It does not surprise that people sometimes do things even if they do not like, only to share it on social media. To some extent, differently than preconceptions, this kind of attitude might facilitate a transformation. For the person who is living the experience, knowing that visiting a specific place or living a specific experience people's perception might be influenced or might change, could be a possible trigger towards a sense of renewal, or a feeling of increased self-esteem.

6.1.1.2 OPINION ON THE BRANDS & FEELINGS TOWARDS LUXURY

As previously mentioned, all of the participants are Italian, and in Italy, the fashion industry is still one of the most profitable industrial sectors of the country (Morici, 2017). Hence, the name of brands such as Armani, or of some famous designer such as Donatella Versace, or the idea of what is considered a luxury product, are all part of people's common knowledge to some extent. Therefore, it is not a surprise that when asked if anyone knew Prada or Louis Vuitton, according to the group, all the participants said yes; that they know the brand by name, and that they are luxury brands. Specifically, Vuitton is known by all the participants mainly as a producer of leather goods, its garments are not so well known, while Prada is known for garments and accessories. All of the participants associate both brands with concepts such as highly luxurious and expensive. Moreover, Prada is considered by the participants as a very classic brand, although historically Prada tend to attempt to be perceived as an innovative brand (section 2.6.2). Yet, when naming Prada, people generally think about suits and the colour black, and this leads them to consider the brand as a classic brand.

The conversation with the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* group, regarding their knowledge of Louis Vuitton as a brand, revealed the participants' attitudes towards the luxury world.

F(FLV) for example stated that she has never visited a flagship store for the pure fear that, once inside, she would be judged by the sales personnel.

> *"I have this thing (opinion), I have my shoes full of mud,*
> *I'm getting in Vuitton (retail store) … where are you going?"*
>
> *"Wasn't in Milan that in a store they didn't recognise Oprah and they got her*
> *thrown out?"*
>
> *"but even in Rome, sometimes you have to be dressed in a certain manner to*
> *get into some retail stores."*
>
> *- F(FLV) and L(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -*

As previously reported with regards to contemporary art, also with regards to people's feelings towards the luxury sector there is the idea of it as a very distant world, as an exclusive and elitist world. In the participants' minds, art and luxury are considered to be difficult to reach, to access, and to understand. It is probably due to this perceived distance, that most of the participants were unaware of the existence of fashion exhibitions in museums, or of artistic projects organised and sponsored by luxury fashion brands. Art and fashion are both perceived as being very remote worlds. Hence, people appeared not inclined to seek information, or to get involved in these worlds. Unless one or the other is a passion, people know that fashion and art exist, but they tend to not explore them. Yet, with regards to fashion, there is still a tendency to ensure of wearing the right outfit for the right occasion, or the latest trends, or at least what is thought to be what the others are expecting you to wear (section 2.2.1). However, as discussed in section 2.2.1, this tendency is arguably deriving more from a fear of being judged and not conform to the society, than from a genuine interest in shapes, materials, colours, and patterns.

6.1.1.3   AWARENESS OF THE FOUNDATIONS

Except for C(FP) and P(FP), who visited *Fondazione Prada* once before, all the other participants in both groups were not aware of *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s existence. On the contrary, it is of interest to note that both foundations consider themselves to be internationally well-known, as emerged during both of the interviews with P(int1) and P(int2), and with LV(int1).

"[...] and you know Fondation Louis Vuitton is already very much anchored in the cultural landscape, internationally [...] its loans for this particular exhibition that is on at the moment come from the Hermitage Museum, from the Pushkin Museum, form the MoMa, from the Centre Pompidou [...] so, you know, sort of all these major international museums [...] it is a museum within the cultural landscape, internationally, and it's very much devoted to art."

- LV(int1) from Fondation Louis Vuitton interview -

It is fair to think that the participants were unaware of the foundations' existence due to their lack of interest towards both fashion and art. However, since their opening, both the foundations have implemented a promotional strategy which appears more focused on influencing art channels and art magazines than a wider audience. As admitted during the interview with *Fondazione Prada*, they did not have a marketing office; they base their promotions on press releases, and an elementary use of social media. Yet, it is notable that lately, the foundations' social media activity is slightly improved. For example, recently *Fondation Louis Vuitton* launched an Instagram contest, also promoted on the LVMH Group's Instagram account, where people were asked to share their pictures of the foundation's structure (#MyFLV). The contest allowed some of the participants to be randomly selected for being officially posted as a feed of the *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s Instagram account. Figure 7 shows the Instagram post dedicated to the contest.
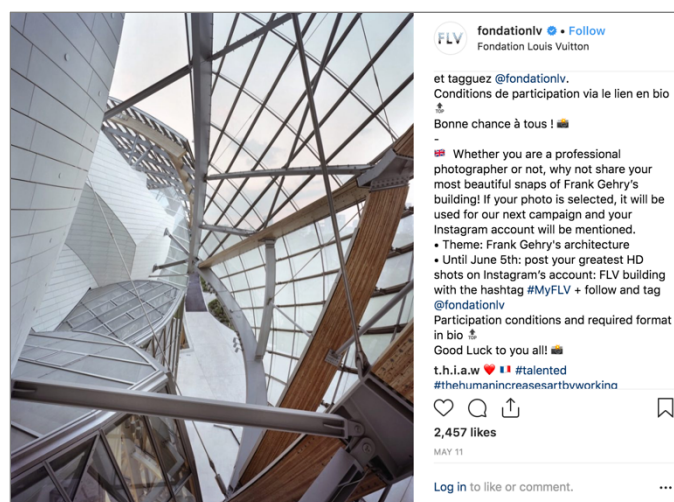
Figure 7 - Instagram post of the #MyFLV contest (Fondationlv, 2018).

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Always with regards to promotion strategy, since the opening of the foundations, both brands have applied a firm policy of entirely disassociating the foundations from the fashion brands. During the interview with LV(int1), it was highlighted how the foundation was not owned by Louis Vuitton but by the LVMH Group. As well as during the interview with P(int1) and P(int2), it was stated that the foundation is a personal project of Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli, while Prada as a fashion brand is their job.

Regardless of these declarations, and of the foundations' communication strategy, it is natural that by calling the two foundations with the brands' name peoples are associating them with the fashion world and not with the art. Association even more facilitated if people related to the fashion brands are interacting with the foundations – Figure 8 shows Marc Jacobs, a former Louis Vuitton designer, outside the foundation. Apparently, this tendency of disentangling the brand from the foundation has the scope to allow the foundations to be perceived as proper cultural institutions by the public, and especially by art experts and the media. However, this same policy has also generated the negative effect of limiting the publicity and the wide audiences' awareness of their existence.

Figure 8 - Instagram post published by Marc Jacobs and re-posted by *Fondation Louis Vuitton* (Fondationlv, 2015b).

Although this disassociation between the brand and the foundation might be understandable, there has been an unexpected lack of promotion of the foundations. Especially considering that they are 100% funded by brands which base all their business on communication and promotion (as contextualised in section 1.4). A unique example of this lack is a recent exhibition held by *Fondazione Prada*. Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, an Oscar-winning director, created a Virtual Reality project called *Carne y Arena* which

was exhibited at the *Fondazione Prada* from June 2017 to January 2018. Most of the Italian and international newspapers dedicated some articles to the event, mainly when the director was awarded a special Oscar for this specific project.

Nonetheless, the kind of promotion which the foundation dedicated to the event can be considered basal, and composed of press releases and very simple use of social media. Starting in March 2018, the same exhibition has been hosted in a refurbished church in Washington, after being shown at the *Fondazione Prada*. For the occasion, the universally known actor Leonardo DiCaprio, who worked with Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, decided to promote the event on his own Instagram account which counts 23.2 million of followers (against the 259,000 of *Fondazione Prada*). The dedicated post was viewed 876,115 times and received more than 1300 comments, while all the posts which the *Fondazione* dedicated to the exhibition (10 posts) received 17,913 likes in total.

Although it is not possible to access the numbers regarding the *Fondazione*'s footfall for the event, it is plausible that the Washington event might have attracted a different number of people. Celebrity endorsement has typically worked very well in fashion as a promotion tool. Although, here is not suggested that Prada and Louis Vuitton have to promote the foundations through this mean, yet, they could exploit some of the brands' communication capabilities to better promote the foundations to a broader audience. Figure 9 shows one of the Instagram posts published by *Fondazione Prada* to promote the exhibition, and the post published by Leonardo DiCaprio and mentioned above.

Figure 9 - Instagram posts published by *Fondazione Prada* (left) and Leonardo DiCaprio (right) to promote the exhibition "Carne y Arena" by Alejandro Iñárritu (FondazionePrada, 2017; LeonardodiCaprio, 2018).

Finally, it is noteworthy to appreciate how a combination of lack of promotion, disassociation from the fashion brand, and the use of the brands' name for the foundations, has generated confusion also among fashion practitioners and academics. Indeed, this project has been presented at international conferences dedicated to fashion, marketing, or luxury industries on different occasions and under different forms. In almost all of the occasions, the audience showed one between the following two reactions while the project was presented. The first immediate reaction was of curiosity, due to the lack of awareness regarding the foundations' existence. The second reaction was of surprise, due to the discovery that *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* are contemporary art museums and are totally unrelated to the fashion brands. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that also the participants in the focus groups, who are unfamiliar with both fashion and art, were unaware of the foundations, or were expecting to visit something regarding clothes and accessories.

6.1.1.4   EXPECTATIONS PRE-VISITS & ASSUMPTIONS

All the participants in both groups were expecting a fashion museum, or signs of fashion, or signs of the brand, or its history, or unveiling of fashion brands' 'secrets', except for C(FP) and P(FP) who had already visited the *Fondazione Prada* once. The participants were expecting something philanthropic because of the use of the term 'foundation', which they normally associate with health projects, or environmental projects, or human rights projects. F(FLV) said she would have appreciated a fashion museum enclosing some secret of the brand. Yet, as previously said, most of the participants are not even aware of the existence of fashion exhibitions. Hence, it is unlikely that they would have appreciated more a fashion museum. Moreover, there is no concrete reason to state that by showing aspects of the fashion brand, the foundations would attract more people or people would be more interested.

> *"…a museum of contemporary art, I think everybody has seen one before. But something specific in that sector, in fashion, no […] maybe you can explain to me the reason why a bag costs 5000£. Tell me.*
> *Could it be from that point of view… Because I choose a cow that eats that grass and for that reason, it has better skin, you know?*
> *Could be something, my bag costs 5000£ because of this, this, and this."*
>
> *- F(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -*

All participants were also expecting a very well curated and very well organised venue because of the name the foundations are carrying. As said, by utilising the name of the brand it is impossible to expect that people do not associate the fashion brand with the foundation. Hence, the participants were anticipating a sense of exclusivity, attention to details, and a distinctive venue to visit. During the interviews with associates from both *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, it has been made very clear that there is no direct association, correlation, and collaboration between the brand and the foundation.

"[…] for them, art is a passion, fashion is a job."

- P(int1) from Fondazione Prada interview -

Once people have visited the two places and noticed that they show a very limited (*Fondation Louis Vuitton*) or no (*Fondazione Prada*) sign of the fashion brands, most of the participants said that any brand or cultural association with no particular distinction could have owned the foundations. The only aspect that according to all the participants could have recalled a luxury brand, yet none specifically, is that there is a clear investment of money in the institution. The participants drew this conclusion by observing the venues and the kind of art they were exhibiting. In particular, this final consideration was made with specific reference to the *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s exhibition dedicated to the New York MoMa Museum.

The participants in the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* focus group believed that to organise such an exchange would have required an important amount of resources. As previously discussed, the idea of hindering people's association between the foundations and the fashion brands might generate both positive or negative effects. For example, during the *Fondazione Prada* interview, P(int1) said that Prada is a complex and very conceptual brand through its design, and the art proposed in the foundation is mirroring this aspect. Those similarities were apparent for a person who knows the brand very well, but they were entirely unnoticed by the participants in the focus group. Thus, the effect that such a cryptic association between the two might generate on people is blurred.

Nonetheless, a more explicit association between the foundations and the fashion brands could generate some positive effects, at least in terms of publicity. From the *Fondazione Prada* interview clearly emerged that the foundation(s) is fearing to appear as a mere marketing tool of the fashion brand, instead of a credible cultural institution. However, if the association could be carried out smartly, it may bring benefits for both, by strengthening the brand values, and by bringing more visitors due to a foundations' greater visibility. Not necessary the commercial association does diminish the value provided by a cultural experience; especially if the experience due to the interaction with art could be transformative for people. However, this experience needs to be cleverly promoted to highlight the benefits which could derive from it, and apparently, a simple disassociation from the main brand is not properly working. B(FLV), at the moment he discovered the existence of the foundations, and even before visiting *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, immediately thought of the foundations as a very bright commercial strategy and compared it to other immersive experiences into brands

"[…] such as the O2 that owns the O2 arena in England."
"[…] The brand is for an elite, that museum is something for an elite, full of elitist pieces."
"[…] It makes you talk about the brand."

- B(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

None of the participants was aware that there are other brands which are sponsoring art. Once revealed this aspect during the conversation, the participants had considered very positively the idea that a significant amount of resources are being reinvested in something for everybody to access; especially if these resources are deriving from a business, and especially if the company is operating in the luxury sector. As *Fondazione Prada* management stated during the interview, the foundation's mission is to be useful to people. Hence, a greater emphasis on the philanthropic aspect of the fashion brand could be pivotal for the brand and the foundation's promotional strategy. The idea of giving back to people by guaranteeing access to the art is generally positively assessed. However, if people are not aware of the foundations and their existence, the contribution to the community could be restricted to a tiny group, and the feeling generated might be of exclusivity and difficult access, instead of philanthropy and inclusivity.

Two main aspects are worth highlighting from the analysis of this first theme. First, peoples' preconceptions regarding art, luxury, or fashion cannot be identified as a limitation or a strengthen in consideration of their opportunity to be transformed by an experience. Loving art might not guarantee a transformation, and vice versa, and this will be clearer at the end of this chapter. Second, people are not fully aware of what *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* are, or their reasons to be. There is an apparent miscommunication or lack of promotion which surrounds the two venues. A stronger promotional strategy which might benefit of the main brand's skills, could encourage people to visit the foundations, and maybe live a transformative experience regardless their interest in art or the fashion brands.

6.1.2   PLACE

In section 2.3, the importance which a place represents for a fashion brand is analysed, and in particular for luxury fashion brands. Different aspects of the brand are enhanced by those places which are used as a point of contact with the customers. Social distance is represented by salespersons and, in some cases, by the layout of the flagship store. For most of the time, brands consider flagship stores as a pivotal point of contact with their consumers to understand and evaluate their preferences and attitudes towards the brand. Moreover, flagship stores can be considered as a point of entry in new markets. Furthermore, to make their stores unique and attractive, not only for consumers, but also for tourists, star-architects have been increasingly involved in the design of the layout and facades of the flagship stores.

As reported in section 2.3 (and its sub-sections), Louis Vuitton and Prada, amongst other luxury fashion brands, are an indicative example of significant investments to create important structures to showcase their products. Recently, to provide the consumer with a significant experience, their flagship stores have also hosted art exhibitions. Noteworthy, the architect involved in the concept behind Prada's most emblematic retails stores, the Epicenter, is the same architect appointed to design *Fondazione Prada*. As previously mentioned, the attempt of keeping the fashion brands apart from the art foundations is not of any use for the brand, especially when there is such a number of factors which might generate a natural association between the two in people' s minds.

Art foundations, in contrast with the idea of social distance embodied by the luxury retail store, should be a gathering point, an inclusive space for any person interested in the art and/or in the brand. They should represent an engaging and open space, as any other museum should be, especially considering how hard these foundations are attempting to be viewed as bona fide cultural institutions, also through their declared mission of being useful for people. The museums' peculiarity of being an inclusive and engaging space for people is a crucial element to consider when thinking of the foundations as a potential venue to provide the public with a transformative experience. For this reason, the place is one of the main four themes analysed in this chapter.

Several tangible and intangible aspects of the foundations have been analysed: from the ease of locating and accessing the place, to the presence of symbols and features which might recall the fashion brand; from the people who work in the venues, to the information provided to the public during their visits. Furthermore, also specific observations regarding the presence, or not, of public engagement activities have been made and coded in this theme. However, for the sake of completeness, and in the spirit of constructing this chapter following the specific logic flow explained in section 6.1, the public engagement aspect is discussed in section 6.3 (and its sub-sections).

6.1.2.1   GETTING THERE & GETTING IN

One of the first elements to consider during the observation exercise was the way in which people could reach the place. Was it central to the city, or not? Was it possible to reach it with public transportations, or not? Were there proper signs to indicate the direction to take along the way, or not? Could people find the place, or not? All these questions were forming part of the first analysis, considering them as basal questions which a place should address to ensure attracting and encouraging people to visit. From this perspective, there are a couple of significant differences between *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*. The first is the presence of signs, and the ease of finding the place. The second element regards the simplicity of entering the site and of understanding how to visit it.

6.1.2.1.1   FONDAZIONE PRADA

Fondazione Prada is located in a part of the city of Milan which is not central, and Largo Isarco is the name of the road. There is an extensive railway which separates *Fondazione*

Prada from the metro station which is indicated on the foundation's website as the right stop to take to reach the place. Walking from the station towards the foundation, the neighbourhood is not attractive, and the only things on the way are a Trattoria (old traditional Italian restaurant) and a number of Chinese shops.

"ugly area."

"pretty ugly, yes."

- D(FP) and P(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group -

Figure 10 - *Fondazione Prada*'s neighbourhood. The walk to reach the entrance (left) and the view of the railway from one of the *Fondazione*'s windows (right).

The metro is the most straightforward public transport to use to reach the foundation, especially if visitors are not from Milan and they arrive in the city by train at the central station. During the data collection for this project, Prada inaugurated another space which is still part of the foundation but is dedicated only to photography. This space is called *Osservatorio* (fig. 12) and is located in the heart of the city centre, in the most famous arcade in Milan, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele (fig. 11). It is at the 4th and 5th floor above the Prada store and near the Pasticceria Marchesi (part of the PradaGroup).

Figure 11 - *Galleria Vittorio Emanuele* in Milan city centre, where is located the *Osservatorio.*

During the interview with P(int1) and P(int2), it emerged that the space was part of a public bidding which the brand had won. Requirements for the firms involved was to offer a retail space together with a hospitality space, and cultural initiatives. The foundation considers the *Osservatorio* as a possible catalyst for tourists who are shopping in the arcade, where most of the products sold are luxury products. According to P(int1), the idea is that by visiting the *Osservatorio,* people might decide to reach also the main venue in Largo Isarco. A current promotional strategy, applied by the foundation to encourage this catalyst effect, is to make people pay for one ticket and have the possibility to visit both places. Although this strategy might be effective to bring people from a more central space to a location which is not on tourists' routes, it is interesting to note that also the *Osservatorio* entrance is quite hard to locate the first time visiting.
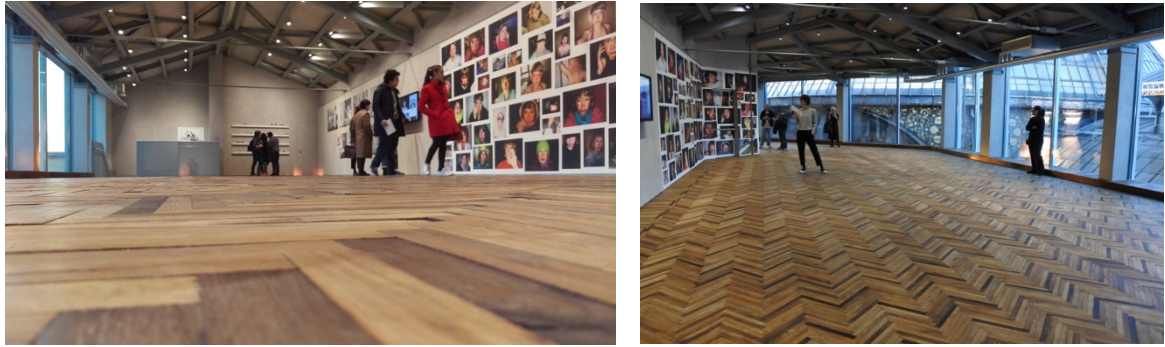
Figure 12 - Inside the *Osservatorio.*

At the time of the first visit at *Fondazione Prada*, immediately outside the metro station, and facing a junction, it has been challenging to orientate and find the way towards the entrance. Fundamental, also for all the participants, has been the help of Google Maps (a navigation system for mobile phones). During the focus group, it emerged that all participants encountered the same difficulties to reach the place. In particular, two of the participants discussed their frustration of discovery too late that the foundation had a parking space.

> *"we discovered after (the visit) that there was a car park."*
>
> *"we also discovered it after (the visit) [...] the most annoying thing about going to Milan is the parking."*
>
> - C(FP) and D(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group -

The second time, outside the metro station, there was a road sign reporting the name *Fondazione Prada* which indicates the direction to follow, and which was not there the first time, or maybe there was, unnoticed, as some of the participants confirmed. Some others noticed the sign and followed it. Along the road, there is, and always has been, another sign.

Gloomy weather, or sunshine, are giving two completely different aspects to both the neighbourhood and the entrance of the place. On the one hand, the foundation is looking like

"A squared grey fascist-style structure with a predominant black iron gate in an anonymous neighbourhood."

- Field notes from Fondazione Prada observation -

"Also our (day of visit) was very gloomy… give you a bit of that feeling of Germany, all grey… a bit Berlin. Do you know those palaces in Berlin where you can find in some artists that are working with iron and that look like gutter punks… a bit like that […] they (the buildings) are not occupied, they are given by the city."

- D(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group -

Figure 13 - *Fondazione Prada*'s entrance on a gloomy day.

On the other hand, the foundation could appear like a modern and innovative project to requalify an old distillery in an area which could be gentrified thanks also to this project.

"About venues, I was wondering if there is some specific idea of gentrification related to your choice to open the foundation here."

"This space in this neighbour has been a bit of a godsend. I mean, this was a venue that the Group bought several years ago and that was used on one side as a storage facility, on the other side as offices and showroom. Then, after a reorganisation of Milan's venues, this space was part unused. This coincided with the decision of providing the Fondazione Prada with a permanent venue, hence here we are"

- Interviewer and P(int1) from Fondazione Prada interview -

Figure 14 - *Fondazione Prada* courtyard on a sunny day. One of the *Fondazione*'s buildings reflects the main building where the reception and the ticket office are located (under the gold tower)

Another important aspect related to the ease of visiting the *Fondazione* is that participants complained of feeling lost once inside the gate, as there is no sign showing where to find the ticket office, or the reception. A guard walking on an upper deck, dressed all in black, is not an encouragement when seeking to ask for information. Most of the participants tried to find their way, while Q(FP) preferred to ask where to go. Even C(FP) stated that, although this was her second visit, she could not remember where the ticket office was, which made her feel even more frustrated than the others. Confusion and frustration were the frequent terms most used during this part of the conversation

According to what emerged during the interview with P(int1) and P(int2), and although the foundation has a declared intention of being a challenge for the visitor, confusion and frustration are feelings which they would like to avoid generating in the visitor. Their idea is of being different from other museums, by not providing a pre-determined path to follow, or signs and maps everywhere, instead they would like the audience to explore the structure and find their way to visit the exhibitions. It is a clear strategy which might be intriguing for some individuals, but could be difficult to understand and appreciate by people less oriented towards challenges, or people who do not see in the incapability of finding the toilet, a challenge.

"First of all, the public gets lost. That is something which you should absolutely never do.
You should take (the public) by hand, show him(/her) 500 arrows and never make him(/her) feel lost, inadequate for the context he(/she) is in.
So, what does Fondazione Prada? It said 'listen, visitor, contemporary art, the world, the fashion industry, it is not all sunshine and rainbow.
Come on! Switch on your mind and get in this amazing arena'.
You public need to make an effort and look around, read the space in which you are, and decide to talk to someone."

- P(int2) from Fondazione Prada interview -

Figure 15 - Another view of the *Fondazione*'s courtyard.

As above mentioned, *Fondazione Prada* interviewees declared that one of the aims of the *Fondazione* is to challenge the public, and not to make the public feel frustrated. Yet, during the focus group, as above mentioned, frustration was the term used by all participants when describing how they felt while trying to locate and then visit the foundation. Difficulties in finding the reception, challenges in finding the bathroom, some of them did not know or see that there was a bar inside the venue, and all felt tired by exploring such an extended surface. According to the interview with P(int1) and P(int2), there are 11.000 square meters of exhibition space, comprehensive of 10 different buildings, one of which was finished and inaugurated in April 2018 and is hosting a restaurant.

During the interview, it emerged that the availability of a vast space, and ten buildings which are all designed in different shapes and with different scopes, is giving the foundation the opportunity to explore different kinds of arts, from cinema to performative arts. However, unless being a frequent visitor, who can enjoy a part of the foundation at the time, such as night openings for film projections and filmmaker talks, it is hard to appreciate the space without feeling lost and tired after a few hours of visiting.

> *"I jotted on the guidance paper that I wasn't able to get in. I've asked three different people 'go there', 'go that way', 'go over there' and in the end, I was in the bar (not the ticket office)."*
>
> *"It is very bed located in Milan, and the path to follow wasn't clear. Any time you get out a building you didn't know where you were or where to go… Any time I got out in the main square, I said: 'and know what?'."*
>
> *- Q(FP) and C(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group –*

In all *Fondazione* there is no reference to the fashion brand, anywhere. The only two things which might recall the brand are: its name; and this concept of challenging the visitors and urging them to leave their comfort zone, as expressed during Prada's interview. However, the latter might be clear only for a person with an in-depth knowledge of the brand.

> *"(Prada delivers) fashion collections which are inspired by some complex concept… obviously, there is a huge coherence with the foundation's activity […] it has to be challenging for the visitor […] (the foundation is a) strengthening of some fundamental values of the brand which are coherent with our (the foundation) activities. […] (For Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli) art is a passion, fashion is a job."*
>
> *- P(int1) from Fondazione Prada interview –*

6.1.2.1.2 FONDATION LOUIS VUITTON

Louis Vuitton appears as quite the opposite of Prada, as a brand and as a foundation. *Fondation Louis Vuitton* is easier to find and easier to visit, even the art is easier to understand. Not in the centre of Paris, but located near the Champs Elysees, in the east

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side of the city, in one the most famous parks of Paris, and in one of the wealthiest neighbours, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* looks very different than *Fondazione Prada*. It is possible to reach the place by car, by metro, and there is a mini-bus that brings visitors directly from the *Charles De Gaulle* airport.

On the platforms' walls of the metro station, it is already possible to notice signs for directions, and again outside the station. There are a couple of cafés at the corner, and then to reach the foundation, there is a walk to take in a residential area which is adjacent the *Bois de Boulogne* park (the second largest park in Paris). Part of the foundation lies in a garden called *Le Jardin De L'acclimatation*, which is part of the *Bois de Boulogne* park. These gardens are share owned by the LVMH group, and apparently, they will be part of another project of the French Group soon.

Once in front of the structure, the first impression is entirely different than the first impression generated by *Fondazione Prada*. *Fondation Louis Vuitton* is hosted in a big structure made of glass, and which welcomes the visitor with a white and silver polished entrance. Figure 16 shows the front of the foundation. In the specific period when this picture was taken, the structure was covered with coloured panels, as part of an art installation called "Observatory of Light" by Daniel Buren (Morby, 2016).

Figure 16 - *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s front. The coloured panels over the structure are part of Daniel Buren's installation "Observatory of Light".

Above the ticket office, there is a visible silver 3D logo of Louis Vuitton. There are security checks at the entrance, in airport-style, and two different queues for tickets (to buy, online reservation). It is impossible to miss the entrance (fig. 17), or being confused on where to go. In the first period since the opening, the security controls were located immediately after the door, and they were simpler by consisting of a person checking the bag with a portable metal detector. More recently, and probably due to terrorists attached happened in the city, they decided to install a proper security check before the ticket office, which is very similar to an airport security check. This level of security seems excessive and gives the idea of being more of a strategy to appear like a sensitive target in Paris. It seems excessive, especially if compared to *Fondazione Prada* which has no controls at all, and especially if considered how little the foundation is known in comparison to other places, such as the *Louvre* or the *Tour Eiffel*.

Figure 17 - *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s entrance.

F(FLV) visited the place during a raining morning. She complained that the footpath in the direction of the foundation was muddy, and noticed that all people in the queue had dirty shoes. V(FLV) complained that the park surrounding the foundation is not very well

preserved, a little wild, especially compared to English parks, which she loves particularly. These two comments implied the idea that, by going to visit a place owned by a luxury brand, people expect a sort of perfection and attention to details, not muddy with wild grass, even though both the park and the pathway are probably not Louis Vuitton's properties. It is perhaps to rectify this impression that when the participants visited the foundation, they were provided with an umbrella while queuing. A small attention for the consumer which has been added recently, and which was not applied by the brand during the participant observation exercises.

Another element, noted by the participants while approaching the venue, was the lack of cafes and restaurants in the area except for a couple, characteristic which *Fondation Louis Vuitton* is sharing with *Fondazione Prada*. The reason why *Fondation Louis Vuitton* participants noticed this lack might be related to the fact that they were tourists of the city at that time, some of them were visiting Paris for the first time. They were tourists who were visiting a museum at lunchtime and had the impression that eating in the restaurant of the foundation could have been very expensive. The Prada's participants instead were not tourists in Milan but knew the city quite well; they went to visit the foundation only to participate to the exercise, and then left the city; and moreover, they visited the foundation not at lunchtime.

It notable that, except for the big logo at the entrance, the restaurant is showing the only other element which links the foundation to the main brand. Indeed, on one of the walls at the entrance of the restaurant, there are four old monogrammed trunks, a distinctive mark of the brand. The restaurant service might be deemed as another opportunity to provide a different brand experience, but most of the participants did not notice it. Some of the participants stated that by seeing a queue forming in the hall to enter what they know only now to be the restaurant, they thought that that was the queue for collecting audio-guides.

"considering how many people get in that place every day, it is so strange that outside there is no café, bistro, and even inside it is complicated to find something to eat."

- B(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"I noticed that there was a kind of restaurant inside because there was a queue."

- M(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"Yes, right… there was a restaurant."

- L(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"But is very hidden. There are walls in front, and you can't understand that is a restaurant."

- M(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"Where did you see a restaurant?"

- V(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"Near the exit. There is almost nothing... we look on TripAdvisor, and the nearest restaurant was far more than 15 minutes by foot."

- B(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"Well, there is Burger King which is where we went. But still, you need to go out and walk."

- M(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group –

"There is one just outside the metro station."

- The Facilitator from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"Yes, but it has bad reviews."

- B(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -
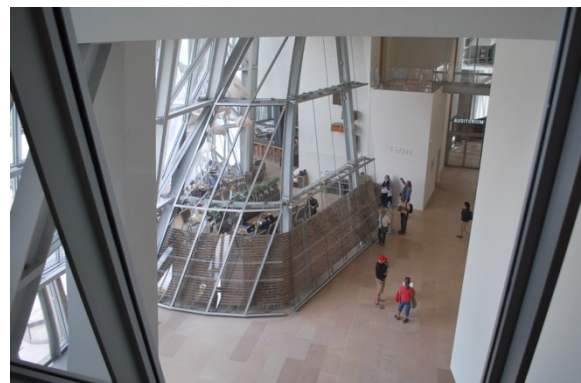
Figure 18 – The queue to enter the *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s restaurant (left). The restaurant "Le Frank" (right).

Same concept, an art foundation, but a very different development. *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* not only have two structures which are looking totally different, but they are also in two neighbourhoods which appear to be entirely at the opposite. They are both located in two of the fashion capitals of the world, as mentioned in section 2.6.2, which happen to be also the places of origin of the fashion brands. Yet, their approaches towards the visitor are different. Louis Vuitton has some clear element which enables anyone to recall the brand, such as the trunks; while Prada makes several efforts to differentiate the foundation from the brand, although it allows some associations for those people who genuinely know the brand. One is easy and does not create any significant contrast in feelings, while the other generates confusion, challenges, and frustration.

However, regardless these differences, there is one main thing which the two places have in common, and which all the participants particularly appreciated, and this is the distinctive and particularly curated design of the structure. In both cases the participants were impressed by the buildings which are hosting the foundations: *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and its terraces from where you can see the *Tour Eiffel*; *Fondazione Prada* and its bathroom which appears unrelated to the rest of the structure, and which one of the participants stated looking like

"cyber-punk from the 80s."

- M(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group –
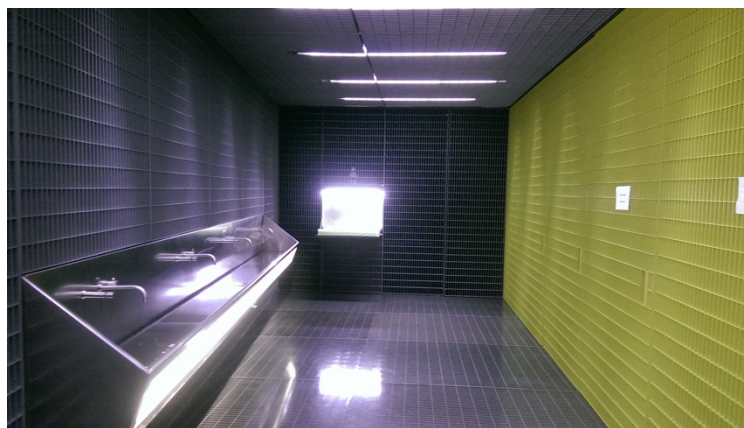
Figure 19 - *Fondazione Prada*'s bathroom.

The white and polished hall of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and its particular front fountain makes the structure appear like a sailing boat; the Bar Luce in *Fondazione Prada* is almost more famous than the foundation itself, because it was designed by the filmmaker Wes Anderson.

"It is clear there is a huge investment behind the place. There is such attention to details."

- M(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"Because is Fondazione Prada, I expected a very curated and luxury environment, and so it was."

- D(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group -

As well as for the flagship store, the work of star-architects, in designing the buildings which are hosting the two foundations, is strongly influencing people's experience, and their opinions towards the foundations. Immediately after the opening, Louis Vuitton decided to host a fashion show outside the foundation, probably due to the positive comments from public and media received by the building. A decision that is not easing the separation between the brand and the foundation. Figure 20 shows celebrities, and Louis Vuitton's endorsers, who were invited to attend the show organised in the foundation. It is interesting to note that all are wearing Louis Vuitton products.

Figure 20 - Celebrities (and endorsers) at the Louis Vuitton's Spring 2015 show, which was organised at *Fondation Louis Vuitton*. Pictures were taken in front of the pool which is located on the ground -1 of the *Fondation*. From the left: Jennifer Connelly, Selena Gomez, Michelle Williams (Louis Vuitton, 2015).

Finally, during this part of the analysis, some intangible aspects have been considered as elements of the place, and will be discussed in the next sections. In section 2.3.2, the importance of social distance as an intangible feature of the flagship store was discussed. Similarly, there are critical intangible elements present also in a museum environment, such as inclusivity and accessibility. For this reason, it was a requirement for the participant to ask for information regarding anything they preferred. This task aimed to evaluate peoples' perception of the foundations' personnel and of their availability to help the visitors.

Generally, in museums, the ability of attendants to engage with the public by providing information, and the informative material released during the visits, are deemed a first important step towards inclusion. Through these two simple instruments museums are able to bring people closer to the elitist world of art. Considering that the foundations are defining themselves as museums, and in the spirit of assessing people's experience of the foundations, this project considered pivotal to evaluating the existence, the quality, and the appreciation by the public of the aspects mentioned above.

6.1.2.3   ATTENDANTS

Both focus groups considered the foundations' attendants as kind, gentle, and helpful. All wearing black, some more prepared than others to answer, but all very well trained to address any curiosity the participants had. In *Fondation Louis Vuitton* there are two types of personnel who walk the rooms: one is wearing a black suit with a white shirt and a red tie; the other is dressed all in black with a badge pinned on the jacket which shows a big question mark (first two visits) or a light-blue badge pinned on the jacket (all the other visits). The difference between the two is that the first is a security guard, while the second is an attendant who people can ask for information related to artists, artworks, and even the place. In section 6.1.4.2, it is mentioned that the participants were confused with regards to the right person to ask for information when these two figures were not in the same room; while in *Fondazione Prada*, there were only attendants in the rooms. They were either careful that people do not go too close to artworks, if not permitted; and they give explanations regarding the exhibitions.

Notably, as for the security check at the entrance, also in this case, *Fondazione Prada* looks more 'relaxed' towards security problems. The attendants in the room sometimes

were talking with each other, and the visitor has the feeling that, by asking for information, he/she might disturb their conversations. However, due to the scarcity of public for most of the days, it is comprehensible that they would talk to each other. As in *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, also *Fondazione Prada* attendants are all dressed in black. During the interview with P(int1) and P(int2), P(int2) said that they have approximately 100 attendants who work at the foundation. These employees are selected based on their specialisations, not only art related but also history, architecture, or geography. Moreover, all the attendants are trained directly by *Fondazione Prada* to ensure a high level of preparation, and the quality of the service provided.

"I think that the attendant I met was a less prepared than yours."

- Q(FP) talking with D(FP) who has just explained an artwork they both asked for information, from Fondazione Prada focus group -

"In any room, there is someone ready to tell you about the exhibitions. I ask the first girl I meet and she's delighted to explain to me the artist's history and the meaning of some piece of work. She also tells me to ask around because they're there for that. To help the public to know more."

- Field notes from Fondazione Prada observation -

Figure 21 - Attendants in *Fondazione Prada*, during William Copley exhibition.

In further sections dedicated to public behaviour and the impact of the experience, it is reported that observation allowed to notice that people tend to not ask for information while visiting; or, as emerged from the focus groups, they do not know they can. The social distance created by the salespersons in a flagship store can easily be compared to the 'fear' that people have to ask for explanations regarding the art. They perceive the art world as an elitist world. As people do not enter in flagship stores fearing to be judged by their dress, or by their inability to afford the luxury product; similarly, people think that by asking information regarding a piece of art they are admitting a level of ignorance and inadequacy. This is probably the reason why one of the attendants, during the *Fondazione Prada* observation exercise, actively encouraged the researcher to ask her or her colleagues for information, highlighting that that was their reason to be there. It appeared as she was implying that commonly people were not used to asking anything to them.

As previously mentioned, these employees are a vital element to guarantee the public with the first level of access to the art, and to new knowledge. However, because some people, as said, do not like or know that they can ask, the second crucial factor to encourage the public to enjoy the visit, and to guarantee a first access to the arts, is to provide an adequate number of informative materials, such as maps, brochures, and informative tags. Next section is analysing this aspect.

6.1.2.4   INFORMATIVE MATERIALS

> *"Listening to conversations around me… that woman is clearly looking for a tag, a name, some information… the man with her looks disappointed... a second man arrives and points a wall… 'the tags are there'… the woman now looks even more disappointed by the fact that there are tags and they are far from the pieces of art, than by the lack of them."*
>
> *- Field notes from Fondation Louis Vuitton observation -*

What is reported in this quote, also emerged during one of the focus group discussions. Both *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* are using tags to provide small details of any piece of work. During the conversation with the *Fondation Louis Vuitton*

group, V(FLV) complained, for example, that the tags were too far from the paintings and they were difficult to understand. According to her, when there is more than one sculpture or painting in the same corner, and tags are far away from the artworks, it is more difficult to understand which painting the specific tag refers to. M(FLV), on the contrary, appreciated that the tags were far from the paintings. He considered that in this way, anyone could read the tag without preventing others from seeing the painting. Moreover, for most of the exhibitions, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* provides long written explanations on the walls at the beginning of any floor, or at the beginning of each room, if the main theme changes (fig. 22 and 23). These explanations normally contextualise the central theme of a storey, or a room, and give some information with regards to a specific period or artist.
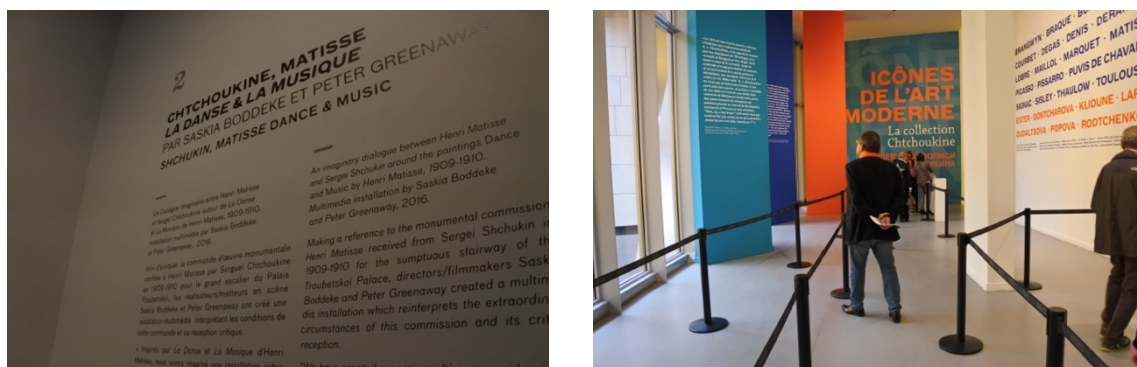
Figure 22 - Description of the rooms written on some of the walls of *Fondation Louis Vuitton*.

On the one hand*, Fondation Louis Vuitton* participants did notice the writings on the walls, but admitted that after a few lines they stopped reading. The participants claimed that they are not interested in reading lengthy explanations, as well as are not interested in long guided tours. They would prefer short tours which can give them basic information to understand a room, or a floor. Fast and Immediate. On the other hand, *Fondazione Prada* participants highlighted the lack of these kinds of writings during their visit. Figure 24 shows one of the few walls explanations in *Fondazione Prada* provided for an exhibition which was ended when the participants visited the foundation.

Figure 23 - *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s walls with explanations of the rooms' theme.

The participants stated that they are used to seeing those walls in other museums and, for the type of art which *Fondazione Prada* shows which was considered by the participants quite challenging, they were expecting to see them, and almost felt the need for those explanations. This need probably derives also from the lack of details in the brochures provided. This lack sometimes is justified by the attendants as a lack of explanation offered by the artist, hence the foundation does not want to speculate with regards to the meaning and prefers to allow freedom of interpretation for the public. However, explanations of the historical context, or of the artist's life, might facilitate the public's interpretation, as some participants highlighted. On the contrary, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* provides brochures full of content and explanations.
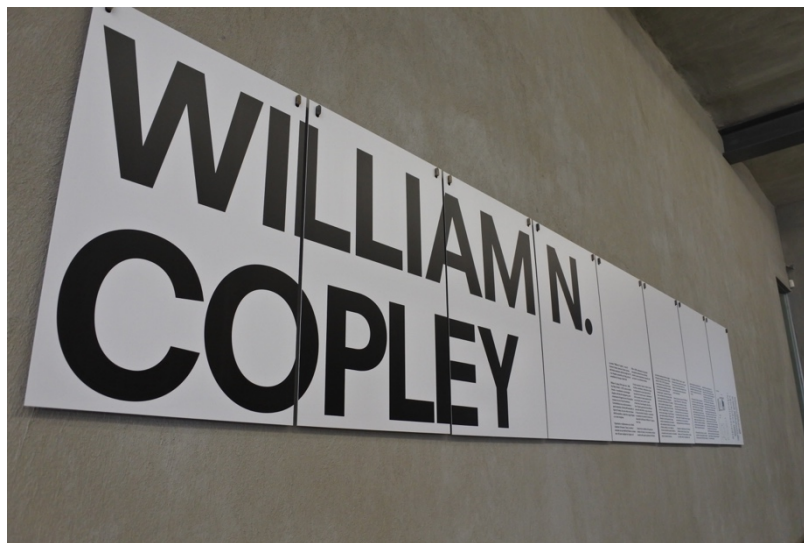

Figure 24 - Brief explanation on *Fondazione Prada*'s wall before entering William Copley's rooms

During the observation exercise, it was noticed that a very detailed and useful brochure given at the entrance of a room which was present one day, had disappeared the day after. The day before, the number of visitors was minimal, it was a Friday morning, and there was a small stand where it was possible to collect this brochure containing explanations in different languages. The day after, a Saturday morning, with a more significant number of visitors, not only had the brochure disappeared, but also the stand. It was not clear if that depends on an unexpected footfall, or scarcity in printing; however, it was a disappointment not to find that piece of information again.

Finally, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* provides an app for visitors to use as an audio-guide, and to gather some more information regarding the 'behind the scene' of a specific exhibition (fig. 25). Participants at the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* hardly noticed the existence of the app. The app is advertised in the brochure which is given at the entrance and which contains the main map of the building. However, the specifications with regards to the app are at the bottom of the brochure, and they are easy to miss in the other writings. L(FLV) noticed an advert on the wall, noticed that there was free Wi-Fi to download the app on the mobile, he downloaded it, but then for lack of interest, he did not use it. *Fondation Louis Vuitton* sometimes even provides tablets for visitors who want to use the app. B(FLV) did not even notice that there was free Wi-Fi. While discussing with the *Fondazione Prada* participants, the idea of an app for visiting the place generates a good discussion on how *Fondazione* and the public could really benefit from the app, and how some specific interactive content would increase the quality of the experience at *Fondazione Prada*, and make it better than a number of other museums' experiences.

Figure 25 - Screenshot of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* mobile application from Google Play.

People should know that they can rely on explanations to increase or improve their knowledge towards the art. A piece of paper, or a person, are two equally valuable means to provide information, according to the public's preferences for human interactions. Although both foundations are mostly following the basal rules for brochures and attendants' availability, *Fondazione Prada* is maintaining the level of challenge previously mentioned, also with regards to providing information to the public. This continuous challenge sometimes frustrates the public, as emerged from the discussion, although the brand's intentions are not of frustrating its audience.

The neighbouring, the surroundings, the building, the availability of information, every tangible and intangible aspect encountered during the visits was recalling, overtly or not, the characteristics of the fashion brands' image and identity. As previously said, it might be ineffective to continue attempting to distinguish the fashion brand from the foundation, instead of exploiting the brand to promote the foundation, and the foundation as a prompt for the brand, its image, and its brand values.

> *"They (Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli) actively participate in the selection and definition of the projects. They both have operative roles [...] They attend meetings where we decide the exhibitions' content [...] Ms. Prada selecst the invitation, or read or the writing materials which then would be in the exhibition or send to the press."*
>
> *- P(int1) from Fondazione Prada interview -*

6.1.3   BEHAVIOUR

The reason for analysing the data by considering the audience for its characteristics and behaviours is twofold. First, through participant observation, it had been noticed a few patterns and common attitudes among the audience. Hence, investigating if the participants' behaviours and attitudes were coherent with what was observed, has been considered of some interest. The second reason derives from the review of the literature. As explained in section 2.3.2, the flagship store has to follow some specific 'rules', such as maintaining a level of social distance from the consumer. Hence, has been considered relevant to verify if this kind of attitude was present also in the foundations. Especially,

in light of the inclusive nature which museums and art galleries should show; and considering the foundations' mission, as reported at the beginning of the Introduction chapter.

6.1.3.1   ASKING FOR INFORMATION

As shown in Appendix 1, one of the main tasks for the participants was to ask for at least one piece of information with regards to an artist or a specific piece of art of their choice. The need for this task derived from the observation exercise where it was noticed that most of the public was not asking anything to the attendants; and before starting this project, even the observer was not aware of this possibility of asking for information. As previously mentioned, providing information to the public should be one of the first steps a museum takes in consideration of being inclusive. Participants admitted to having asked for information only because it was required by their tasks. Furthermore, they declared to be not interested in asking for more than what required, because none of the art pieces exhibited further captured their attention, except for the one they asked for. However, a positive note emerged from both focus groups, and is that attendants were considered very kind and prepared. B(FLV), who is not a frequent visitor of museums and galleries, said that when he does, is used to ask for explanations only if there is something which in his opinion is really worth asking.

"[…] yes, if the thing (piece of art) is so absurd that I don't get why is art, yes (I ask)."

- B(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

All other participants are not used to asking. Generally, because on the rare occasions in which they did visit exhibitions, these were self-explanatory, or show less complicated pieces of art (referring to *Fondazione Prada*). Only D(FP) during his exercise asked more than once for information, and he is a person who generally attends contemporary art museums and exhibitions. He admitted that compared to other contemporary art museums, the complexity of the pieces exposed in *Fondazione Prada* would have probably required to ask information for all of them. Moreover, the informative material provided by the foundation was limited, giving mainly the name of the authors and the

title of the artworks but nothing more. This aspect has been analysed in the previous section, and as reported, has to be considered a critical negative element in the perspective of an inclusive strategy.

Evaluating how the participants relate to the attendants is essential in the context of the level of social distance which luxury brands strive to maintain with their customers, as explained in section 2.3.2. As mentioned in section 6.1.2.3, having to ask for information, together with the idea that the attendant has a more profound knowledge on the subject, has generated in the participants the same feeling of distance which the brand instils in its stores; although this kind of feeling might also be perceived in other museums. Moreover, as explained in section 6.1.1.1, art is considered by most of the participants as aimed at an elite, as well as luxury fashion. Hence, the perceived distance between the visitor and the attendant has enhanced the idea of art being exclusive. In the attempt to diminish this distance, museums and galleries have started to implement public engagement and educational activities.

These kinds of activities, and the benefits which derive from them, are discussed in section 6.3, in the spirit of evaluating how the foundations could improve their inclusivity. As a confirmation of the importance which clear explanations and real inclusivity might have for the public, participants stated that being able to understand a piece of art due to the explanations retrieved, made them feel good. Even if asking for information cannot be considered as a public engagement activity, providing information is a tool which museums use to guarantee the first level of access to the arts.

6.1.3.2   PICTURES AND SHARING

Sharing the experience online with others, or taking pictures, is another aspect of public behaviour deemed significant for this study. Especially, as discussed in section 2.4, in the light of a possible generation of word of mouth; hence, of spontaneous, free, and perceived more authentic promotion for the foundations. During all of the visits, the participants voluntarily took pictures and videos of their experience, even if in a small quantity. The main subject of their pictures was the outside of the venue, even if, in both foundations, they were allowed to take photos inside of most of the rooms. M(FP) and P(FP) said to have shared a couple of pictures on social media, choosing Instagram as the preferred one. M(FLV) created an Instagram story, a very utilised feature of

Instagram which consists of a concise content to share in a dedicated section of the personal page, which can be altered with filters and stickers, and lasts for only 24 hours. Finally, C(FP) admitted that the first time she visited *Fondazione Prada*, there was a particular piece of art which she considered perfect for sharing on her Instagram feeds. It was located in a hangar-like room, and it was composed of 8 ceiling-high bronze statues, each one 'wearing' a particular fashion item, items which during the months have changed, from a hat made by books to a big red shoe, from a huge pink bow to a crinoline (Fig. 26). In this second visit, according to C(FP), there was nothing worth sharing.

"(the installation of statues) was definitely 'Instagrammable'."

- C(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group,
meaning something that is worth publishing on Instagram -

Figure 26 – The sculptures mentioned by C(FP) ("The Giacometti Variation" - John Baldessari). Her photo shared on Instagram during her 1st visit (left). The Observer's picture (right).

An impressive and peculiar building is an excellent tool to capture visitors' attention and facilitate some Electronic Word of Mouth on social media. Yet, as emerged from the discussions with the participants, not only a fancy building, but also some small curiosities, might influence peoples' decisions to share their experiences. Examples are: a pinball in the *Fondazione Prada* café *Bar Luce* which recalls the main character of Wes

Anderson's "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou" (fig. 27); or a pile of candies exhibited in *Fondation Louis Vuitton*.

Figure 27 - Pinball mentioned by D(FP) and which is located inside *Bar Luce* at *Fondazione Prada*.
D(FP)'s picture, which he shared on Instagram.

In an increasing number of cultural institutions, social media have started to gain importance and to be used as a natural tool for engaging with people and promote the place. Since the advent of social media, people are more and more obsessed with sharing any aspect of their life, as mentioned in section 2.2.1. There is a sort of hidden rule, especially among Millennials, that an experience not shared is an experience not lived. The continuous need for documenting anything aims to demonstrate to the 'followers' that the life lived is better than theirs, that the experiences enjoyed are better than theirs. As reported in the literature review, social media are more and more shaping the consumer culture, and brands are continuing to invest in digital innovations inside and outside the flagship store.

As previously mentioned, the foundations are slowly improving their use of social media as promotional tools, but they would be advised to also implement the use of these tools

as part of the visitor's experience. Social media are fundamental in the perspective of encouraging people to share their experiences, to stimulate a sense of community, and for the brand to gain free publicity. As widely recognised, EWOM is indeed a potent tool for promotion and is a free tool. As for the original Word of Mouth, also EWOM is considered by people to be more authentic than any other form of corporate-driven advertisement (Harmeling et al., 2017; Subramanian, 2018).

6.1.3.3   AUDIENCE CHARACTERISTICS

Another noteworthy observation is related to the kind of people who, on different occasions, were part of the audience of the two foundations. As for the structures and the art exhibited, also the audience was very different between *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*. At *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, most of the audience was generally French, although on different days there were different audiences, as it is normal to expect in any museum. During the collaboration with the Pushkin Museum, it was possible to spot some Russian people in the public. On Friday morning, it was full of couples of different ages, but generally over their 40s. All very well dressed, women wearing furry coats, flashy jewels, and some even carrying Louis Vuitton bags. On the Wednesday morning, before the foundation opening hours, there were three groups of students exiting the building.

Figure 28 - Lady walking towards *Fondation Louis Vuitton* carrying a Louis Vuitton bag.

It is plausible that the foundation prefers to conduct educational activities before the public enter the space. On the Saturday at lunchtime, a large group of Japanese tourists arrived by bus and stopped in front of the entrance, mainly women, mainly over their 50s. Groups of women are frequent to notice, and they are generally over their 50s or 60s. For all the visits, during the observation exercise, there has always been a queue to enter. There are usually many visitors but, as previously reported, there are also security checks slowing down the procedure to enter, especially when two unrelated couples (two women and two men) over their 60s are trying to enter the place with a Swiss Army knife each. The second reason for queues, is due to a not-perfectly-organised way of managing the entrance according to the kinds of tickets – to buy or already booked online.

Figure 29 - Queue to enter *Fondation Louis Vuitton.*

The 'mainstream' kind of art usually exhibited at *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, such as the Van Gogh, the Monet, and the Picasso, might be a reason for an older audience. Noteworthy, the 16th Arrondissement in Paris is one of the wealthiest districts in France for average household income. It is the district where the *Tour Eiffel* is, and other museums such as the *Palais de Tokyo* are. It is known for prestigious schools and gorgeous buildings with art nouveau style entrances. Moreover, the district is mostly populated by women, and the average age of its inhabitants is 43 years old. However,

more than 35% of the women are over 55 years old – dated 2014 (Srl, 2014). It might be a coincidence, but the audience of the foundation typically mirrors these characteristics. On the contrary, *Fondazione Prada* most of the time seems desert. Maybe because it is a very big structure, as previously reported, or perhaps because there is no security check slowing down the entrance to the building, but it always looks empty. During the first visit, a French family was walking from the metro station towards the place, and that was the only time someone was heading towards the foundation together with the observer. Generally, the visitors are Italians, probably due to the distance from the city centre and the lack of promotion of the place, as discussed in section 6.1.1.5. There are no particular characteristics in the way people are dressed which might capture the eye. The atmosphere appears more relaxed and less posh than at *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, it seems less of a catwalk and more of a cultural moment. There is no evidence to sustain that Prada consumers are or are not visiting the place, yet, the less posh atmosphere is reflecting part of the brand image.

Usually, it is possible to notice some small groups of young visitors (3 or 4 people), around their 20s. Potentially, the younger age in comparison to *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, might be due to one of the few public engagement activities which *Fondazione Prada* is carrying, and this particular emerged during the interview with P(int1) and P(int2). Asking for characteristics of their audience, the answer was that they have no target consumer because a museum is for everybody, and it will be against their nature and scope to target a specific audience. This answer was not a surprise, almost what expected from a cultural institution.

However, continuing the interview, they started describing educational activities which the foundation is carrying around Milan. Particularly, the foundation runs activities addressing university students in different universities. Usually, *Fondazione Prada* organises seminars in Milan's universities which are tailored according to the particular course they are invited to, for example for a media and communication course, they send a member of the foundation's media office to talk with the students and describe the kind of job required from that office in that specific industry. While P(int1) was describing these activities, both P(int1) and P(int2) admitted that these seminars could be the reason of attraction for a younger audience. For the sake of completeness, they also highlighted

that these were empirical data; at that time, they were just starting to organise a survey of their audience.

A final consideration regarding the characteristics, and differences, of the two audiences, is that regardless the brands' features or the art exhibited, there is a big difference also between Milan and Paris as cities. Although both are very famous cities, and both are vital cities for the fashion industry, the kinds of tourists who are normally attracted by Paris might be potentially different than the tourists in Milan. Both cities are renowned shopping destinations, with the most prestigious brands and the most impressive retail stores. However, Paris offers many landmarks which Milan does not have. Tourists in Italy are generally looking for history and museums, and might be more attracted to Florence and Rome, than Milan. This is a city which in Italy, and around the world, is considered to be the commercial capital of the country; although it is very rich of history, this is an aspect which has never been intensely exploited by the city. As previously mentioned, there are not many non-Italian tourists at *Fondazione Prada*, a fact which the foundation probably has noticed, and one of the reasons for investing in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele space, as reported in section 6.1.2.1.1.

"We'd like the place (Osservatorio in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele) to be an incentive for visitors who decide maybe to start visiting the Galleria, obviously also for access reasons both logistics and of content, to then come over here (the foundation)"

- P(int1) from Fondazione Prada interview -

6.1.3.4   STROLLING AROUND

During the first visit at *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, a few months after the opening, most of the visitors were noticed for sitting and walking on the terraces outside, rather than looking at the collection exhibited inside. The building, as mentioned, is a great attraction, and at that moment with only the foundation's private collection displayed, was probably the main one. It was possible to hear passionate people explaining to their friends the architectural structure, the details of the design, the way every component is fundamental to generate that final effect of amazement. Before the opening, the building was the most advertised thing on newspapers, and even if still today many people are

unaware of the nature of *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, the Frank Gehry's design is already quite popular. Architects and enthusiasts were attracted by the building, although the part of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* dedicated to the architectural project is usually with no visitors. It is not only for the structure that the terraces have always been crowded; from there, there is a unique view on the *Tour Eiffel*, the *Grande Arche de la Défense*, and Paris skyscrapers. The sun and the warm weather are another reason for people to spend time on the terraces, and in the *Jardin De L'acclimatation* immediately outside the foundation.

Figure 30 - Views from *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s terraces.
The *Tour Eiffel* (left) and the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* (right).

During another visit, while an impressionists' exhibition was held, there were too many people to be able to move quietly around the rooms, sometimes impossible to enter in a room or queues to enter, sometimes too crowded to see the artworks. Where there were the most famous paintings, groups of people were gathering: in front of Cezanne's "Man Smoking a Pipe", or Van Gogh's "Portrait of Dr. Felix Rey", or Monet's "Luncheon on the Grass". It appeared like most of the public were gathering in front of these paintings, not because they are famous – they are impossible to see unless already in the crowd – but because there is a crowd, and this generates curiosity on why there is a crowd.

During the focus group, some of the participants clearly confirmed this thought, saying that they were very attracted towards a corner in the foundation because there were a lot of people, and without knowing why people were assembling in that particular point. The crowd attracted the participants, and the crowd's behaviour generated curiosity in the

participants. For example, in one of the most crowded points in the foundation, there was an installation with a pile of candies (fig. 31 – section 6.1.4.2), some of the participants were attracted by the assembling of a crowd around this artwork. Moreover, by observing people who were taking some of the exhibited candies, the participants noticed a sign near the artwork which was encouraging the public to take the candies. Finally, motivated by curiosity, some of the participants decided to ask one of the attendants to explain the installation and the reason why they were allowed to take the candies. Details with regards to this specific explanation, and its effects on the participants, are provided in section 6.1.4.2.

With regards to attendants and audience behaviour, in those limited cases in which someone was asking something, it could have been about anything. Someone asked about a specific painting or sculpture, and listened very carefully to the explanation provided, as some of the participants did and was able to report detailed descriptions during the focus group. However, one of the most frequent questions which were possible to hear during the visit was:

"Excuse me, could you please tell me where the bathroom is?"

- Field notes from Fondation Louis Vuitton observation -

Another common behaviour noticed in both the foundations regards people and their smartphones. As previously mentioned, taking pictures, and sharing them on social media, is the normality nowadays. Hence, it was not a surprise noticing a lot of people taking pictures, navigating Instagram and Facebook, writing on WhatsApp. Notably, a number of them were not only photographing paintings and sculptures, but also tags and descriptions, in a sort of archival attitude towards the exhibition. For most of the visits the places were very silent, as often happens in museums, almost to show some kind of respect towards the art and the other visitors. During one of the visits at *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, there was a curious man wearing a red robe. He was impossible not to notice him, not only for the unique selection of his outfit, but also because he was the only one, together with the observer, to take notes on a small notebook, room by room as he was studying the situation.

"I tried to take part in the micro-guides, short tours which take place floor by floor every half an hour, and I discovered that they are only in French. What a disappointment.
An international brand, in one of the most famous cities in the world. They provide all the informative material in English, and these are only in French? I can feel all their French national pride here, now... something good, but just for us.
I'm leaving the spot when a 60 years old lady who was there waiting and followed what just happened starts to talk to me: 'Don't you speak French?' 'No, madam, sorry, only Italian and English' 'Oh, well, you don't need this, you just need your eyes'
... ah, thanks. Why are you there, then?"

- Field notes from Fondation Louis Vuitton observation -

The most the observer was reaching upper floors in *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, the less were the people present. It was possible to notice that following the path indicated for the exhibition, and reaching the first floor, and then the second, more and more people were sitting on benches, chairs, and a sofa. It was possible to hear people complaining that the seats on the lower floors were too crowded, people were complaining of being tired. During the visits in *Fondazione Prada*, due to a constant smaller number of visitors, it was not possible to analyse the public in such details, as instead, it was possible in *Fondation Louis Vuitton*. However, significant differences emerged even with a smaller crowd.

"I asked info to an attendant, and near me, I see a guy who is listening to the answer I'm receiving, even if he is not approaching the attendant or me. In the room after, I see the same guy, he is now asking another attendant for information. I've got the feeling that he is doing it because he saw me doing it."

- Field notes from Fondazione Prada observation -

During the interview in *Fondazione Prada*, it emerged that the foundation is organised – space and exhibitions – to 'force' people to explore and ask questions, although the intention is not to frustrate the visitor. In the previous section, has been analysed how in reality all of the participants considered this way of organising the foundation frustrating and extreme. The idea of challenging the public in principle is clever and stimulating.

However, it seems that something is missing in conveying this message to the public. The foundation and the public are not speaking the same language, or maybe the way the foundation is presented to the public makes the message unclear.

A common topic emerged from both the focus groups regarded the interaction with the art. The part of the exhibition most remembered and most enjoyed during *Fondation Louis Vuitton* exercise was the one where the participants were allowed to interact with the piece of art. A pile of candies which is possible to take, sitting in the middle of a set of speakers which is reproducing a choir, video games consoles to play with. In *Fondazione Prada*, even if there was no interactive piece of art, the participants clearly said that they would have appreciated something more interactive.

6.1.3.5   SUMMARY

There is a parallelism worth noticing between the interaction with the art and the commercial environment. In the last, consumers are more and more interested in contributing to the brands, its productions, its communications; they want to be part of the brand. In the foundations, being an observer is not enough for visitors anymore. They want to interact with a piece of art, they want to create, they want to know more, they want to share their experiences, and they want everything to be fast. This might derive from the kind of society we are leaving in. Everything is fast, interactive, customisable, personal, shareable, 'Instagrammable', and consumable. People want to experience and to consume, being that a product or a piece of art, and this might be one of the reasons why participants declared that they would prefer to do something during the visit instead of only looking at the art.

6.1.4   IMPACT

This section analyses the most important theme in the context of evaluating peoples' experience of the foundations as a transformative experience. As reported in Chapter 3, an experience to be transformative has to generate a long-lasting impact. Furthermore, the experience has to affect peoples' perception of themselves, and this effect can have different forms, from new knowledge acquired, to a feeling of renewal or increased self-awareness. As a consequence, the analysis reported in the next sections is organised based on these subthemes:

- the effect of visiting the foundations in comparison to visiting other museums and art galleries;
- the impact of receiving explanations with regards to specific pieces of art or artists;
- the eventuality of having gained new knowledge from the visit;
- the impressions on the overall experience analysed as the desire of revisiting;
- the way in which (if) the participants have talked to others with regards to their experience.

As shown in Appendix 1, one of the tasks people had to complete regarded the collection of information during their visit. As previously anticipated, the majority of the participants, as well as the researcher, were unaware of the possibility to ask for information regarding an exhibition in a museum, or felt no need to ask. Hence, it has been considered fundamental to analyse the effect generated by receiving information, and the eventuality that some new knowledge was acquired from the explanations. As previously mentioned, gaining new knowledge is one of the main factors which can trigger a transformation. In this section, it is reported that among other things, being able to understand a contemporary piece of art, art mainly considered as difficult to comprehend, emerged as a central aspect, and an aspect which made the majority of the participants, and the observer, feel different, and feel better.

The impressions on the overall experience were analysed considering to what extent the participants would be inclined to visit the place another time, or how the participants refer to the foundations while talking about it after the visit, and if the visit generated any kind of word of mouth. Generally, the evaluation regards the final effect caused by the experience. Finally, in section 6.2.1 and 6.2.2, the results of a follow-up email sent to all the participants are reported and discussed to analyse the eventual duration of this impact.

6.1.4.1   COMPARISON WITH OTHER MUSEUMS

During the interview with LV(int1), it emerged that *Fondation Louis Vuitton* is aiming to excel as a cultural institution and that, according to the interviewee, the foundation can easily be compared to other well-established museums, such as *Centre Pompidou* or *Palais de Tokyo*. LV(int1) said that, as for the fashion brand, also the foundation aims to

provide the highest quality possible, and one of the means to ensure it was to hire Suzanne Pagé as artistic director, former Director of the *Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris* for 20 years. During the interview with P(int1) and P(int2), very similar statements emerged. *Fondazione Prada* can be compared to other cultural institutions, but at the same time, they do not consider the others as direct competitors. However, considering that to access both foundations there is a ticket to pay, it is reasonable to believe that a higher number of visitors is preferable, and especially to the detriment of other museums.

> *"Is not that we are stealing visitors each other. We are happy if people go to visits also other museums. In the more museums people go, the happier we are."*
>
> *- P(int1) from Fondazione Prada interview -*

As a consequence of the interviews with *Fondazione Prada* and the associate to *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, one of the questions asked during the focus groups was if they have spotted any particular difference between the foundations, and the experience they are providing, and other museums. This question aimed to understand if the foundations are being perceived as museums, considering that as fashion brands they could offer a unique and distinctive experience, but as foundations, they want to be only museums. While a few identified in the peculiar structure and the quality of the interiors a distinctive element, the majority did not notice anything or felt in any way differently than visiting other museums. The buildings have been identified as a very peculiar aspect, and as previously mentioned the place is an important influencer while living an experience. However, once inside people could not distinguish any brands' feature, could not say that there was a fashion brand responsible for the foundation, and could not identify something memorably different from other experiences in similar circumstances.

Most of the participants are not frequent visitors to museums, but they have all visited some famous museum; hence, they can have an informed opinion in this regard. Notably, *Fondazione Prada* participants discussed their experiences in other museums which are not dedicated to the art, such as science museums. From this discussion, it emerged a sense of general enthusiasm more for those kinds of museums considered to be more

interactive, thus more interesting for the participants. Science museums are generally very oriented to teach difficult concepts to anyone by utilising different and engaging strategies, and this might almost guarantee the acquisition of new knowledge on a larger scale. This could be one of the reasons why the participants appeared much more impressed and enthusiastic to discuss those experiences than other experiences in art museums.

One thing identified by the participants as different from all other experiences lived before, has been the lack, and difficulty, of finding information and explanations in *Fondazione Prada*. D(FP), who is a frequent visitor of museums with a particular appreciation for contemporary art, said that the most significant difference which he noticed by comparing *Fondazione Prada* to other museums he has visited before, is that in those museums he had always found artworks easier to understand.

> *"At the MoMa there are different forms of art, but even the most modern or most contemporary is easier to understand in comparison to the art in the foundation. [...] I'd like to visit the foundation again, but I'd look for more information about the exhibition before going [...] Well, there (at MoMa), there is Andy Warhol, the pop art, you know... there is no need... you don't need a guide to tell you what 'the tin' represents [...] (in other museums) if I have to ask for explanation it might happen once in all the visit... in the foundation, you'd need explanations for all."*
>
> *- D(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group -*

As explored in section 6.1.2 (and its sub-sections), specific references to the fashion brands' image have become clear after several months of observation. The attention to details, the polished white interiors, the tidiness and organised space, together with the polite and smart personnel, were all recalling a sense of luxury which is hard to perceive in other museums or galleries. However, in general, especially after one single visit, it is hard to find evidence of distinctions from other cultural institutions, and references to the brands are not so evident for an untrained eye. The rules of hospitality applied by the foundations are not different from the ones applied by other museums. There are attendants in the rooms ready to provide information; security personnel to control the rooms and the artworks; tags and brochures, more or less explicit, in almost every room;

bar or restaurant; toilets; elevators; benches or chairs to rest, or in the rooms to admire the art; cloakrooms for jackets and backpacks; enjoyable spaces outside to relax and enjoy the place and the city. Not even the *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s idea of providing a mobile application for guided tours is something innovative. At the moment, several museums are offering the same service, and one of the first to do so has been the London National Gallery in 2009.

Finally, another element which could have been distinctive of the foundations, compared to other museums, is the association with a star-architect to create the spaces. Yet, not even this characteristic is unique and different. In particular, Frank Gehry, the architect who conceived *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, is a prolific 'museum-designer', and probably this is the main reasons why he was chosen for the foundation's project. A few examples of other projects he designed are: the *Guggenheim* in Bilbao; *MASS MoCA* in North Adams – Massachusetts; *Vitra Design Museum* in Weil am Rhein – Germany; *Weisman Art Museum* in Minneapolis – Minnesota; and the *EMP Museum* in Seattle – Washington.

The inability of participants of identifying peculiar characteristics, unique to the experience they have lived, is something which might be taken carefully into consideration. The difficulty in differentiating the foundations from any other museums might be positive for the brand which want to conform to other institutions, but at the same time might be detrimental in the perspective of increasing the possibilities to transform people. People might receive more positively, and remember longer, experiences which are impressive and different. This could open people towards something which is considered difficult to understand and elitist, as contemporary art is. This might also facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge, by making everybody feel equal to the experience and to the art; as the science museums make people feel adequate to technology and science, even if they have never studied it before.

6.1.4.2   REACTION TO EXPLANATIONS

Participants were asked to interact with the attendants by looking for information regarding anything they preferred. Most of the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* participants, for example, were attracted by the same artwork, a pile of candies representing the AIDS disease and the artist's relationship with it (fig. 31 – section 6.1.4.2). During the focus

group F(FLV), in particular, explained enthusiastically the information received from the attendant with regards to the artwork.

> *"We asked information about that (candies installation), and the girl (attendant) answered perfectly. She explained the why… the reasons behind any colour of the candies packaging, the quantity of the candies which were in the corner in kilograms, 136 I think, that it (the installation) was about AIDS, the artist's history. It has been fascinating, and there I completely changed my opinion. If you look at it (the installation), it has no effect. I was curious because you say, 'come one, candies in a corner?!' … and the fact that you could also take them. She explained that that (taking the candies) for the artist represented AIDS which he got, and the fact that everybody could take the candies because everybody could get infected… The 136 kilograms which he and his partner were weighing together, when they both were sick. So, there was a lot of history behind that. So cool… the fact that someone explains to you exactly what you are looking at changes everything."*
>
> *- F(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -*
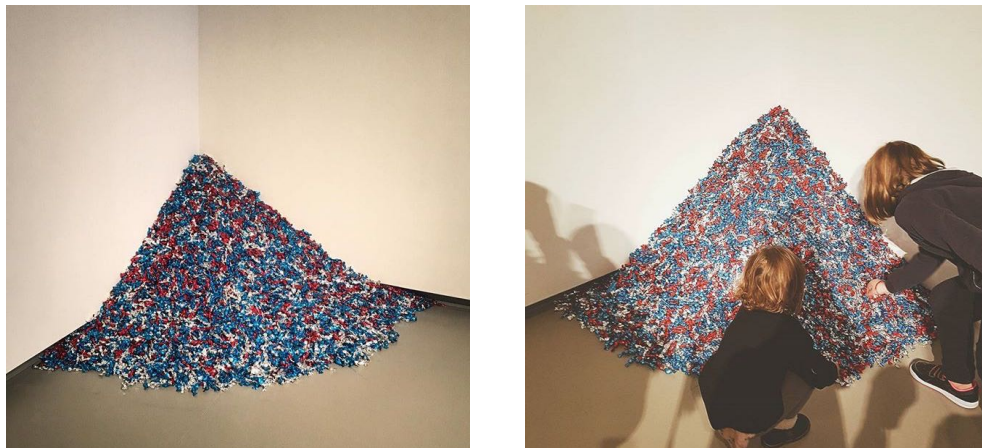
Figure 31 - The 'Candies' installation (Felix Gonzalez-Torres - "Untitled"). The picture was taken by F(FLV).

Other participants who wanted to have the same explanation, wrongly asked a security guard who apparently sent them to read a mysterious explanation which did not exist. They confused the security guard for a guide because, as explained in section 6.1.2.3, the only thing which distinguishes one from the other is a red tie instead of a blue badge on

the jacket. F(FLV), who asked the right person, appeared delighted with the explanation received.

"She started a bit unsure, maybe to adjust her English. But then…"

- F(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group –

Once F(FLV) finished explaining the meaning of the artwork, the others reacted

"Now is making sense."

- V(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"It is clear that I don't get it (contemporary art) because nobody had ever explained it to me."

- L(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"Now, it's (the piece of art) making me think."

- M(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

It is worth noticing that, this specific artwork required a level of interaction from the audience, even if minimum, and as previously mentioned, this is an element which all participants identified as being attractive and essential. Specifically, it was possible for the audience to take a candy from the installation, as B(FLV) and F(FLV) explained

"According to the guide, this means bringing the installation at home with you."

- B(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

"Yes, because is not just belonging to the author, but to everybody […] being able to understand it (the piece of art) made me feel very happy […] all the others (artworks) around had lost a bit of appeal […] let's say that it

Nonetheless, as reported in section 6.1.3.1, even if enthusiastic about having received a clear and interesting explanation, neither F(FLV) or the other participants decided to ask for further information during their visit. However, F(FLV) stated that her initial idea regarding contemporary art slightly changed after having received such an informative explanation. Even if she still cannot say to be passionate of contemporary art, now she said of feeling more open-minded towards it.

As mentioned in the introduction to this theme, understanding a piece of art due to a clear explanation has resulted in being one of the main factors which have influenced the participants' experience, in *Fondation Louis Vuitton* as well as in *Fondazione Prada*. During the interview with P(int1) and P(int2), it was clear that *Fondazione Prada* gives much importance to high-quality trained staff. As showed by the satisfaction of the participants, derived by receiving very clear and detailed information when asked, the attendants in the rooms are vital to provide…

"[…] an experience useful to a personal growth"

- P(int2) from Fondazione Prada interview –

…as *Fondazione Prada* is aiming to provide according to the interview.

"You can't force utility, and you can't even explain it (utility)… you make it an experience. So, if it is not YOUR experience, is not useful. This is what we do."

- P(int2) from Fondazione Prada interview -

The attendants are helping the public to live a useful experience, but unfortunately, as previously mentioned, it is not clear to everybody that the people in the room are not there only to control for the audience not to touch anything, as emerged by the focus groups and the observation. *Fondazione Prada* is aiming to provide a significant experience, and as previously explained, part of the process to reach this aim involves challenging the visitor through the space, and through peculiar, and sometimes 'strong', exhibitions (fig. 32 is an example). The deliberate lack of some information, such as the way to visit the exhibition, or a sign for the entrance, is part of this challenge. However, most of the time, as explained in section 6.1.2 (and its sub-sections), this is generating the opposite result of frustration, and might prevent the visitor from enjoying the experience.

Discussing the lived experience during a focus group, and receiving quick but detailed explanations with regards to the artworks, is something which significantly engaged the participants and made their experiences more than significant. From this exercise, it derived that by implementing the foundations' strategies with activities which require a higher involvement and interaction of the visitor with the art or the place, might increase the chance for the public to live an experience which can be defined as transformative.

Figure 32 - One of the *Fondazione Prada*'s installations which the participants remember the most, as reported in section 6.2.2 (Robert Gober, Untitled, 1993-1994).

As previously mentioned, one of the main elements which might trigger a transformative experience is the acquisition of new knowledge. It can be established that all of the participants during the visit, or during the focus group, have learnt something new. Moreover, someone felt particularly good once able to understand something which has always been considered or insignificant, or too complicated. Some of them through this experience have acquired a sense of renewal, or increased self-awareness, all elements which define an experience as transformative. However, as has emerged from both the focus groups and the observation exercise, not all people are used to, or know that it is possible to ask for information during a museum visit. Hence, it could be argued that the transformation which the participants have lived has happened only because they were 'forced' to ask for information in the exercise.

As a consequence, it is not possible to conclude that the simple act of visiting the foundations brings people to live a transformation. From the primary research emerged that discussing the visit with others, and asking for information, generated new knowledge and awareness which cannot be guaranteed in other circumstances. This lead to deem that, the foundations would be advised to organise more specific activities to encourage discussions, or to generate curiosity towards their exhibitions and collections, if they want to maximise the chances for a person to live a transformative experience while visiting the foundations. As it will be discussed in section 6.3, and as it is contextualised in section 1.7, public engagement activities implemented by many museums often allow reaching this result.

The importance for brands to provide transformative experiences, as said, lies in the idea that an experience which provides a stronger impact, and a transformation of the perceived self, can facilitate the generation of loyalty and the achievement of a state of resonance. As explained in section 2.2.1, these are both very desirable states which brands actively aim to achieve in consumers' minds. Even if the fashion brands are detaching themselves from their foundations, people automatically associate the two names. Hence, a transformative experience lived in the foundation could also influence people's perception of the fashion brand. Yet, it is still not possible to determine if the foundations, as they are at the moment, are providing a transformative experience or not.

When directly asked if the opinion on the brand has changed after their visit, all participants said no. Moreover, for those not inclined towards the art, the experience left them indifferent or did not change the opinion they had of contemporary art. However, through other questions, it emerged that participants remembered the explanations asked during their visits with specific details, even after a few months. This means that the experience actually did not leave the participants indifferent. As previously said, these memories could also depend on having participated in the exercise, and having undertaken actions which they usually would not undertake. Still, this does not diminish the effect of the experience as a whole. On the contrary, this suggests that some specific activities could make the experience more significant and the effect more durable.

During the discussion regarding *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, L(FLV) stated that even if his overall opinion on the arts and museums has not changed, by interacting with some artworks and by being able to understand a piece of contemporary art due to the explanation received, he felt the experience as very pleasant and significant. He now feels more inclined to consider that contemporary art is not ridiculous, as he once thought. After having understood the 'candies installation', L(FLV) has been the only one to admit to having started to look at other installations differently. This can be categorised as a significant transformation which was derived from the acquisition of new knowledge.

Again, L(FLV) spontaneously admitted that before visiting the foundation, as reported by all the participants, he was expecting to see a fashion exhibition, or at least something dedicated to the brand and its history. Yet, discovering that this was not the case, left him with the curiosity to know why a fashion brand needs to invest such an amount of resources in the arts, a thought shared by F(FLV) and V(FLV), and M(FLV). As mentioned in section 6.1.1.3, this confusion with regards to the nature of the foundations is something which occurs almost every time that the foundations are mentioned to people, even in academic environments dedicated to the fashion and/or luxury sector. This might derive from a natural association between the name of the brand (and the foundation) and its core business. As mentioned in section 6.1.1.5, this is a significant lack in the foundations' communication strategy which is suggested to address.

Prada and Vuitton are attempting to maintain a separate image between the brand and the foundation. Yet, the two entities are influencing one another in different ways, and by doing so, they are generating confusion. The foundations are being used to host fashion shows; they have been designed with the specific intent of recalling some of the main aspects of the fashion brand; they are managed by the people that are owning the fashion brand. Brands appear to have this idea that, by maintaining the two realities detached, the public, and even more the media, might consider the foundations more seriously as cultural 'dealer'. They probably think that by intertwining the foundation with the brand, the 'superficiality' of fashion might undermine the value of their cultural programs. However, it is absurd to pretend that the fashion brand and the foundation are not sharing any ground, instead of taking advantage of the peculiar skills and abilities which are making the luxury fashion brands such successful businesses.

As previously said, most of the participants wondered why fashion brands, which are successful and universally recognised, feel the need to invest in the arts (except for tax deductions), and especially by creating a museum. They think there are enough museums, but in their opinion, there are not enough venues dedicated to the fashion world, and the secrets behind the luxury brands.

"why am I spending 5000£ for a bag instead of 200£ for one that looks the same [...] it would be very interesting visiting that kind of exhibition."

- F(FLV) from Fondation Louis Vuitton focus group -

It is also true that, when asked if the participants were aware of the existence of fashion exhibitions hosted by famous museums, such as the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, or the Metropolitan Museum in New York, they admitted their ignorance on the matter. Hence, is not by changing the nature of the foundation, that people could be less confused, but a different communication could change their perceptions. As previously recognised, there is an evident lack of communication from both the brand and the foundation if people, after three years from their opening, are still confused with regards to their existence and their nature, and has already mentioned, this aspect did not emerge only during the focus groups. Probably, the foundations' target audience is well aware of

their scope. Although, by considering the inclusive nature which a museum should display, being well known by a small elite should not be the desired state for an art foundation.

As explained in the literature, people mostly associate art and especially contemporary art with the idea of a niche world, of an elite of perceived-intellectuals which is hard to access. However, L(FLV) considered that to access the foundation is very easy and not excessively expensive. He realised that it is a nice thing that a brand such as Louis Vuitton has decided to invest in giving access to the art world.

6.1.4.5 REVISITING & TALKING ABOUT IT

As introduced at the beginning of this section, other two important aspects which need to be considered in evaluating the impact of an experience are: people will of repeating the experience, and their desire of talking about the experience. The majority of the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* participants said they would not revisit the foundation. Considering another trip to Paris, they would probably have other priorities and other things to visit. F(FLV) said that, if she would have some spare time during a visit, maybe she would be back, based on the art exhibited. L(FLV) during the visits noticed an auditorium, and said he would probably check what the music programme is. In the *Fondazione Prada* group, D(FP) said that he would visit again; C(FP) by knowing of the existence of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* said she would be more curious to see that foundation, than coming back to visit *Fondazione Prada*, already visited twice.

In general terms, most of the participants did not noticed anything so exciting and unforgettable to feel the need or the desire for another visit. However, the experience they lived will be remembered for a long time, due to the tasks they were asked to complete, and to the conversations they had during the focus groups. Concerning WOM, all the participants claimed that they would mention the foundations to people who they know would appreciate it, because interested in the art or the building. Finally, after their visit, some of the participants discussed the experience with a few colleagues, but in general terms. Most of them did not address any details of their visits with anyone. The reason why participants did not share their experience with other people lies in the fact that they do not know many people who might be interested in these kinds of experiences or dialogues.

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It is true that there is already a significant number of museums which are letting people access the art, and probably there is no need for luxury brands to create contemporary art museums and invests in the art, but this is not the focus of this project. Regardless of the reasons behind a brands' investments in the arts, what emerged from the analysis is that the outcome is considered positive for both the brand and the public. Yet, the foundations could provide even a better service, and enhance their image further if they would be more public-oriented, as the brand is being more consumer-oriented.

6.1.5   PART 1 - SUMMARY

The main findings which have emerged from the participant observation and the two focus groups can be summarised as follows:

- Preconceptions are not a limitation or strength to the possibility of living a transformative experience. There are no characteristics which allow determining if a person is more likely to be transformed than another by living a specific experience. This will be more evident in the next part of this chapter, due to the analysis of the follow-up emails.

- People like to understand the art, especially contemporary art which is considered very elitist, but they prefer a quick and immediate way to access information. Generally, they do not like to ask for information, or read too long explanations.

- People prefer the interactions with a place and with the arts. They also like to share images of peculiar things on social media (a building, an installation), but they usually do not discuss their experience with other people, unless they are sure this person is sharing an interest.

- The place, together with the people associated with it, is a powerful influencer for any experience.

The effect which *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada* exercises generated on people is a very subtle effect. Advertisements, movies, concerts, usually are producing a substantial impact on people without requiring them to be passionate; while visiting a museum when art is not a passion, might affect less or even not affect people. By forcing people to leave their comfort zone, and to complete specific tasks which differ from their standard way of behaving, they all have lived a transformative experience. It is not about changing ideas with regards to the art, or starting to love museums. It is all regarding the

acquisition of new knowledge, or discovering an unknown side of the self, or increasing the self-esteem, by challenging the self. Considering that people who were not interested in the arts had this strong reaction because the visit included some challenges and an involving discussion, lead to conclude that, through a well-planned engagement strategy the effect on art-enthusiasts and people interested in cultural challenges could be even stronger.

Finally, Louis Vuitton and Prada are exclusive brands which are managing a place which has to be perceived as inclusive, but which is still maintaining an allure of exclusivity due to the name is carrying and the art is exhibiting, considered as complicated and elitist. It is true that the foundations are apparently not providing anything different than other contemporary art museums, but this contrast between exclusive and inclusive is something which is causing a significant impact on people's mind, and is enhancing a positive image which other ordinary museums are not. A positive and considerable reaction which is deriving by the fact that names, generally associated with concepts of exclusivity, closed doors, difficult access, can now be associated also to the contrary ideas of open access and inclusivity. This impact is something which brands would be advised to exploit better.

First, dissociating the fashion image from the cultural image is useless and an implausible effort which might damage both. Second, significant lacks in engaging with the public, and generating a two-way dialogue, are preventing the foundations from creating more opportunities for transformative experiences to happen. Both the brands and the foundations will benefit from addressing these two main points: the first will significantly enhance the foundations' image and skills to attract more people, and creatively interact with the public; the second will enhance some essential brand values, the brand image, and potentially might result in new loyal consumers for the brand.

The next part of this chapter reports the results emerged from a follow-up email which was sent to all participants, with regards to their experience. This last data collection aimed to evaluate the duration of the impact generated by the experience, and to confirm if they have lived a transformative experience or not.

6.2   PART 2 – FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

As reported in the Methodology chapter, a few months after the focus groups took place, an email was sent to all the participants, as a follow up on the discussions. The email asked each participant, individually, if they still have some memories of their visits, what kind of memories, and the reason why they thought to have maintained that memory. This final exercise aimed to evaluate if the entire experience had a profound and long-lasting impact on the participants, and to confirming or not whether their experience had been transformative. By asking them to explain why they think to remember something in particular, it might be possible to identify specific factors which may have triggered a transformation. All of the participants replied almost immediately, and all remembered something.

6.2.1   *FONDATION LOUIS VUITTON* PARTICIPANTS

Between the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* focus group, which happened immediately after the participants' visits, and the follow-up email, three months have passed. All of the participants replied to the email, and everyone remembered one or more things which have happened, or which they have seen, during the visit. Table 6 shows what each participant remembered, and the reason they gave for this memory.

PARTICIPANT	MEMORIES	REASON FOR REMEMBERING
F(FLV)	She remembers the 'candies' installation very clearly. During the focus group, she appeared very enthusiast in explaining all the details of the installation, and in the email, she still remembers those details.	She thinks to remember the specific installation because it was different than what she is used to see in museums. This, peculiarity, led her to ask for more information. She remembers it because the meaning of the installation changed her perspective with regards to that particular art work, and slightly towards contemporary art. A second reason to remember the piece of art, was the opportunity to interact with it by taking a candy.
B(FLV)	He remembers a number of things: 1. The building; 2. The 'candies' installation; 3. Other two installations, one on one of the terraces representing the layers of ground of the earth, the other a group of ball-bearings at the ground floor;	For each one there is a specific reason: 1. Because it was very beautiful and very peculiar. Especially the view of Paris from the terraces, and the front fountain stair-shaped; and it is different from the architectures that are visible around the city; 2. Not because of the installation itself, but for realising that without an explanation, it was not possible to understand the meaning of it. Hence, he now thinks that to

	4. A peacock in the park; 5. The feeling in discovering that the foundation was not exhibiting fashion or brand-related items.	visit a contemporary art museum, before going needs to be prepared; 3. Because this made him think that anything can generate some thinking, hence can become art: common things such as the ground, or even diseases such as AIDS; 4. It was unexpected; 5. It was unexpected, as well. He compared the effect to going to visit the Ferrari firm at Maranello and instead of cars find a collection of very expensive and beautiful watches, tie clips, or cufflinks. Something very different from the 'common' expectation.
M(FLV)	He remembers a number of things: 1. The building; 2. The 'candies' installation; 3. An installation with video games 4. The foundation is owned by Louis Vuitton	Here are his reasons: 1. Very peculiar, and the possibility to see the *Tour Eiffel* from a corner of one of the terraces; 2. Because it was long discussed during the focus group, and because during the visit he asked information about the installation to the wrong person, as it emerged during the discussion; 3. Because he works in computer science and naturally he noticed it. 4. The pleasant feeling to know that a luxury fashion brands is facilitating people access to the art.
V(FLV)	She remembers in particular: 1. the last floor of the exhibition which she defines as more technological, where emoji were used as part of art installations, and speakers where creating a sort of choir where the visitor could sit and be part of the installation; 2. The positive feeling left by the experience.	Her reasons: 1. It was interesting to see objects of everyday life used to create art, and the speakers made her feel less distant to contemporary art, which normally she considers difficult; 2. The experience let her get closer to a new world and opened her mind.
L(FLV)	He remembers: 1. The building; 2. The 'candies' installation, with the opportunity to interact with the installation by taking the candies, and the 'ground layers' installation.	His reasons: 1. Give the impression of being a boat, and it is a curious and very beautiful structure; 2. The meaning of the artworks, which thanks to the explanation received, was clear. Also, the discussion during the focus group which has been a stimulus and an interesting moment of confrontation with other people.

Table 6 - Results of the follow-up emails sent to the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* participants.

From the follow-up emails, some significant aspects have emerged. First of all, all of the participants have one or more particular memories of their visit to the *Fondation Louis Vuitton*. Most of them distinctly remember the structure, due to the peculiarity of the shape and the view of Paris. This strengthens the concept that the place is a significant influencer of a person's experience, and by designing an impressive venue, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* ensured to be recalled in people's minds.

Another relevant element, which emerged from this final part of the exercise, is that everyone clearly remembers one particular installation, of all those exhibited in the foundation, the 'Candies' installation. The main reasons why they said to remember this installation so clearly are twofold: the majority of them asked for an explanation of that specific installation; the installation has been at the centre of the conversation during the focus group for a long time. With regards to the first reason, most of the participants stated that they appreciated understanding the meaning of something they deemed curious and hard to conceive as art. Moreover, some of the participants even changed their opinion with regards to contemporary art due to the explanation received. The new knowledge acquired, and the sense of self-awareness are apparent. The second reason, being part of the focus group, highlights another aspect which in the literature has been named as a possible influencer of a transformative experience, and it is the sense of group, of community, in living the experience.

This follow-up suggests that the experience has transformed all participants. They show that the experience produced a long-lasting impact, and also that living the experience led them to a change. However, the most critical aspect is that what caused people to remember precise details of the experience, is not the visit itself, but some 'forced' actions they were asked to take. Asking for information, and discussing the experience with a group of people, were both elements of the exercise organised for this project. Yet, knowing that these two aspects had influenced the participants more than any other thing, is confirming that:

- visiting the foundations is not a transformative experience in itself;
- having conversations, and gathering information regarding the arts might generate new knowledge, a sense of renewal, an increased self-awareness or self-esteem, hence might facilitate a transformation.

In section 6.1.5, it is explained that both having conversations and receiving information, might be considered as part of some basal public engagement activities. In the same section, it is concluded that to facilitate the opportunity for people to live a transformation while visiting the foundations, these would be advised to increase the number of public engagement activities in their strategy.

6.2.2 *FONDAZIONE PRADA* PARTICIPANTS

Between the *Fondazione Prada* focus group, which happened one and a half months after the visits, and the follow-up email, six months have passed. All the participants replied to the email, and everyone remembered one or more things which have happened, or which they have seen, during the visit. Table 7 shows what each participant remembered, and the reason they gave for this memory.

PARTICIPANT	MEMORIES	REASON FOR REMEMBERING
C(FP)	She remembers: 1. The difficulties to find the entrance to the ticket office and the bathroom, even if it was the second visit; 2. The exhibition dedicated to war images 3. Two installations seen during the first visit: a number of big bronze statues wearing different accessories, an aquarium containing a dentist's chair.	Her reasons are: 1. She felt very frustrated; 2. She was negatively impressed by the strong images; 3. She really like them, and one of the two was photographed and shared on Instagram.
P(FP)	He remembers: 1. The total absence of any sign of the brand; 2. The building.	The specific reasons are: 1. He expected a fashion exhibition (the first time he visited) and was positively surprised to see that it was a contemporary art museum, instead; 2. Because it was amazing, and architecture is the 'art' expression which he appreciates more.
Q(FP)	He remembers a number of things: 1. The lack of indications at the entrance; 2. An installation with a crib containing a big piece of wax and some apples (Robert Gober, Untitled – Fig. 32); an installation made of doors which gives the visitor the sense of spying in someone's house - Louise	His reasons are: 1. Because he felt frustrated; 2. Because those were the first things he saw during the visit; 3. Because it has a very peculiar style. 4. Because he remembered he was tired to walk and used them.

	Bourgeois, Cell (Clothes); and an installation with a heart in a manhole - Robert Gober, Untitled; 3. The bathroom; 4. The presence of chairs in the main courtyard.	
D(FP)	He remembers in particular: 1. All the installation held in the golden tower, such as the crib (Fig. 32), the heart, the mannequins; 2. The building; 3. The Wes Anderson café.	His reasons: 1. He felt all the rooms be a bit creepy and considered that was the feeling the artist wanted to share with the public. Idea which had been confirmed later by the explanation given by an attendant he asked to; 2. Very nice, clean, linear, neutral colours, something which you could expect to see in North Europe. 3. Because he is a strong supporter of Wes Anderson and curious to see the café he knew about. He then realised how out of context that is compared to the entire foundation.
M(FP)	He remembers: 1. The bathroom; 2. A building all covered by mirrors; 3. An underground room with a big model of a cave; 4. An installation with a crib containing some apples.	His reasons: 1. Because it was very peculiar; 2. Because he took a photo of it; 3. Because according to him that did not make sense; 4. Because he was impressed by the explanation.

Table 7 - Results of the follow-up emails sent to the *Fondazione Prada* participants.

As for the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* participants, also the majority of the *Fondazione Prada* participants are clearly remembering the building which is hosting the foundation. In this case, as for *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, the peculiarities of the structure, together with some unexpected details, such as a futuristic bathroom and an anachronistic café, made the architecture one of the most distinguishing features of the participants' experience. The place is influencing not only people experience, but also their memory of it. By remembering the impressive building, they recall feelings and other memories related to their visit. Hence, it is possible to say that the building, in this case, is also prolonging the duration of people's memories. Moreover, except for P(FP), everyone remembers at least one installation. Someone because of the feelings provoked by the piece of art, but the majority because of the explanation received, and the derived opportunity of understanding the artist's work. The building is facilitating memories,

while remembering an art installation, with its details and meanings, it is a sign of new knowledge acquired.

For *Fondazione Prada*, as for *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, it is possible to say that all participants have been transformed. However, the same conclusions drawn from the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* follow-up emails can also be drawn from the *Fondazione Prada* ones. Thus, most of the transformations happened were depending on the completion of the tasks required by the exercise, or were depending on the conversations had during the focus groups. As a consequence, the foundation would be advised to focus on providing people with more opportunities to interact, have a conversation, and share, to facilitate their transformations. Noteworthy, only P(FP) did not mention any installation as a memory, and he is also one of the two participants who visited *Fondazione Prada* twice. He highlighted that one of the most positive and impressive things for him was to discover that the foundation was exhibiting art, and not fashion. He emphasised how discovering the nature of the foundation surprised him, and this happened during his first visit in 2015, just after the opening. By remembering this detail, and by highlighting how nice it has been to make this discovery, he is showing some new knowledge acquired with an impact which has lasted three years. Hence, it might be possible to deem P(FP)'s transformative experience as the only one which was not forced by this project's exercise.

The next part of this chapter reports the results of a few conversations had with experts in public engagement, combined with participant observation, interviews and focus groups data which are regarding public engagement activities actually present in the foundations. Experts' opinions on what is public engagement, why it is crucial, and their specific examples, compared to what is happening in the foundations, allow drawing the following conclusion: *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada* are still not properly engaging with their public. By implementing more engaging activities, they could increase their chance to provide transformative experiences.

6.3 PART 3 - PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: WHAT IS IT & HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

The final part of this chapter provides conceptualisations, and examples, of public engagement and public engagement activities, mainly in the museum context. This part aims to better understand if *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* are successfully implementing their strategies with public engagement activities, or if they should focus more on this as a tool for including the consumer, and as an ease for transformative experiences; having extensively discussed the importance of a deep engagement in the literature review.

In the Chapter 1, the concept of public engagement has been defined, for the purpose of this project, as: an active participation of both producer and receiver of art in a two-way conversation with regards to understanding the arts and with the scope of generating benefits and well-being. This definition has been discussed with five experts in public engagement during a set of interviews. Some notable aspects have emerged, together with a number of specific examples of activities which these experts usually organise to engage with their public.

6.3.1 THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM

Most of the experts defined public engagement as a spectrum, and this is a concept shared in different areas where public engagement strategies are being implemented.

> *"At one end of the spectrum is 'informing' and/ or 'inspiring' people – a dominant engagement purpose that sees researchers sharing their research processes and outputs.*
> *At the other end of the spectrum are more collaborative approaches – where the purpose may be to develop research together, or to co-produce activities relevant to the research.*
> *These different purposes are animated by the participants having a variety of agencies – from passive roles, e.g. as audience members to more active roles such as co-creators of knowledge."*
>
> *- S(PE) from Experts' interviews -*

"I'm the Engagement Manager, so I sit within the broader learning and engagement team which encompasses everything from formal learning, so schools, colleges, universities, to informal learning […] in terms of people are not coming with any academic pursuits. A life-long learning, a well-being approach. […]
So, it goes from the welcome, right the way through to quite bespoke tailored events for certain groups.
Then you've got everything in the middle which is social engagement: your music nights, your co-produced engagement projects […] we're not just producing these programs, and we're just asking people to take part, we're having a more two-way conversation with groups to make sure the programme best reflects the people and what they want from this sort of organisation. And then, what we can do to inspire other people that don't participate as well."

- E(PE) from Experts' interviews -

6.3.1.1   'LIGHT-TOUCH' ACTIVITIES

Both *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* have demonstrated full capabilities in implementing welcoming and formal learning activities. The first example is the organisation of learning activities for schools or children.

"Accademia dei Bambini decides quite a broad theme every trimester, that could be: the sea and the waves, the numbers and maths, robots… and developed something special for the children through the involvement of an expert in that specific sector.
These events are free; you just need to book. Parents have to stay with the little ones and leave the old ones, but usually, they all love to stay."

- P(int2) from Fondazione Prada interview –

Figure 33 - Post published by *Fondazione Prada* on its Instagram page to promote the children cultural program called "Accademia dei Bambini" (FondazionePrada, 2018a)

"[…] any museums want to reach out as larger public as possible, because that's their vocation... You know, I worked at the Pompidou, for example, and we had relationships with schools, school children, from the age of 3/4 to graduates, that come to see the exhibitions... and they have(promotional) packages with families, we have exhibitions that were done for children […] you really try to reach out the largest audience as possible."

- LV(int1) form Fondation Louis Vuitton interview -

The foundations are also organising music events, or special opening events for new exhibitions. For example, Figure 34 represents an Instagram post written in Italian which is inviting people for two free screenings of the restored version of "Last Tango in Paris" at *Fondazione Prada'*s cinema. The film was introduced by its director, Bernardo Bertolucci.
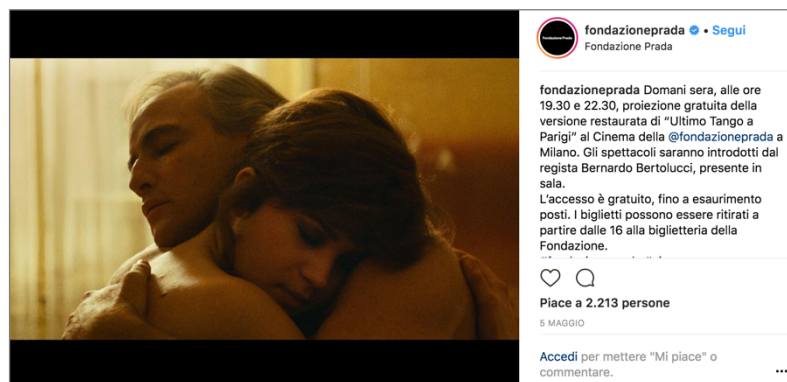
Figure 34 - Instagram post promoting a free screening of the newly restored film "Last Tango in Paris" at the *Fondazione Prada*, and introduced by its director Bernardo Bertolucci (FondazionePrada, 2018b)

Night events are something both foundations usually organise. Figure 35 shows a *Fondation Louis Vuitton* Instagram post which promotes a night event.

Figure 35 - *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s Instagram post to promote evening events (Fondationlv, 2017).

Moreover, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* structure includes an auditorium which is usually hosting concerts, primarily instrumental music, with some exception such as Kanye West four shows for charity held a few months after the opening (fig. 36).

Figure 36 - *Fondation Louis Vuitton*'s Instagram post to promote Kanye West's concerts at the *Fondation* (Fondationlv, 2015a).

6.3.1.2 'STRONG-TOUCH' ACTIVITIES

What both *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* are missing in their organisational strategies, are those activities at the other end of the public engagement's spectrum. Those co-production activities which, on the one hand, would allow the brand to be more inclusive without undermining the exclusivity of the fashion product, and on the other hand, might facilitate people to live transformative experiences. These co-creation and co-production activities usually are more interactive and involving, than simple talks with artists or curators; that kind of interaction which all the participants said was missing during their visits, unless required by a specific piece of art, and which they would have appreciated.

A good example of interactive activities, which are very easy to organise, is the Victoria & Albert Museum example. During the "Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion" exhibition, the museum was providing a sheet of paper to fold into the shape of one of the most iconic coats created by the designer. Once created the coat model, the person could have decided to bring it home as memorabilia, or to let it there at the museum together with other people's models as part of the exhibition. Figure 37 shows some of the paper coats left in the museum.

Figure 37 - Paper coats which people were invited to build during the "Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion" exhibition at the V&A (Dom, 2017).

Another similar example is the one shared by Q(FP) during the focus group, while talking about interaction, and which refers to his own experience in a museum in Oslo.

"For example, I bring my experience.
In Oslo, at the national museum, there was a room where anyone could draw a sculpture, and there were a lot of people in the room.
Then, all the drawings were hung on the wall, and also those were becoming a sort of art.
I've spent at least an hour in that room; the idea impressed me... I would have appreciated something like that (in Fondazione Prada)"

- Q(FP) from Fondazione Prada focus group -

An example of a more intense co-productive activity, and an activity which is slightly more challenging to organise, is the involvement of the public, or part of the community, in arranging and curating exhibitions. During the interview with *Fondazione Prada* interviewees, they clearly stated that this is not something they are interested in doing. They consider the foundation more oriented towards the freedom of the artist, than the involvement of the public in the curatorial line. However, there are significant benefits in involving people into the heart of something which, as repeatedly mentioned, is generally considered elitist.

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"We had an exhibition [...]
I worked with a small group of men who lived in a care home.
So, they would work with an artist, a curatorial team and a conservation team
and look at works in the (our) collection, have conversations about how they
felt about that work and the audience that would appeal to.
Then they curate it. [...] they didn't have free reign of the collection because
sometimes I find [...] ineffective saying you can use anything, sometimes it's
scaring [...]

They worked through the oil paint collection.
An artist and a curator put together a long list of the elements searching fifty
thousand objects [...] Then they worked with this really long list to then
develop the exhibition, so we let them decide everything, the way they were
hung, the relationship between the works and their own stories, how they
wanted to do it [...] even down to the title, in the branding [...]

It was seen by over 50,000 people through the gallery. [...] a lot of different
organisations found it a lot harder to get older men to participate [...]
So this idea was that we would put on a show more accessible to older men
who maybe didn't see galleries as places for them. [...]
A lot of the men thought that a gallery would be somewhere you would go as a
family or your children (now they've changed their minds)."

- E(PE) from Experts' interviews -

One of the main aspects of public engagement is to facilitate a personal development of the people involved, or to co-create a level of well-being. The foundations are aiming to be socially useful, and public engagement activities should facilitate them in reaching this aim. In particular, the 'strong-touch' activities exemplified above are allowing a 2-way conversation which is not always possible to facilitate through 'light-touch' activities. By implementing the foundations with 'strong-touch' activities, the benefit could be twofold. On the one hand, the consumer might live a transformative experience by acquiring new knowledge by doing, or by achieving a new level of self-awareness, or by feeling a sense of renewal due to having been an active part of the foundation and the exhibition. On the other hand, the foundation might attract more visitors, and, because of the interaction with people, the foundation could also acquire a deep insight into its audience. Moreover, there will be a subtle transfer of positive perception between the foundation and the fashion brands which will enhance the brand values.

"If you're not involved in public engagement, if you don't actively seek out opportunities to do things [...]
At the heart of engagement, we're looking at social… so, looking for new connections, finding new ways to interact with new people, developing yourself [...]
luxury foundations see public engagement activities as an extra that it is not a necessity. They could really help and do a lot with the attention that they usually gather."

- E(PE) from Experts' interviews -

6.3.2   SUMMARY

Public engagement has to aim at a co-production or a co-creation which is generated by a two-way conversation. In the context of offering a transformative experience, acquiring new knowledge, self-awareness, or a sense of renewal, are the key. As explored in the previous sections, some lacks have been identified through the focus groups and the participant observation exercise. Lacks which, if appropriately addressed, will improve the foundations' engagement with their public. Finally, due to this engagement, there will be some increasing opportunities for transformative experiences to happen. The following quote exemplifies the link between public engagement and transformation of the self.

"[…] formal education, you understand it completely.
You're interested in something, you start something, and at the end of it you have a new skill or a formal qualification [...]
In the commercial side people get it (product) because it has this quality performance, costs this amount of money [...]
Engagement often sits in the space between a lot of those things, so you may develop yourself further, but you don't get a certificate at the end of it.
Or you don't have an accredited skill, but you've pushed yourself and developed your personal development."

- E(PE) from Experts' interviews -

As previously mentioned, that kind of development cannot be achieved, or it is hard to achieve, through 'light-touch' activities. Hence, foundations would be wise to invest more resources in 'strong-touch' activities to increase their opportunities to provide

transformative experiences to the public. All of the examples provided in the section 6.3.1.2, are not meant to suggest that that is what the foundations should do in the exact same manner. What is suggest is that, by exploiting the parenting advantage derived by being part of a successful fashion brand (Christopher M. Moore & Birtwistle, 2005), the foundation could capitalise on, and transfer, the creative skills of the brand in shaping new, interactive, and attractive activities for the public, as well as the communication skills, to better promote their nature.

Next section is providing a graphic representation of the experience lived by the focus groups' participants based on the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 4.

6.4   MAPS OF THE FINDINGS

Figure 38 and 39 graphically represent the findings derived by the two focus groups run for this project. Each figure is formed by the central part of the theoretical model (fig. 4) presented in section Chapter 4. The model was modified in the spirit of answering the research question (section 1.09). Hence, at the top of the rectangle there is not the general terminology of brand experience (as in fig. 4), but the specific focus of this study, luxury fashion brands' art foundations (abbreviated to brands' art foundations for graphic purposes). The rectangle representing the possible effects deriving from a transformative experience is maintained. The purpose of this model is of mapping the journey which each participant has lived during the exercise. This is the reason both figures are containing a number of rhombi which show the initial letter of the name of each one of the participants to the *Fondazione Prada* (Fig. 38), or *Fondation Louis Vuitton* (Fig. 39), exercise.

More specifically, there are four colours of rhombi which are aiming to represent four different phases of the study. The green rhombus represents the status of the participants before being sampled for the exercise. This status was derived from the answers which the participants gave to the first question asked during the focus group. The fuchsia rhombus represents the participants' status during the exercise, while they were achieving the tasks required (Appendix 1). This status was derived from the focus group discussions, same as for the status represented by the blue rhombi. The blue rhombus represents the status the participants reached after having completed the tasks and which

emerged during the focus group discussions. Finally, the yellow rhombus represents the participants' final status, and it was derived from the focus group discussions combined with the results obtained from the follow-up emails.

6.4.1   *FONDAZIONE PRADA* EXERCISE

At the initial stage of the *Fondazione Prada* exercise, two participants had already visited the foundation, as reported in section 1.9. By discussing her previous experience, C(FP) showed to not remembering anything worth mentioning. On the contrary, P(FP) proved to have already lived a transformation during the first visits, as reported in section 6.2.2, and as represented by the green rhombi in Figure 38. The fuchsia rhombi in the model are showing that most of the participants gained new knowledge by achieving the tasks required, except for P(FP), who, this time, has not lived anything different from the first visit. D(FP) is the only one, probably due to his previous interest in the arts, to have lived an increasing of self-awareness while exploring the foundation and asking information, as discussed in section 6.2.2.

As represented by the blue rhombi, all the participants were transformed, as emerged during the focus group discussion. Notably, as derived from the focus group and the follow-up email, D(FP) is the only one who is interested in revisiting the place, showing to having perceived the foundation as an authentic art experience. Instead, this interest in revisiting the place was not demonstrated by M(FP), who is an art lover as D(FP). This is confirming what discussed in section 6.1.1.5, that is not possible to pre-determine characteristics which might guarantee the experience to generate a specific result. Finally, all the other participants confirmed the occurred transformation even after a few months from the experience, as derived from the follow-up emails, and reported in section 6.2.
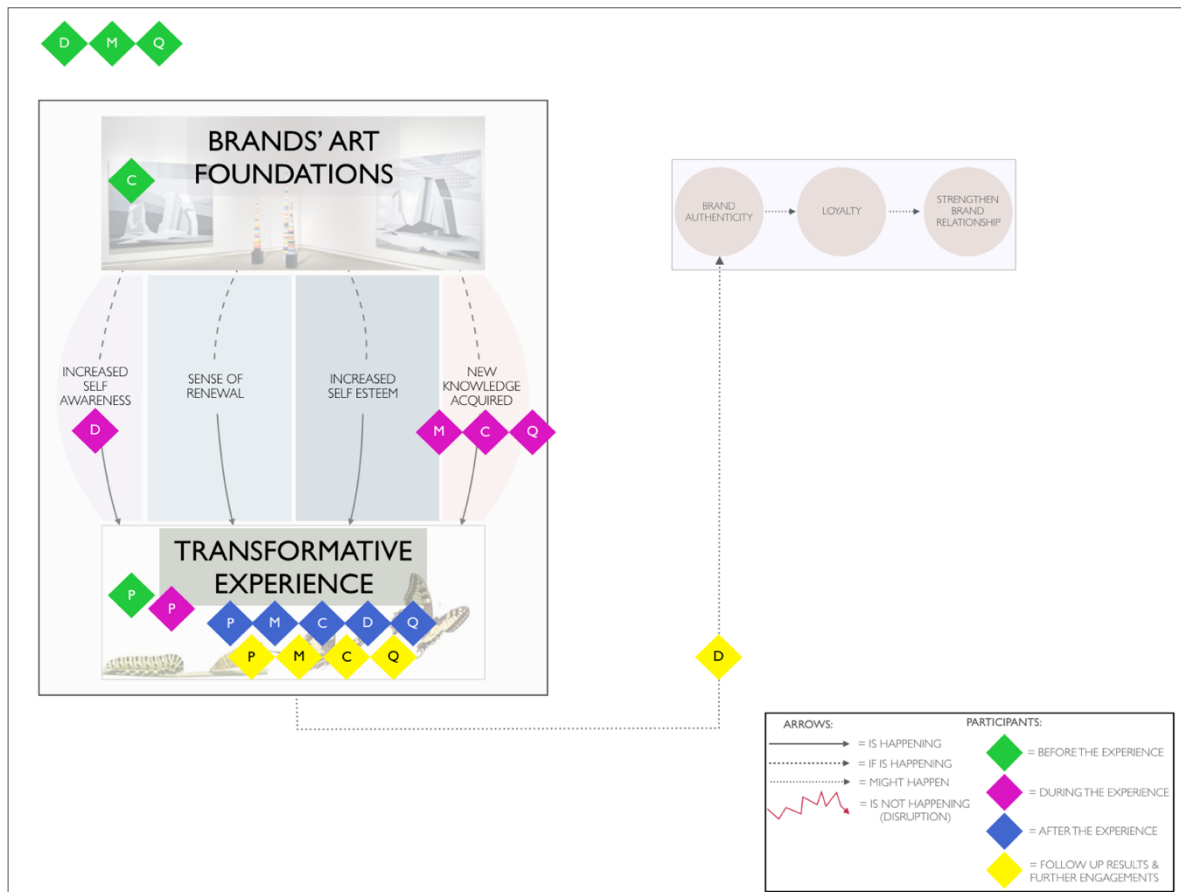
Figure 38 - Graphic representation of *Fondazione Prada* participants' experience in relation to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 4.

6.4.2 *FONDATION LOUIS VUITTON* EXERCISE

The initial stage of the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* exercise differs from the *Fondazione Prada* one, because no one of the participants has ever visited the foundation before. Hence, in Figure 39, all the green rhombi are represented outside the central rectangle representing the experience. Another difference, which is interesting to note, regards the paths which the participants lived during the exercise, and which led everyone to a transformation (blue rhombi). Two of the participants were transformed by the acquisition of new knowledge, due to having asked information during their visits, as represented by the two fuchsia rhombi with M(FLV) and B(FLV) initials on (section 6.2.1).

However, the other participants had all a different experience. L(FLV) lived a moment of increased self-esteem when he realised that, due to the explanations received, finally, he was able to understand contemporary art (section 6.1.1.1). He was convinced to be

unable to understand this art style and, as discussed in section 6.1.4.4, due to the project's exercise he almost changed his opinion on contemporary art. V(FLV) instead expressed her apparent dislike for contemporary art (section 6.1.1.1), but the exercise let her initiate a process of reconsideration. She felt different by understanding some pieces of art, and by discussing the experience with the other participants, and this introspective journey made her reconsider the idea she had on the matter and her feelings towards it (section 6.1.4.3).

Finally, as for D(FP) in the *Fondazione Prada* exercise, also F(FLV) has lived an increasing of self-awareness. She never explicitly stated to not appreciating contemporary art, although she might prefer other styles. However, the exercise led her to clear her doubts with regard to this art style and, as reported in section 6.1.4.5, she appeared willing to revisit the place. L(FLV) is the other participants who, during the focus group and the follow up email, showed the same interest, especially with regards to the auditorium he noticed during the visit (section 6.1.4.5). Finally, all the other participants confirmed the occurred transformation even after a few months from the experience, as derived from the follow-up emails, and reported in section 6.2.1.
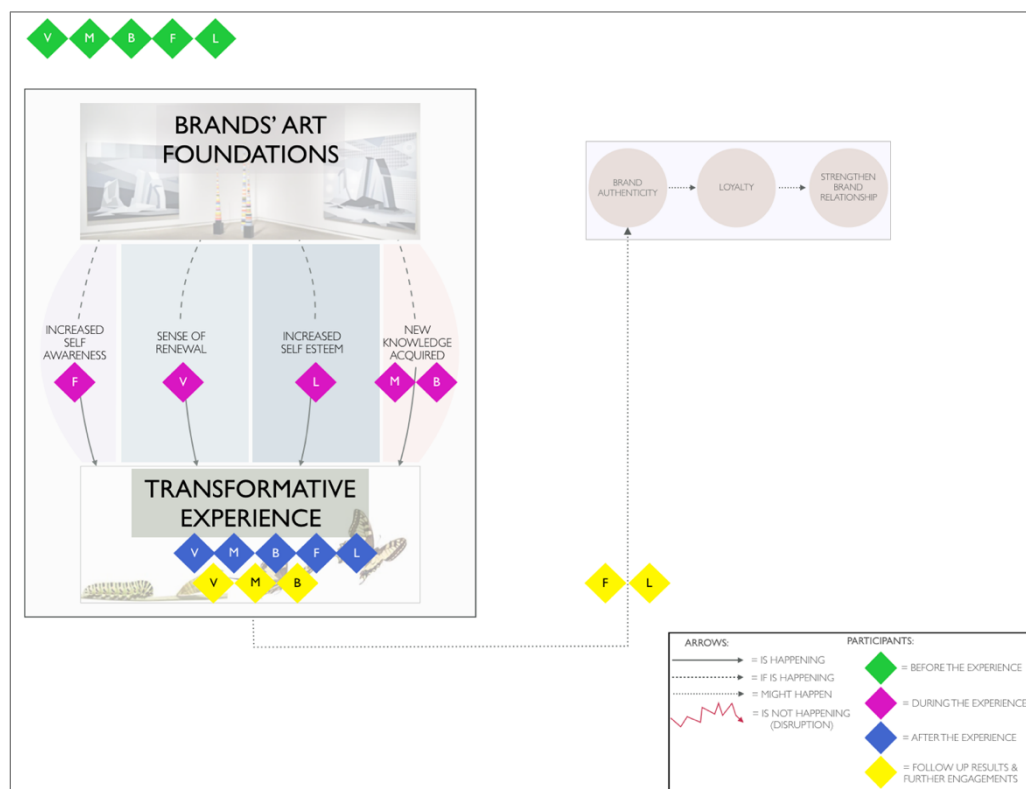
Figure 39 - Graphic representation of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* participants' experience in relation to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 4.

6.4.3 NOTE

In section 6.1.1.5, it was concluded that is not possible to pre-determine the characteristics of a person which allow thinking that that person might be transformed easily. By mapping the findings in Figure 38 and 39, and through the visual analysis of these figures, it emerged a deeper level of assumption compared to what was derived from the verbal analysis. Although it is not possible to determine characteristics which make people more likely to be transformed, it is interesting to note that, in both exercises, those transformations which occurred through an increased self-awareness, and in the last example, also through an increased self-esteem, are the experiences of those who are also willing to visit the foundations again. A sort of initial phase towards recognising the authenticity of the experience, hence of the brand. To conclude, it might be possible to assume that, it may be more likely for a transformation to happen more easily, if it occurs through processes of self-confirmation (increased self-awareness and self-esteem), more than processes of change (renewal and new knowledge).

Next chapter is showing a conceptual model which addresses luxury fashion brands by suggesting some improvements to their art foundations. This model is attempting to be a tool for enhancing the chances of providing transformative experiences to the public, and to the potential customer, through luxury fashion brands' art foundations.

7   CONCEPTUAL MODEL
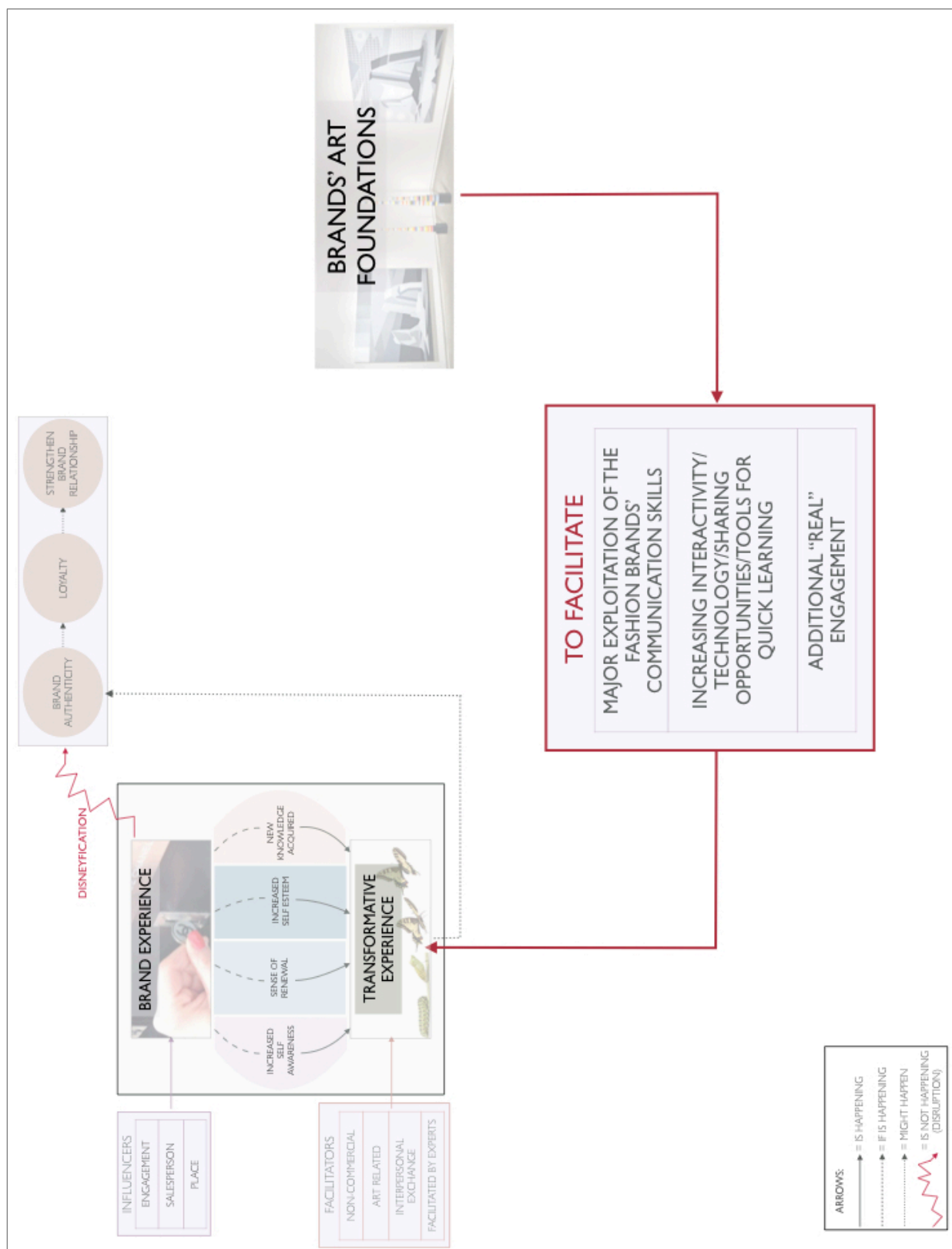
Figure 40 – The conceptual model derived from this research.

Figure 40 represents the outcome of this research. The theoretical framework (fig. 4) is reintroduced, and the research questions posed in the theoretical framework is answered. As explained in section 6.2.1, almost all the transformations occurred during the two exercises were forced by asking the participants to act differently than their natural behaviour. Hence, it is not possible to say yet that the luxury fashion brands' art foundations are the perfect venue to provide transformative experiences. However, they have all the characteristics to be, and this research is proposing some improvements which might facilitate transformations to occur, as discusses in section 6.3 (and its sub-sections). These improvements were derived from the combination of the findings and the literature review, they are three and are represented by the central rectangle bordered in red. By implementing these suggestions, art foundations could increase their chances to provide transformative experiences to their audience, hence to facilitate the brand to be perceived as more authentic.

In the theoretical framework, it has been identified that an evolution of consumption is happening. In particular, people are not interested in only buying products anymore, they are looking for meaningful and authentic experiences to live (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). However, brand experiences are losing authenticity for the consumers due to the Disneyfication of the society (Bryman, 1999). Authenticity is a fundamental element which facilitate brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), thus helps in strengthening the brand/consumer relationship (Gambetti et al., 2012). Hence, losing authenticity for brands might signify undermining this relationship. Engagement (Haven et al., 2007), the role of the 'brand places' (Triefus, 2017) and of salespersons (Fassnacht & Scharwey, 2015), have been pinpointed as influencers of the brand experience, but alone are not sufficient to restore brand authenticity (Gilmore & Pine, 2009).

Through the literature review, transformative experiences have been recognised as more authentic and meaningful experiences (Gilmore & Pine, 2009), thus something which brands should aim to implement in their strategies to reconnect with the consumers (Mermiri, 2009). These experiences happen when the person involved is living a shift in the perception of the self or towards something (Arnould & Price, 1993). More specifically, the following four stages were identified as signifying an occurred transformative experience: an increased self-awareness (Schouten et al., 2007); a sense of self renewal (Arnould & Price, 1993); an increased self-esteem (Bosangit &

Demangeot, 2016); and new knowledge acquired (Kozinets, 2002). Furthermore, a few elements were recognised as facilitators which might increase the opportunity for an experience to be transformative: the experience should happen in a non-commercial environment (Arnould & Price, 1993); should be art-related (Kozinets, 2002); should promote interpersonal exchanges (Schouten et al., 2007); and should be facilitated by experts (Arnould & Price, 1993). All characteristics which were identified as elements present in the art foundations owned by luxury fashion brands part of this research investigation (*Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton*). By providing transformative experiences, brands might restore their perceived authenticity and strengthen their relationship with the consumer.

In the context of luxury fashion brands, the relationship with the consumer in the commercial environment has always been based on a strong element of control which the brand exercises over the consumers in the attempt of educating them (Doyle et al., 2008). For being able to provide transformative experiences, brands have to consider that as consumption is evolving (Yeoman, 2011), also the dynamics of their relationship with the consumer has to evolve (Triefus, 2017). This study identifies in the art foundations owned by luxury fashion brands the potential venue for this shift in the brand/customer relationship to happen.

Data collected and analysed in this research suggest that to provide transformative experiences through the art foundations, thus restore brand authenticity, brands have to consider implementing some public engagement activities within the foundations' strategies. A few examples of these activities might be co-curatorial activities with members of the public; walk and talk with experts and/or artists; specific moments dedicated to co-creating art and values (more extensive examples are reported in section 6.3). Moreover, by exploiting some specific skills of the fashion brand, they could improve the experience provided and facilitate engagement with the public. Communicating better the foundations, increasing interactive moments and exploiting technology to provide quick learning tools are the other main suggestions offered by this study and by the conceptual model at page 168 (Figure 40).

These implementations might allow luxury fashion brands to exploit their art foundations as the perfect venue to evolve their relationship with the consumer by providing meaning

and authenticity through transformative experiences (Mermiri, 2009), and without undermining the luxury product (Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schreier, 2010).

Next chapter discusses the conclusions which are drawn from this entire study.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This project aimed to investigate luxury fashion brands' art foundations as a potential venue for luxury fashion brands to provide transformative experiences; with a specific focus on *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*. These two foundations, as explained in Chapter 2 and 5, were selected after having analysed the main existing luxury fashion brands' art foundations (as set in Objective 1). As reported in the literature review, due to the Disneyfication of the society, there is an increasing need for brands to create new opportunities to provide their customers with meaningful and authentic experiences (as set in Objective 2). In chapter 3, it has been explained that transformative experiences can be considered more meaningful than other experiences, and that these kinds of experiences might help brands regain their allure of authenticity (as set in Objective 3 and 4).

As a consequence, this may encourage consumers' loyalty, and even lead to strengthening the brand/consumer relationship (as set in Objective 4). In the same chapter, it has been shown that there are a number of factors that might increase the potential for an experience to be transformative (as set in Objective 3 and 4). In particular, these facilitators are:

- the environment, the experience should happen in a non-commercial context to appear more authentic;
- the relationship with the art, the experience by being art related appears more meaningful;
- the interpersonal exchanges, the experience is enhanced if people are sharing it with others;
- the facilitation provided by experts, through a specific narrative people will transcend the eventual commercial context, or brand relationship.

All of the above elements are deemed facilitators of the transformation, which can happen by acquiring new knowledge, or feeling renewed, or increasing the self-esteem or self-awareness (as set in Objective 3 and 4). In section 2.3 (and its sub-sections) and 2.6,, similar elements to those which are facilitating a transformative experience were identified as an influencer of the general brand experience: the non-commercial environment, the art related situation, and the presence of an 'expert' (as set in Objective

2). This led to an investigation of existing fashion brand experiences in the spirit of identifying some potential transformative experience that has already been provided by luxury fashion brands. In this scenario, luxury fashion brands' art foundations were identified as a potential ready-to-exploit venue to provide the luxury consumer with a transformative experience (as set in Objective 1).

The data analysed in this project mainly confirmed the idea that art foundations could be perfect venues to provide transformative experiences, although there are elements which appeared as in need of some improvements, as discussed in Chapter 6, graphically represented in Figure 40, and explained in Chapter 7. Through the participant observation, the focus groups, the interviews with experts on fashion brands and public engagement, and the interviews with professionals associated to *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton*, this research identified three critical aspects which could be better deemed by the foundations, in the spirit of exploiting them as venues to provide transformative experiences. These aspects are: the communication and promotion strategy; the opportunity for the audience to interact, share, consume, and co-create the experience; the implementation of 'strong touch' public engagement activities (section 6.3.1.2) in the attempt of creating a two-way dialogue to generate some benefits.

Moreover, by analysing the phenomenon from a visual prospective (sections 6.4.1 and 6.4.2) other than a verbal perspective, it was possible to assume that transformative experiences might be more likely to occur when they derive from a process of self-confirmation, than a process of change. This might be a further specification of the pyramid created by Mermiri (2009) and which the author compared with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) (Fig. 2 - section 3.2). Figure 41 reviews part of Figure 2, and graphically represents the assumption that transformations derived by processes of self-confirmations might be considered at the highest level of the pyramid in comparison to those deriving from processes of change.
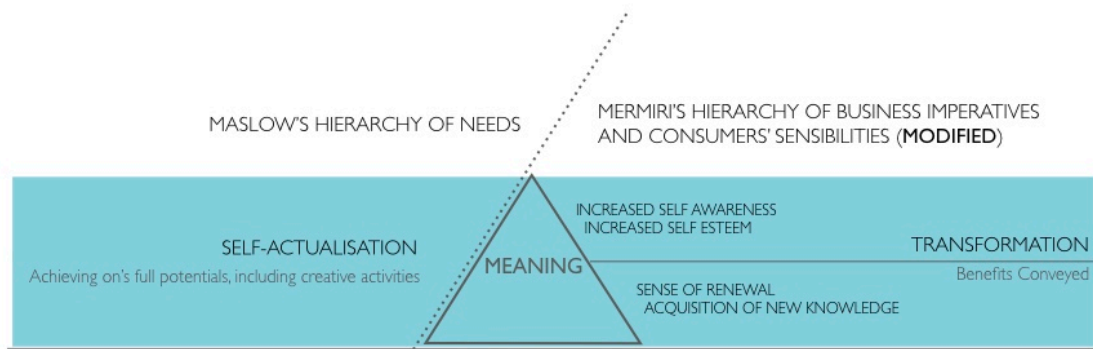
Figure 41 - Possible adaptation of the highest part of the pyramid of Maslow (and Mermiri)'s hierarchy of needs.

In the following sections, the conclusions of this thesis are drawn on the basis of the three elements of improvement which have been mentioned above and are highlighted in the conceptual model (fig. 40).

8.1 BETTER COMMUNICATION

As reported in section 6.1.1, most of the participants to this research showed a general attitude of not being interested in art, specifically contemporary art; and of not having interests in Louis Vuitton or Prada, or of being their consumers. These two might be the reasons why participants were not aware of the existence of the foundations. Yet, as reported in section 6.1.1.3, it has been quite common for the researcher to encounter situations where even fashion experts or art lovers have never heard of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* and *Fondazione Prada*; or they were sure that the foundations were dedicated to fashion products and the brands' history. This confusion with regards to the nature or existence of the foundations led to the conclusion that there is a deficiency in the communication strategies of the foundations, as discussed 6.1.2.5 and 6.1.3.5.

As analysed in Chapters 1 and 2, marketing and communication strategies are part of luxury fashion brands' main strengths. Louis Vuitton and Prada continue to insist that the foundations are separate from the fashion brands, however they are in fact part of the brand: as Corporate Social Responsibility activities (section 2.6.2.3), by carrying the brand's name, and by mirroring some major aesthetic characteristics that are possible to identify also in the fashion brand (section 2.6.2). Hence, they should exploit better the parenting effect which is generated by the fashion brand or by the corporate group (in

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the Louis Vuitton case). More precisely, as previously mentioned, the foundations should exploit those specific marketing and communications competences which characterise Prada and Louis Vuitton as luxury fashion brands.

Moreover, by utilising the same name as the core fashion brand, there is the risk of generating expectations in peoples' minds. Participants were not only expecting to enter in a well-refined place, but also to encounter a very different experience. Being careful in communicating better what the foundations are, what they are aiming for, might help in also attracting those people who are not ordinarily interested in the brand. Furthermore, a different kind of communication than the one employed by other museums, might facilitate a dialogue also with those people uninterested in art but who may nonetheless benefit from the experience alongside art enthusiasts.

Finally, an effective communication strategy would increase awareness for the foundations, and as a consequence, for the main fashion brands. Indeed, as shown in section 6.1.4.6, the idea of such brands investing a significant amount of money in the art was positively received and commented on by some of the participants, participants who can appreciate the social and cultural significance of art despite being personally uninterested in art. Therefore, communicating the foundations better could play an essential role in enhancing brand image and values, especially for those brands that, like Louis Vuitton and Prada, have a long and coherent history of investments and relationship with the arts (section 2.6.2).

8.2 INTERACTING, SHARING, CONSUMING, PARTICIPATING, CO-CREATING.

As discussed in the Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2), the consumption experience that happens in a luxury fashion brand's retail store, or flagship store, requires the brand to provide a certain level of social distance between the salespersons and the consumers. In this case, the flagship store layout is often used as a measure of social segregation. With regards to this apparent social distance maintained by luxury fashion brands, the art foundations are maintaining a similar attitude, although this could also be thought of other museums or cultural institutions. In particular, the idea of seeking information by asking an attendant,

as the participants had to do, generates a feeling of inferiority, especially in those who felt unable to understand the art, or generally feel the museum as an alien environment.

With the idea that a cultural institution should be inclusive towards as many people as possible, the art foundations should find solutions to overcome this feeling of inadequacy linked to the lack of knowledge, especially for those visitors who are unfamiliar with the arts. Understanding the art through acquired information has been presented as a critical element of this study. As discussed in Chapter 6, participants who were transformed during the exercises mainly experienced the transformation due to having received some piece of information.

During the focus groups, it emerged that the participants would have appreciated a more interactive way of retrieving information while visiting the exhibitions, or of engaging with the arts. One participant notably suggested that a quicker way of recovering the more basic information needed to understand a piece of art would have helped him, as he does not like to spend hours with guided tours and is not an art-enthusiast. As reported in section 6.1.2.4, *Fondation Louis Vuitton* has a mobile application that the audience can download, but this was noticed by only a couple of participants who also decided not to use it; while *Fondazione Prada,* which has been defined by the participants as very hard to interpret, does not have one. As for the communication and the promotion issue, also in this case, the main brands already have all the skills and creativity, the technological means, and the financial capabilities to provide a more interactive and alternative experience to their audience.

Only a few of the participants declared to have shared the experience on social media, while visiting the foundations. In particular, those who decided to share their visits, mainly focused on the buildings which are hosting the foundations. This shows that, also in this case, the place is an influencer of the experience, and not only in the commercial environment. By adding dedicated 'moments', or 'corners', in the foundations to encourage people to share their experience, the foundations would profit from free content generated by the audience, and EWOM, as discussed in section 6.1.3.5. These forms of free audience-led promotion activities are generally perceived as being more authentic than an advertisement.

An interesting example of a situation not adequately exploited in this context is the Takashi Murakami exhibition hosted by the *Fondation Louis Vuitton* between April and August 2018. Takashi Murakami is a famous Japanese artist who in the past has collaborated with the fashion brand on different occasions. His art is renowned for being colourful, playful, and recalling cartoons, those kinds of characteristics that people commonly consider 'Instagrammable' (as reported in section 6.1.3.2). However, by quickly browsing social media, and noticing a minimal number of posts in this regard, it appears that not even this kind of exhibition was exploited to communicate the foundation as it could have been (Newton, 2017).

A final consideration regards the fact that, as for the commercial environment, and as reported in section 6.1.3.5, also during these cultural moments, people would enjoy participating in producing something or doing something, instead of being only spectators. As reported by some participants, they felt more involved by interacting with a piece of art, or in other occasions, by creating something that would have been exhibited alongside the art in the museum. During the focus groups, some of the participants remembered some pieces of art because they were those which required some level of exploration and experimentation. As reported in section 3.3.2.2, the will of engaging with a broader community should be part of a museum's spirit. As explored in section 6.3, there are different kind of activities (light-touch, strong-touch) that museums are employing to better engage with the public, activities which also the foundations could initiate to increase their interaction with the audience.

Moreover, as discussed in section 3.3.1, the co-creation or co-production of something is also a way to increase the engagement of people with the brand. Yet, luxury fashion brands cannot risk undermining the perceived value of their products through co-production strategies. Hence, by providing opportunities for co-production or co-creation in the art foundations environment, they could achieve the same goal of engaging the consumer, but without endangering the product allure. Furthermore, forms of engagement in the foundations would involve a wider audience, not only the fashion consumer, and this might facilitate the brand to increase people awareness and desire for the brand, and maybe gain new customers.

As shown in Chapter 6, and graphically represented in Figures 38 and 39, because of the exercise conducted for this research, some of the participants declared that they would like to come back to visit the foundations. Some participants even stated that they had started to think of the fashion brand in a different, more positive, way. On the long-term, a more interactive, and participative environment in the foundations would facilitate transformations, but could also trigger a sense of loyalty for the brand, or even generate a relationship with it, which could turn into a purchase.

8.3 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The exercise conducted in the two foundations has generated a significant impact on the participants. In particular, the opportunity of being able to understand contemporary art, generally considered very difficult and elitist (section 6.1.1.1), seems to have triggered a transformation in everyone. Moreover, the fact that after several months from the experience people still remembered details of their visits, shows that the transformation that occurred was deeply rooted, as reported in section 6.2. Yet, these transformations were caused by forcing participants to act 'unnaturally', or differently than how they are used to; and by having a long conversation with each other on the topic. Dialogue and conversations are central aspects in the context of public engagement, and also one of the main aspects where the foundations are lacking. This could easily be amended by implementing the foundations' strategies with a number of activities that might facilitate any form of dialogue with the audience.

Although the tasks and the focus groups might be considered the cause of people's transformations, the foundations have shown to have already some potential to provide transformative experiences. Yet, one of the primary facilitators of a transformative experience that is missing in the foundations is the interpersonal exchange. That kind of exchange which happened during the focus groups, and that could have been started by the foundations in the venue, or on social media, or under any other kind of form. As for the interaction and the co-creation discussed in the previous section, a key point of a cultural institution is to make the audience feel involved, part of something meaningful.

By improving the opportunities of interpersonal exchange and dialogue with the foundation itself, the brand will increase the chances of providing some meaning to the

public through the art. This, together with a better promotion and all the other aspects discussed in this chapter, might make the luxury fashion brands' art foundation a productive venue to provide transformative experiences. By doing so, they would generate benefits for the audiences involved in the foundations, as well as for the foundations themselves, and due to a spill-over effect created by carrying the same name, also for the fashion brands.

To conclude, it is not really important if the art foundations are deemed a brand experience, or a CSR activity, or a proper cultural institution. Whether the foundations are to be considered brand experiences or cultural institutions, they are missing the point of engaging with people. On the one hand, consumers need to be engaged with or to create a relationship with the brand to feel unique and considered, and hence to become loyal. On the other hand, the public need to be engaged to learn and appreciate the art, to create a conversation, and to experience the art at a deeper level and with a meaning. A more profound and more sincere engagement is the key to provide those transformative experiences that might lead the brand to be perceived as more authentic, hence might lead to a stronger relationship between the brand and the consumer, or the public.

8.4   LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research has some limitations. The first limitation is due to the scope of the study. In particular, by focusing on a specific phenomenon which is happening in a specific moment in time, may be possible that under different circumstances the results and outcome as they were presented in this thesis might vary. Another similar limitation relates to the nature of the participants. By increasing the number of participants or selecting people of different ages, or with different interests, the outcome of this research might vary. The lack of validation of the conceptual model could be considered a limitation of this study too. Yet, these limitations are coherent with the philosophy that is underpinning this entire study. A final limitation is due to the lack of direct involvement of *Fondation Louis Vuitton* employees; an involvement which might bring to light some peculiarities that were impossible to gather by other means.

8.5 FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS & FUTURE RESEARCHES

There are a number of further developments and future researches which might be considered with regards to this study. A new stage of this research could regard the development of other models (fig. 38 and fig. 39) of the experiences lived by the participants. It would be interesting to map people's situations in the long-term to evaluate the duration of the impact of the transformation. Furthermore, this research could be further developed by involving a larger number of participants which might differ from that of this study, for characteristics of interests, ages, or nationalities. It would be interesting also to involve brands' consumers, and evaluate the effect that living a transformative experience in the art foundations has on their relationship with the brand. Another further development might be of involving more members of the foundations and of the brands studied. A final development might be the validation of the conceptual model by involving the art foundations.

With regards to future researches, in section 3.2 of the literature review, different typologies of experiences that can all be deemed transformative have been reported: such as flow experience, peak experience, or transcendent experience. It would be interesting to evaluate further which of these kinds of transformative experiences people would live in the foundations. Another possible future research that could derive from this study regards the testing of the conceptual model both on existing or new foundations, whether in the fashion industry or in other sectors. Moreover, it would be interesting to analyse the results deriving by applying different methodologies and approaches to the same study, such as a more quantitative approach, or a case study methodology. Similarly, it would also be interesting to apply case studies or quantitative methods to evaluate transformative experiences that might occur in other foundations. Finally, with regards to Figure 41, it would be interesting to further look into the possibility of defining different stages of transformation, maybe in collaboration with academics in the psychology field.

8.6 IMPLICATION FOR THE FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE & CONTRIBUTION.

This research has theoretical and managerial implications. As frequently mentioned, this study aimed to investigate luxury fashion brands' art foundations as a potential venue for luxury fashion brands to provide transformative experiences. By achieving the aim through the objectives set in the Introduction chapter, this research contributes to knowledge by investigating luxury fashion brands' art foundations as a brand experience, and from the public perspective. Moreover, this research opens a conversation with regards to transformative experiences in the fashion industry, in the luxury sector, and as marketing strategies. In particular, this thesis determined that transformative experiences might be a way for brands to regain credibility by providing experiences that are perceived as more authentic. In the specific context of the luxury sector, these experiences are allowing brands to engage with the consumer in co-creative and co-producing activities without undermining the allure of exclusivity and high-quality of their product. The model provided in Figure 40, the outcome of this research, has theoretical implications, by suggesting improvements that might facilitate transformative experiences to occur in the art foundations' environment. Finally, the same model has also managerial implications, by being a marketing tool for brands, and their foundations, that could easily be implemented in their strategies to improve their opportunities of providing transformative experiences.

A list of publication is available in Appendix 5.

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APPENDIX 1 – FOCUS GROUPS' GUIDELINES

Appendix 1 shows the English version of the document containing the guidelines sent to all the participants to *Fondazione Prada* and *Fondation Louis Vuitton* focus groups.

A day at the Fondation Louis Vuitton

My name is Alessia Grassi, I am a PhD candidate at the University of Huddersfield, and I am currently conducting a research on how luxury fashion brands give the public access to their private art foundations.
This list of easy tasks aims to understand how attendances, employees, facilities, and the structure of the foundation are making the public felt engaged with it.

All answers provided are for the purpose of this research only, no third party is involved.
Thank you for participating in this exercise.

For any questions about the research, please feel free to contact me:
alessia.grassi@hud.ac.uk

Please, provide your contact details.
After your visit, I would like to treat you and the other participants to coffee and biscuits and to have an informal chat with regards to your experience at the foundation.

Name:
Email Address:

A day at the Fondation Louis Vuitton

1. You're entering the foundation.
Is anybody approaching you with some brochures or map?

◯ Yes

◯ No

2. If No, please, go to the reception and ask anything you want (i.e. a map, a suggested route to visit the place, where's the bathroom, if you can take pictures).
How would you describe the girl/guy at the reception?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Friendly	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Helpful	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

3. You're in one of the rooms of the exhibition.
Are there any brochures about the artists or about what you're looking at?

◯ Yes

◯ No

4. If Yes, how is the content of the brochure?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Clear	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Informative	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

5. Now, you need the bathroom.
Is the bathroom easy to find?

◯ Yes

◯ No

A day at the Fondation Louis Vuitton

1. You're entering the foundation.
Is anybody approaching you with some brochures or map?

○ Yes

○ No

2. If No, please, go to the reception and ask anything you want (i.e. a map, a suggested route to visit the place, where's the bathroom, if you can take pictures).
How would you describe the girl/guy at the reception?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Friendly	○	○	○	○	○
Helpful	○	○	○	○	○

3. You're in one of the rooms of the exhibition.
Are there any brochures about the artists or about what you're looking at?

○ Yes

○ No

4. If Yes, how is the content of the brochure?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Clear	○	○	○	○	○
Informative	○	○	○	○	○

5. Now, you need the bathroom.
Is the bathroom easy to find?

○ Yes

○ No

6. How would you describe the bathroom?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Clean	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable	○	○	○	○	○
Elegant	○	○	○	○	○

7. You are tired of walking around and you want to seat.
Can you easily find a place to seat?

○ Yes

○ No

8. You're in a room of the exhibition and you're really appreciating a paint/sculpture/installation.
Please, ask the attendant in the room for more information about the work of art or the artist.
How would you evaluate the attendance?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Friendly	○	○	○	○	○
Informative	○	○	○	○	○
Helpful	○	○	○	○	○

9. Now, you're ready to go home.
You'd like to leave your comment about the today experience to the foundation.
Is there any place where you can leave your comments (i.e. a comment box, a guestbook)?

○ Yes

○ No

10. How would you evaluate the whole experience?
Leave any comment, note, or sketch that you think can help to better describe your experience at the foundation.

APPENDIX 2 – PARTICIPANTS' NOTES EXAMPLE

Appendix 2 shows an example of the guidelines document filled by one of the participants in *Fondazione Prada*. The document was translated to facilitate the participants' experience.

6. Come descriveresti il bagno?

	Molto in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Neutro	D'accordo	Molto d'accordo
Pulito	○	○	○	○	✕
Confortevole	○	○	○	○	✕
Elegante	○	✕	○	○	○

PARTICOLARE e MODERNO MA NON ELEGANTE

7. Sei stufo di camminare per la Fondazione e vuoi sederti un momento.
Riesci a trovare facilmente un posto dove riposarti per un momento?

○ Si

✕ No   HO PROVATO NELLA SEZIONE 6 DELLA MAPPA

8. Sei in una delle stanze dell'esibizione e c'è un opera/un artista che ti sta colpendo in modo particolare.
Per favore, trova un addetto di sala e chiedigli ulteriori informazioni riguardanti l'opera o l'artista.
Come valuteresti l'addetto di sala?

	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Neutro	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo
Amichevole	○	✕	○	○	○
Informativo	○	✕	○	○	○
Utile	○	✕	○	○	○

9. Ora sei pronto per andare a casa.
Vorresti lasciare un commento riguardante la tua esperienza in Fondazione.
Riesci a trovare qualcosa dove poter lasciare un tuo commento? (es. una scatola per i commenti, un libro degli ospiti, etc.)

○ Si

✕ No

10. Come valuteresti l'intera esperienza?

Scrivi qualsiasi commento, nota, disegno che pensi possa aiutarti a descrivere l'esperienza di oggi.

~~GARDISTACO~~

Gli edifici e l'ambientazione sono sicuramente interessanti e ne consiglio la visita.

Secondo me manca però un "filo conduttore" della visita. Dovrebbero spiegare meglio come eseguire la visita. Gli edifici sono separati e distanti e la visita risulta dispersiva (anche con la mappa fornita risulta difficile capire come proseguire la visita tra un edificio e l'altro).

APPENDIX 3 – DATA CODING

Appendix 3 shows a few examples of the way in which the data were coded utilising NVivo software. Figure 42 picture shows the four main themes derived from the data. Figures 43, 44, 45, and 46 represent the sub-coding of each one of the four themes; in order: Behaviour, Impact, Perception, The Place. Figure 47 shows a sub-sub-coding of the theme 'Impact', and of the sub-coding 'Overall Experience'. Figure 48 and 49 show part of the material coded utilising the software.
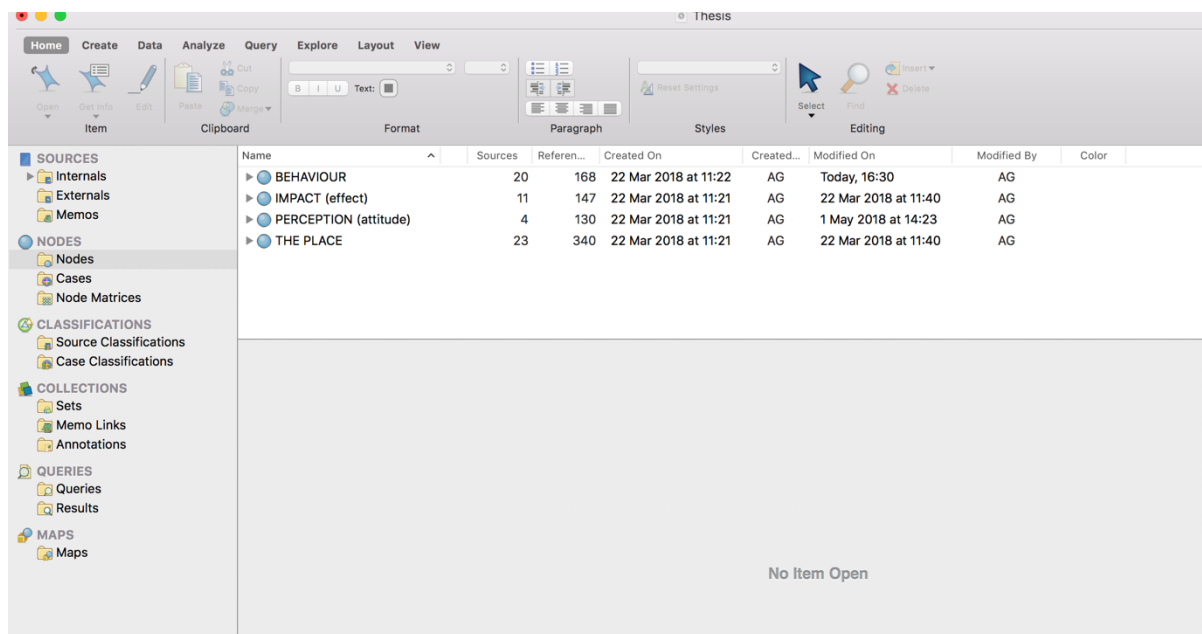
Figure 42 – Themes emerged from the data analysis on NVivo.
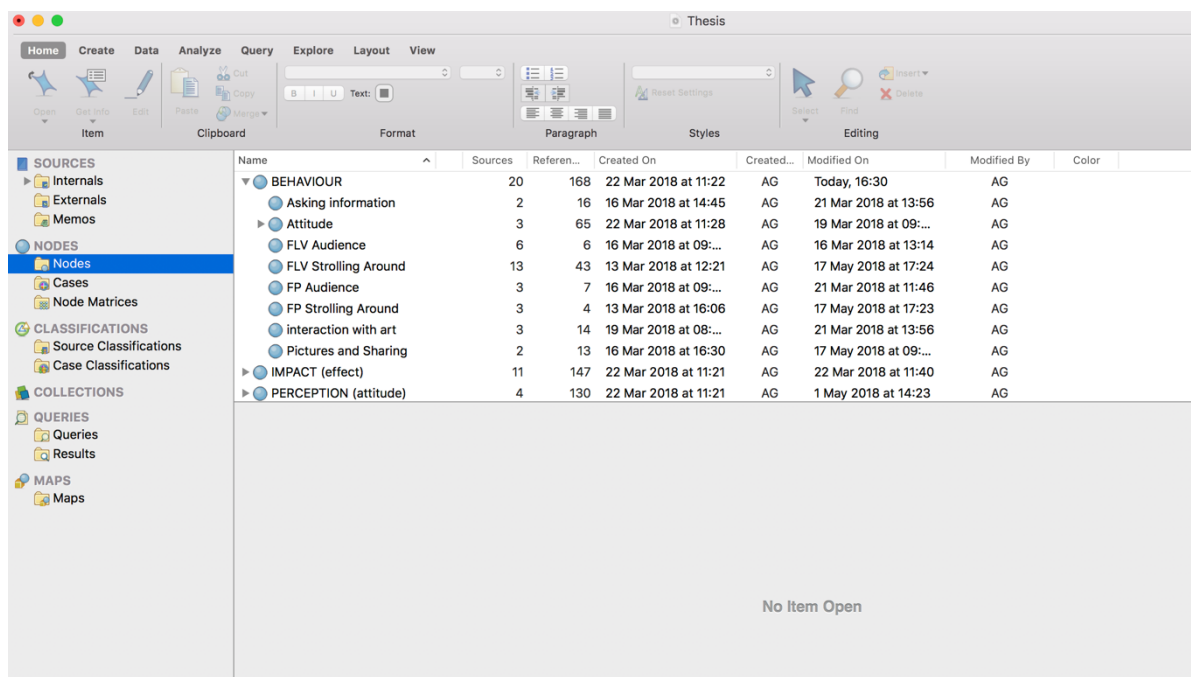
Figure 43 - Behaviour sub-coding.

Figure 44 - Impact sub-coding.

Figure 45 - Perception sub-coding.

Figure 46 - The Place sub-coding.

Figure 47 - Sub-sub-coding of the Impact theme/Overall Experience code.

Figure 48 – Example of the focus groups' transcription coding.

Figure 49 - Example of field notes coding.

APPENDIX 4 – FIELD NOTES

Appendix 4 shows examples of the field notes taken during the participant observation exercise. Colours on pages derive from the pre-coding done to create the template for the data analysis.

explaining me what I'm going to see, how look at the exhibition. So I am simply strolling from a room to another.

There's a -1 level, where you find yourself near the big pool at the base of FLV, with mirror and lights all around. Then there are other floors with dark rooms, light rooms, paintings, sculptures, music, installation, etc. I'm not a big fan of ART. But, really ?! It's all here ?!

"ASTONISHING THE PUBLIC" said Arnault. Seems a balley to me, nothing more or less of others. But I'm ignorant on the subject. However, it's interesting how many people are outside on the terraces. Most of them looking up at the FLV structure, someone looking at the TOUR EIFFEL on the right, an AIR BALLOON in the sky. It's a really nice design, but I'm a little disappointed. A map, guided tour, a bus came to take you from the airport, signs in the metro station, and that's it. WHERE'S PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?
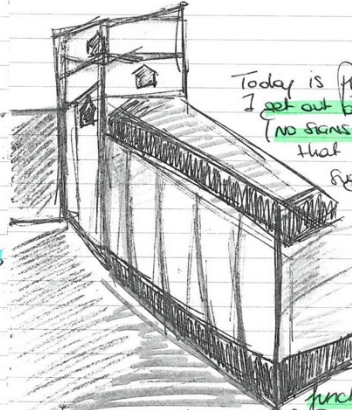
30/03/2016

Today is PRADA turn. I get out of the underground (no signs inside the station that the fondation suggest on its website as the one to get to them). I don't know where I am. Obviously Milan, but I don't know the neighbour. There's a big junction with traffic lights. No indications of Prada. I need maps. Finally, I find the way. After turning right on a bridge that overpass the railway, there's a sign. The neighbour is apparently poor, not very wealthy (no comparison with LV). There's a family before me, going in my same direction. They're french. Tourists. I see billboards of "FONDAZIONE PRADA" along the railway wall.

Fondazione Prada

APPENDIX 5 – LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

CONFERENCE PUBLICATIONS

A. Grassi, Providing Transformative Experiences: A Marketing Tool for Luxury Fashion Brands, 1st Fashion Marketing and Consumption Discourse Colloquium, 2018.

A. Grassi, S. Wigley, Inclusivity is the New Exclusivity: The Case of Gucci S.p.A., 47th European Marketing Academy Conference, 2018.

A. Grassi, T.D. Cassidy, S. Wigley, Luxury Fashion Brands Ownership Of Private Art Foundations: A New Way Of Conceiving Marketing, 1st Luxury Industry Symposium of the International Marketing Trends Conference, 2017.

A. Grassi, Luxury Fashion Brands' Art Foundations in the Context of Public Engagement: An Exploratory Investigation, FTC Association Research Event, 2017.

A. Grassi, S. Wigley, Transcending the Conventional Relationship Luxury Brand-Customer in Fashion Through Private Art Foundations, International Congress on Visual Culture, 2017.

A. Grassi, Luxury Fashion Brands' Art Foundations in the Context of Public Engagement: An Exploratory Investigation, Fashion Across Boundaries: PhD Workshop, IUAV University of Venice, 2016.

A. Grassi, S. Swindells, S. Wigley, Luxury Fashion Brands' Art Foundations - An Exploratory Investigation, The Fashion Project - Exploring Critical Issues - 8th Global Meeting, 2016.

JOURNAL & BOOK CHAPTER PUBLICATIONS

A. Grassi, S. Wigley, Gucci Inclusivity is the New Exclusivity, International Journal of Costume and Fashion, vol. 18, n. 1, June 2018.

A. Grassi, T.D. Cassidy, S. Wigley, Luxury Fashion Brands Ownership Of Private Art Foundations: A New Way Of Conceiving Marketing, Journal of Marketing Trends, vol. 4, n. 2, January 2018.

F. Cerutti, A. Grassi, M. Vallati, Unveiling the Oracle: Artificial Intelligence for the XXI Century, Intelligent Decision Technologies: an International Journal (in press).

A. Grassi, S. Swindells, S. Wigley, The Art Foundations of Luxury Fashion Brands: An Exploratory Investigation, chapter of the "Fashion: Exploring Critical Issues" ebook (in press).