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An Exploration of Interactive Characteristics in the Commercial Application of Installation Art: A Case Study of Gentle Monster's Physical Retail Outlets in China

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Abstract: The development of installation art currently exhibits diverse transformations. As public aesthetic sensibilities continue to evolve, interactive installations hold a distinct advantage over other forms through their heightened engagement potential. The convergence of art and commerce has increasingly facilitated seamless connections between audiences and brands. The South Korean fashion brand Gentle Monster exemplifies this trend. This paper examines how the brand leverages marketing narratives, design storytelling, artist collaborations, and intellectual property to forge cross-sector partnerships. By analysing the specific methodologies employed in its physical exhibitions, it explores the triadic relationship between installation art, audiences, and brands. Through summarising audience engagement during on-site interactions, it investigates the unique characteristics of interactive installation art within brand retail contexts. This innovative art-marketing model is poised to become a significant opportunity for brands to redefine their intrinsic values and pioneer fresh approaches to commercial marketing.

Keywords: Installation Art; Art Business; Gentle Monster; Popular Aesthetics.

1. Introduction

In today's era of widespread technological advancement, artistic expression has evolved beyond the singular format of easel painting, diversifying into sculpture, architecture, installation art, digital imagery, and other forms. The development of digital art has gained particular favour among younger generations. A pronounced human-centric trend has emerged, with mass-appeal art installations enjoying widespread popularity. Since the 1980s, aesthetics has increasingly focused on the subjectivity of the audience. "Interaction" in the Modern Chinese Dictionary denotes a process of mutual influence or engagement, emphasising the bidirectional and relational nature between subjects. The Oxford Dictionary similarly defines reciprocal feedback as a key attribute of interaction. Unlike ancient Greek sculpture, installation art possesses weaker boundaries in its artistic language due to the complexity of its constituent elements. Its primary artistic value is realised through the "interaction" between the individual and the installation object, employing computer technology and physical decoration in its creatio. In the present era, consumers may seek self-worth through brands or added value, expressing personal taste, values, and lifestyles. This renders brand building and promotion pivotal. As a fashion label, Gentle Monster has steadfastly crafted eyewear tailored for Asian features, consistently advancing brand dissemination through diverse development strategies and cross-sector integration from its inception. Its offline Giant Exhibition features numerous biomimetic mechanical installations. These incorporate responsive and narrative co-creation techniques, enabling the brand to "converse" with consumers. Takashi Murakami once remarked, "Art and commerce are not opposites but mutually reinforcing; commercial success grants me greater creative freedom." The interactivity of installation art, fuelled by the convergence of technology and artistry, unleashes unique appeal, market influence, and diverse creative possibilities. It not only fulfils mass aesthetic demands but also propels brand advancement.GM employs diverse installation art forms, primarily categorised as static installations, kinetic mechanical installations, and sensor-activated kinetic installations. While interactive elements are incorporated, this discussion focuses on exploring the interactive characteristics of GM's brand installations to examine the nature of interactive installations within commercial contexts.

2. Research Questions and Design

2.1. Research Questions

This study employs in-depth interviews and theoretical analysis. Primarily through in-depth interviews with visitors, it collects offline participants' reflections on installation art, exploring the interactive processes and functions of installation art within commercial physical retail spaces.

2.2. Interview Design

Interviews centred on offline visitors' interactions with GM Giant Exhibition installations. Key themes included human-machine interaction methods, post-interaction reflections and suggestions regarding installations, and brand recall after the visit. Interviewers recounted their browsing experiences to identify common interaction patterns.

3. The Interactive Process

Reproduction of the interactive process The "interaction" in this article mainly refers to the process of interaction between the audience and the installation site. There are many factors of interaction, and the audience interacts with each other through visiting the exhibition and the installation, both sensory, ideological, and behavioral. Interactive art creation

is always around people, and many factors of the work will be directly or indirectly generated with the audience, and behavior is a concrete manifestation of the interactive relationship [1]. Based on relevant theories concerning interviews and device interactions, figure 1 can be derived.

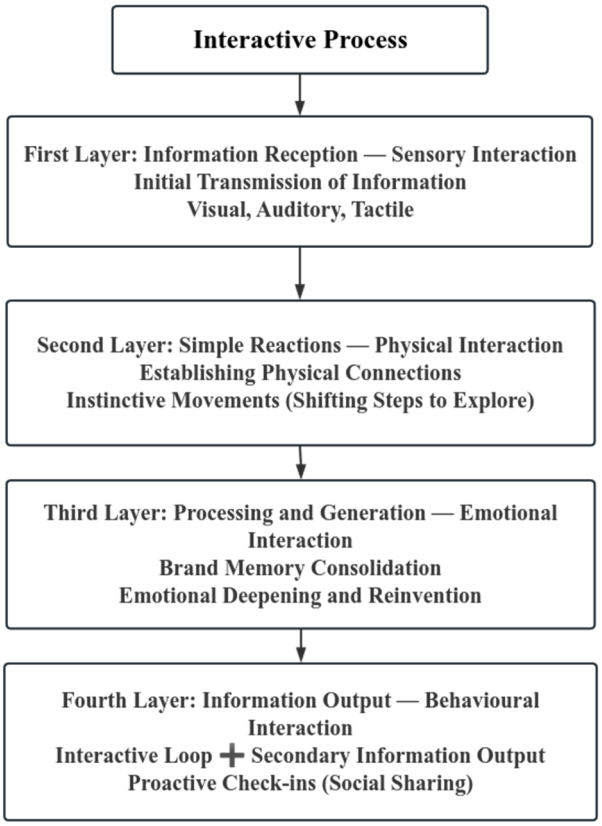


Figure 1. Interactive Process

4. Linguistic Characteristics and Multiplicity of Interaction in Installation Art

4.1. The Distinctiveness of Installation Art's Language

The term “installation art” began to proliferate in the late 1970s, referring to holistic artistic expressions encompassing installations, scenes, and similar forms. Compared to the linguistic limitations of easel painting, it possesses a multidimensional expressive language and spatiality, utilising materials more closely aligned with everyday life, thereby significantly narrowing the distance between the public and art. Unlike easel painting, which employs fewer compositional elements, installation art inherently incorporates mature elements from diverse artistic disciplines to achieve its own integrity. Contemporary installation art exhibits characteristics of diversity, accessibility, and openness, but its most crucial feature lies in its interactive and participatory nature. Hans Robert Jauss, one of the founders of reception aesthetics, proposed the concept of the “horizon of expectation”, emphasising the importance of the reader's aesthetic experience in the generation of meaning within a work. The very openness of installation art's artistic language affords the audience the possibility of active reception and participation.

4.2. The Multiplicity of "Interaction"

Given the subject matter involves fashion brands merging art with commerce, commercial objectives within interactions must be considered. The interactive process can be examined through three dimensions: the subjects of interaction, the methods employed, and the outcomes achieved. These three aspects reveal the multifaceted nature of interaction.

4.2.1. The Subject of Interaction

Human agency and the adaptability, openness, and narrative potential of art installations. In the Giant exhibition, the primary interaction involves people and the art installations themselves. Within the GM exhibition, the agency of the audience and the functional aspects of the installations play a crucial role in the interactive experience. Based on the principle that art engages with people, interactive art only fulfils its purpose when the artwork resonates with the aesthetic sensibilities of the majority of viewers, thereby becoming accessible and comprehensible. The distinctive form of "interaction" subtly transforms spectators into participants, enabling them to engage with and redefine brand meaning. At this juncture, the audience assumes dual roles as both observers and co-creators. For this unique brand marketing model, defining the audience's creative contribution becomes more complex, extending beyond mere engagement with specific interactive installations to encompass the audience's own reinterpretation of brand memory.

Specifically, brand artistic communication primarily manifests through three avenues: the artistic transformation of product imagery, the artistic refinement of communication channels, and the artistic expression of brand philosophy[2]. GM's art installations demonstrate remarkable compatibility. The brand's philosophy fundamentally embraces an experimental spirit that transcends boundaries, extensively utilising digital interaction, simulation technology, mechanical engineering, and AI technology – experimental applications of new media – to forge contemporary installation aesthetics. The Shenzhen physical store, themed HAUS NOWHERE, constructs a unique worldview exclusive to INSECT KINGDOM. The official narrative framework revolves around the delicate tensions between giants, insect tribes, and beast tribes, hinting at millennia-old secrets poised to be unveiled. Visitors merge with the space, experiencing transdimensional perspectives through unconventional viewpoints, fostering emotional resonance and sparking unique imaginative journeys within the environment. Central to this are the Primordial Giant (static sculptural installation), the Three Oracles (dynamic mechanical installations), and the INSECT KINGDOM (static installation).The Primordial Giant curls its colossal form, eyes closed in slumber. Crafted primarily from fibreglass, silicone, skin-textured coatings, and simulated fur—materials akin to hyper-realistic sculpture—it delivers a visceral impact, evoking the presence of a living titan. This presentation, rooted in megalithic aesthetics, inevitably sparks profound associations. The Prophet attracts the most visitors, owing to its exquisitely lifelike skin texture, subtle expression, and mechanical transmission that masterfully embodies the enigmatic seer. The Primordial Giant's hyper-realistic skin and colossal scale, despite being a static installation, evoke an oppressive sense of impending awakening. The Insect Kingdom employs mechanical materials assembled in a manner reminiscent of insect specimens, yet infused with futuristic mechanical

aesthetics.Without textual explanation, the open-plan space and installations employ distinctive visual and figurative narrative themes that align perfectly with the thematic setting and product design.

4.2.2. Interaction Methods

This primarily refers to the relationship between installations and visitors. The virtual reality spaces created by the GM brand can be categorised into two "immersive" approaches: active interaction and passive interaction. These two interaction types can be attributed to different installation types. The store alters its spatial scenes according to the theme of each time period, emphasising the creation of a "sense of place". It focuses on the interaction between the audience and the environment, using the three-dimensional expressive language of installation art to enhance immersion and facilitate understanding of the themed product series. Art installations are further adapted for distinct themes. For instance, the latest Shanghai-themed POCKET series incorporates AI-powered interactive installations. At the POCKET series store on Shanghai's Huaihai Road, an interactive installation uses AI to generate personalised Bratz doll avatars. Such installations offer deeper engagement and comprehensive interaction, employing AI generation and photo recognition to create unique dolls reflecting visitors' appearance, attire, and movements.Some visitors even emulate the dolls' style by donning their favourite eyewear. Based on both respondent feedback and the author's personal experience, in-store interactions typically begin with visual engagement: shop window displays, installation aesthetics, and the overall spatial ambiance.Upon entering the exhibition space, visitors follow guided pathways through the display. During this process, they engage with the installations through physical interaction—circling the pieces to observe from multiple angles, photographing them for social media, and interpreting both the artwork and the brand. For instance, on Xiaohongshu, one finds visitors' selfies mimicking the "Prophet" from various perspectives, or images gazing up at the giant. This process yields distinct interpretative angles and outcomes for the installation. Each individual becomes an interpreter-critic. Some interviewees expressed awe at the "skin" texture of the Prophet, a primal reaction stemming from sensory perception. Art's allure lies in its capacity for spontaneous association, prompting visitors to personalise interpretations through their experiences, objects, and lives. For instance, one respondent perceived the "Sleeping Giant" as seemingly "alive". Ultimately, this leads to varied interactive outcomes. Most attendees engage primarily for "check-ins" and "photography," with their immediate actions fueling secondary dissemination online. This transforms every viewer into an organic disseminator—whether through self-curated visit guides, installation analyses, or interactive photographs. Notably, some interviewees were inspired to visit in person after encountering other visitors' shared content online. This fusion of art and digital interaction organically forms a closed-loop system, seamlessly integrating human engagement, installation art, and brand interaction.

4.2.3. Multiplicity of Interactive Outcomes

This can be analysed through interactive effects. The interactive outcomes of installation art, based on the diverse installations within the overall exhibition, can be categorised into two forms of dual interaction: designer-preset outcomes and visitor-initiated responses. For commercial brands, the paramount consideration is marketing efficacy—specifically, human reactions following interaction. Human activity within commercial spaces operates on three scales: behavioural, physiological, and psychological [3]. Consequently, installation art within commercial spaces must also account for these dimensions.The GM Giant Exhibition exemplifies this through three key aspects. Firstly, the physical space and installation design align with human behavioural scale. The exhibition spans three levels, with key areas featuring hollowed-out spaces housing colossal giants. This creates a visual draw for visitors while reserving ample surrounding space for close encounters with the slumbering giants. The overall spatial and installation design is both compelling and gently guiding, layering the narrative across levels. Secondly, the thematic narrative centres on humanity, ensuring strong audience resonance. People naturally engage with relatable subjects; the giants in this tale mirror human traits, while the other two species represent natural fauna. The giants' greed and subsequent punishment by their creator mirror reflections on human conduct, compelling contemplation of humanity's destiny. The static giant installation evokes an oppressive sense of impending awakening and mystery, while the dynamic Prophet blinks as if perpetually probing the future's trajectory. This embodies the artist and brand's vision of constructing a new worldview and delivering a transcendent experience. By aligning with prevailing aesthetic sensibilities, the brand has effectively achieved this objective in the current exhibition. Thirdly, it fulfils the psychological need for immersive experiences. Through visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli, it subconsciously constructs motivations. This subconscious induction is closely tied to the nature of new media installation art. The curator employs meticulously designed narratives and interactive elements to forge an emotional connection between the audience and the brand.By leveraging novel concepts like 'macro-object aesthetics' and futuristic technology, the brand attracts audiences and amplifies reach through organic word-of-mouth from visitors, achieving substantial zero-cost dissemination. Though no data currently quantifies this shift, GM has cultivated a dedicated following of loyal brand advocates.One respondent, after researching and revisiting the installation More is More by Max Siedentopf and Haus Siedentopf on Xiaohongshu, discerned its environmental ethos and deemed it profoundly meaningful. This indicates audiences are willing to engage in thoughtful interaction and possess heightened artistic discernment. The remark "the installation featuring rubbish bags left a lasting impression" reveals self-constructed brand memory.In summary, the outcomes of proactive engagement can be categorised as: the reconstruction of visitors' artistic sensibilities, the establishment of brand memory, and successful brand marketing case studies. This undoubtedly represents a masterful fusion of art and commerce.

The brand-curated retail model primarily employs installations to convey information through diverse formats, offering audiences open-ended artistic spaces. This subtly deepens brand recall based on individual aesthetics and lifestyles. Many interviewees and media platforms reveal that visitors prefer sharing photographs, reflections, and interpretations—expressing their engagement through text and imagery. While some respondents may not develop strong purchasing impulses, the majority express a desire to revisit the physical store, positioning them as potential customers. The psychological outcome of audience interaction primarily involves brand memory formation, strengthening brand identification and self-awareness construction. Gentle

Monster's interactive installation spaces, seemingly simple and exaggerated short-term marketing tactics, actually create a complete interactive loop.The philosophy that "commerce is art, and art is commerce" is embodied in practice. GM's physical retail stores consistently employ an artistic dialogue approach, inviting audiences into the brand. The 20% merchandise to 80% installation ratio disrupts traditional brick-and-mortar retail models. While seemingly "putting the cart before the horse," it elicits a powerful response. This can be attributed to the elevation of mass aesthetic standards in the current era, alongside the popularisation, secularisation, and diversification of installation art.

4.2.4. Summary

In summary, GM's installation art interactions exhibit multiplicity in their subjects, methods, and outcomes. The fusion of installation art and commerce, facilitated by technological advancement, leverages the medium's unique interactivity to forge effective connections between brands and the public. Moreover, traditional consumption models no longer suffice to satisfy contemporary consumer desires. Increasing emphasis is placed upon fulfilling spiritual needs.Consumer perspectives extend beyond basic product utility to encompass spiritual value—namely, personalised consumption. Gentle Monster harnesses installation art's distinctive empowering function within offline brand marketing, satisfying consumers' pursuit of high-quality, individualised taste. Installation artworks themselves embody humanisation and personification, forging a singular "brand like a friend". This model warrants thorough examination!

5. Conclusion

As technology continues to evolve, artistic expression will become increasingly diverse, and experiential marketing will grow more prevalent. When implementing such strategies, attention must be paid to avoiding homogenisation. Continuous innovation, precise positioning, and matching the right artistic form are essential to achieving optimal results. Numerous interviewees expressed a desire for "more interactive installations", highlighting audiences' strong demand for immersive brand experiences. Many brands are now integrating art galleries into everyday life, enabling art to serve daily living. Interactive installation art holds considerable future potential. This study aims to contribute to research on interactive characteristics across different installation art models and the integration of installation art with commercial ventures.

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