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Luxury Brands as Cultural Actors. Heritage, Creative Cities, and Tourism Ecosystems in the Luxury Economy

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Abstract. *Luxury brands are increasingly operating at the intersection of cultural production, heritage valorisation, and tourism development within global creative cities. Moving beyond their traditional role as producers of high-end goods, they act as culturally embedded actors that mobilise heritage resources and artification strategies to generate symbolic value and institutional legitimacy.*

This paper examines how luxury brands integrate intangible cultural heritage into branding practices and how these processes contribute to the development of tourism ecosystems. Adopting an institutional and cultural perspective, the study conceptualises luxury brands as actors embedded in networks of cultural production, symbolic legitimisation, and destination development. A qualitative multiple case study approach is employed, focusing on two Italian firms—Buccellati and Molteni Group— to illustrate heritage-based branding practices.

The findings show that heritage serves as an institutionalised organisational resource, embedded in archives, museums, and structured cultural practices, while artification functions as a mechanism for constructing legitimacy at the field level, aligning brands with institutionalised cultural frameworks. Furthermore, corporate cultural spaces and heritage initiatives enhance the symbolic appeal of creative cities and contribute to the development of tourism ecosystems.

This study makes three key contributions to the literature: (1) it reconceptualises intangible cultural heritage as an institutional resource; (2) it advances the understanding of artification as a mechanism of legitimacy construction; and (3) it bridges luxury branding and tourism research through an ecosystem-based perspective. In doing so, it positions luxury brands as cultural mediators operating between cultural production and destination development.

Framing of the research. *The luxury industry has undergone significant transformations as globalisation, digitalisation, and evolving consumer expectations have reshaped brand management strategies. Luxury brands now compete not only through product quality and exclusivity but also through symbolic value, cultural meaning, and experiential engagement (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).*

As competition intensifies, firms are differentiating themselves more through narratives that convey authenticity, creativity, and cultural depth. Consequently, luxury consumption has therefore evolved beyond product acquisition to encompass experiences, and storytelling (Batat, 2019; Kumar & Swain, 2025). In response, companies are integrating craftsmanship traditions, historical archives, and cultural collaborations into their branding strategies. This links contemporary products to cultural identities and reinforcing authenticity and distinctiveness (Beverland, 2005; Dion & Borraz, 2014).

Within this context, luxury brands operate as cultural actors that contribute to the creation and dissemination of meaning (Holt, 2004). Rather than functioning solely as commercial organizations, they engage with museums, cultural institutions, artists, and creative communities, positioning their products within the aesthetic and symbolic frameworks traditionally associated with the arts. This shift reflects a broader transformation in which luxury firms extend their role beyond market activities to become participants in cultural ecosystems.

A key resource enabling this transformation is intangible cultural heritage, which includes craftsmanship traditions, artisanal knowledge, and cultural practices transmitted across generations (UNESCO, 2003). In luxury industries, such heritage functions both as a production resource and as a source of symbolic value, reinforcing authenticity, cultural depth, and legitimacy (Kapferer, 2014; Throsby, 2001).

At the same time, luxury brands operate within creative cities—urban environments where cultural production, creative industries, and tourism intersect (Richards, 2011). These cities host dense networks of designers, cultural institutions, and tourism infrastructures that shape global cultural economies. Within these contexts, luxury brands contribute to cultural life through exhibitions, heritage spaces, and collaborations with artistic and institutional actors.

These initiatives increasingly form part of urban tourism ecosystems. From an ecosystem perspective, tourism can be understood as a configuration of interdependent actors whose interactions co-create value at the destination level (Richards, 2011; Richards, 2021). Recent studies further emphasise that such ecosystems are structured through economic and relational interdependencies linking industrial activities, cultural production, and territorial development (Platania et al., 2025).

The concept of artification is particularly useful for interpreting these dynamics. Artification refers to processes through which objects or practices originally perceived as non-art acquire artistic legitimacy through aesthetic framing and institutional recognition (Shapiro & Heinich, 2012). In luxury industries, it reinforces perceptions of rarity,

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creativity, and symbolic value, as brands collaborate with artists, organise exhibitions, and curate heritage spaces (Massi & Turrini, 2020). These practices blur the boundaries between commerce and art and position luxury products within cultural frameworks associated with artistic production. Artification can be interpreted as a field-level mechanism through which organizations align with institutionalised cultural frameworks, thereby reinforcing legitimacy and symbolic value. It can also be understood as a form of boundary work through which luxury brands negotiate the distinction between art and market domains. Despite growing scholarly interest in luxury branding, cultural heritage, and creative cities, limited research has examined how luxury brands simultaneously contribute to cultural production and tourism ecosystems. Existing research remains fragmented across branding and tourism studies, calling for more integrative approaches (Zhang et al., 2026). Much of the existing literature has focused on brand authenticity, heritage branding, or consumer perceptions, while less attention has been devoted to the broader cultural and territorial role of luxury firms. Similarly, tourism studies have often analysed destination attractiveness and cultural experiences without fully considering the role of luxury brands as actors shaping cultural infrastructures and tourism imaginaries.

This paper advances a theoretical reframing of luxury brands by conceptualising them not merely as cultural actors, but as institutional producers of cultural legitimacy. In this perspective, heritage infrastructures and artification processes are not simply branding strategies, but organisational and field-level mechanisms through which firms stabilise symbolic value and actively shape cultural and tourism ecosystems.

This study addresses this gap by examining how luxury brands mobilise heritage resources, artification strategies, and cultural initiatives to position themselves within creative city ecosystems. Adopting a cultural and institutional perspective, the paper investigates how heritage-based branding practices are embedded in organisational structures and how they contribute not only to symbolic legitimacy but also to tourism ecosystem development.

The present study makes three key contributions to the existing literature. Firstly, it reconceptualises intangible cultural heritage as an institutionalised infrastructure embedded in organisational practices, which stabilises legitimacy over time. Secondly, it advances the understanding of artification by interpreting it as a field-level mechanism of institutional alignment and legitimacy transfer across cultural and market domains. This enables luxury brands to embed their products within recognised cultural frameworks. Thirdly, it combines luxury branding and tourism research by adopting an ecosystem-based perspective, demonstrating how luxury brands actively shape tourism ecosystems by co-producing symbolic value. The study provides a comprehensive framework that integrates these perspectives, establishing a clear link between branding, cultural legitimacy and territorial value creation.

Purpose of the paper. *Building on an ecosystem-based and institutional perspective, this paper examines how luxury brands mobilise intangible cultural heritage within branding strategies and how these practices contribute to tourism ecosystems in creative cities. In particular, the study investigates how heritage resources are embedded in organisational practices, how artification processes support the cultural positioning and legitimacy of luxury brands, and how these dynamics shape their role within urban cultural and tourism systems.*

By analysing the cases of Buccellati and Molteni Group, the research explores how craftsmanship traditions, design heritage, and corporate cultural spaces function as strategic resources that strengthen brand legitimacy while simultaneously contributing to the symbolic and experiential attractiveness of urban destinations.

To address these issues, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. *How do luxury brands mobilise intangible cultural heritage as an institutionalised resource within branding strategies?*

RQ2. How do artification strategies function as mechanisms of cultural positioning and legitimacy construction in luxury markets?

RQ3. How do heritage-based branding practices contribute to tourism ecosystems in creative cities?

Methodology. *Following the literature review, this study adopts a qualitative multiple case study approach to examine how luxury brands mobilise cultural heritage within creative cities and tourism ecosystems (Yin, 2018).*

The empirical analysis focuses on two Italian luxury brands: Buccellati, operating in high jewellery, and Molteni Group, operating in luxury furniture and design. These cases were selected through purposive sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989), as both firms actively integrate cultural heritage and creative production into their branding strategies while operating within the Milan design ecosystem. Although they belong to different sectors, they are analytically comparable in their use of heritage to connect brand identity, cultural production, and territorial attractiveness.

The unit of analysis consists of the organisational practices through which luxury brands mobilise cultural heritage and engage with cultural and tourism ecosystems. In particular, the study focuses on practices such as the development of corporate archives, museum initiatives, exhibitions, cultural collaborations, and heritage spaces, which allow observation of how heritage and artification are operationalised within organisational contexts.

Data were collected from multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews with communication and brand managers, corporate reports and publications, archival materials, exhibitions and cultural initiatives, academic literature, and industry reports. The use of multiple sources enables data triangulation and strengthens the reliability of the analysis (Yin, 2018). Interviews provide insights into managerial interpretations of heritage and cultural initiatives, while corporate documents and archival materials offer evidence on historical narratives, design traditions, and heritage infrastructures. Exhibitions, museums, and cultural spaces are analysed as organisational manifestations of artification and cultural positioning.

Data analysis follows an iterative and comparative process (Eisenhardt, 1989). First, empirical material is coded to identify practices related to heritage mobilization, artification strategies, and tourism-related initiatives. The coding process is structured around three analytical dimensions derived from the research questions: (1) heritage mobilization practices, (2) artification strategies, and (3) tourism-related initiatives. First-order codes emerging from the data (e.g., archives, exhibitions, museum activities) are subsequently grouped into broader themes reflecting recurring organisational mechanisms.

Second, within-case analyses are conducted to examine how each company institutionalises heritage and positions itself within cultural and urban ecosystems. Third, cross-case comparison enables the identification of recurring patterns and differences, with particular attention to how similar practices generate comparable outcomes in terms of legitimacy and cultural positioning.

Recurrent patterns—such as the institutionalization of heritage through archives and museums and the use of exhibitions as artification mechanisms—support the identification of mechanisms connecting heritage mobilization, legitimacy construction, and integration into tourism ecosystems. This approach allows findings to be grounded in empirical observations while contributing to theory development.

Literature review.

Intangible Cultural Heritage and Craftsmanship. *Intangible cultural heritage includes practices, knowledge, and skills transmitted across generations (UNESCO, 2003). Within creative industries, craftsmanship traditions represent a key form of such heritage, combining technical expertise, aesthetic sensibilities, and cultural continuity. In luxury industries, these traditions are central to brand identity, enabling the production of unique objects characterised by quality, rarity, and refinement (Kapferer, 2014).*

Artisanal knowledge develops through long-term learning processes, apprenticeships, and workshop-based transmission. Luxury brands increasingly invest in preserving this knowledge through archives, training programs, craft schools, and documentation initiatives, highlighting its role as both a production resource and a strategic cultural asset.

Beyond technical expertise, craftsmanship also functions as a storytelling resource. Narratives centred on artisanal knowledge, handwork, and historical continuity allow brands to communicate authenticity and cultural depth (Beverland, 2005). In this sense, intangible cultural heritage operates as both cultural capital and a mechanism of differentiation (Bourdieu, 1984; Dion & Borraz, 2017).

Artification and Cultural Legitimacy. *Artification is the process by which objects, practices, or activities not initially regarded as art are progressively constructed as art through material, symbolic, and institutional shifts, eventually attaining cultural legitimacy (Shapiro & Heinich, 2012). In luxury industries, it plays a central role in reinforcing perceptions of rarity, creativity, and symbolic value. Firms increasingly adopt artification strategies through collaborations with artists, museum exhibitions, and the curation of heritage spaces (Massi & Turrini, 2020; Green, 2025).*

When luxury products are exhibited in cultural institutions, they acquire meanings that extend beyond functional value. Research shows that artification enhances symbolic prestige and perceived legitimacy (Chailan, 2018), while also influencing consumer evaluations of durability and uniqueness (De Angelis et al., 2020).

Kapferer (2014) argues that artification represents a key strategy through which luxury brands recreate rarity and cultural value in markets characterised by increasing globalization, standardization, and competitive pressure. Artification contributes to positioning luxury brands within wider creative ecosystems, allowing products to be framed as cultural artifacts rather than purely commercial goods.

Creative Cities and Tourism Ecosystems. *Creative cities are urban environments where culture, creativity, and economic activities intersect, supported by dense networks of creative industries, cultural institutions, and tourism infrastructures (Richards, 2011). Events such as fashion weeks, design festivals, and art fairs enhance their international visibility and attract diverse audiences.*

Within these contexts, luxury brands contribute to cultural life through exhibitions, collaborations, and heritage spaces. From a tourism perspective, such initiatives form part of tourism ecosystems, where firms, institutions, creative professionals, and visitors interact (Richards, 2011; Richards, 2021; Platania et al., 2025). Brand museums, flagship spaces, and exhibitions increasingly become elements of cultural itineraries within creative cities.

Recent tourism research highlights the role of storytelling, heritage interpretation, and symbolic coherence in shaping visitor engagement and destination attractiveness (Guo et al., 2024; Sinha & Chinki, 2025). In this perspective, heritage should be understood not only as a cultural asset but also as a driver of tourism experiences, whose interpretation and staging contribute to experiential value creation within tourism ecosystems.

These dynamics are particularly relevant to luxury brands, as heritage spaces operate as hybrid environments combining storytelling, experience, and cultural consumption. At the same time, critical tourism studies underline that heritage valorisation may involve selective representation and commodification, especially when cultural resources are mobilised for market purposes (Richards, 2021; Kumar & Swain, 2025).

Recent contributions further emphasise the importance of integrated approaches linking heritage, branding and tourism development (Kumar & Swain, 2025), highlighting the need for systemic perspectives in analysing the role of luxury brands within tourism ecosystems.

Empirical cases.

Buccellati. *Founded in Milan in 1919, Buccellati represents a prominent luxury heritage brand deeply rooted in craftsmanship and artistic tradition. Its identity is strongly linked to goldsmith techniques such as rigato, telato, ornato, and segrinato, which create textile-like textures on precious metals. These techniques embody forms of intangible cultural heritage transmitted across generations and embedded in the firm's identity.*

Beyond craftsmanship, Buccellati integrates artification strategies into its branding approach. Drawing on artistic references from Renaissance and Byzantine traditions, the brand positions its jewellery as culturally significant artifacts rather than purely decorative objects. Heritage preservation plays a central role in this process. The Buccellati Historical Archive documents the company's legacy through sketches, historical pieces, and documentary materials, functioning both as a repository of the past and as an organisational resource supporting authenticity and continuity.

The brand also engages with cultural institutions through exhibitions and museum collaborations, with pieces displayed in venues such as the Museo degli Argenti in Florence and the Museo del Gioiello in Vicenza. These initiatives reinforce the perception of Buccellati's creations as cultural artifacts and illustrate how artification is operationalised through institutional recognition and aesthetic framing.

Empirical evidence from interviews and documentary sources indicates that these practices are strategically mobilised to reinforce legitimacy. Craftsmanship heritage is not only communicated symbolically but institutionalised through archives, cultural programming, and curated initiatives.

Located in Milan, Buccellati operates within a dynamic creative ecosystem characterised by fashion, design, and cultural production. Through exhibitions, collaborations, and participation in cultural events, the brand contributes to the symbolic landscape of the city and becomes relevant to visitors interested in Italian craftsmanship. These activities suggest its integration into broader tourism ecosystems.

Molteni Group. *Founded in 1934 in the Brianza design district, Molteni Group is a leading company in the luxury furniture sector, whose identity is shaped by collaborations with renowned architects and designers such as Gio Ponti, Aldo Rossi, Jean Nouvel, and Foster + Partners. Unlike Buccellati, whose heritage is rooted in artisanal craftsmanship, Molteni mobilises design heritage and architectural culture as the foundation of its cultural positioning.*

The company emphasises the historical significance of modern Italian design through initiatives such as the Heritage Collection, which includes re-editions of iconic furniture pieces. A central element of its strategy is the Molteni Museum, inaugurated in 2015 at the company's headquarters in Giussano. The museum preserves and communicates the firm's design heritage while hosting exhibitions and cultural events, functioning as both an archive and a platform for cultural engagement.

Molteni also collaborates with cultural institutions, including the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan, and has developed Palazzo Molteni, a flagship cultural space in central Milan designed by Vincent Van Duysen. This space combines showroom, exhibition venue, and cultural hub, offering immersive environments where visitors experience design within curated domestic settings.

These practices support the interpretation of Molteni as a cultural actor embedded in Milan's design ecosystem. The company frames design as a cultural language and positions itself as a custodian of design heritage. As in the Buccellati case, legitimacy emerges from the organisational embedding of cultural resources rather than from symbolic narratives alone.

At the same time, Molteni's museum and flagship spaces contribute to the experiential attractiveness of Milan by offering visitors access to curated design environments that connect brand identity with urban cultural experience. Interview data and corporate documentation further indicate that these initiatives function as institutional platforms through which design culture is formalised and communicated to broader audiences.

The comparative analysis of Buccellati and Molteni Group highlights recurring patterns in how luxury brands mobilise cultural resources, engage in artification processes, and position themselves within urban cultural and tourism ecosystems. While the two cases differ in their sectoral focus—craftsmanship-based luxury versus design-driven production—they show converging organisational mechanisms through which heritage is institutionalised, artification is operationalised, and cultural initiatives contribute to broader ecosystem dynamics.

These patterns provide the basis for identifying key analytical dimensions that structure the findings of this study. In particular, the analysis focuses on (1) the institutionalization of heritage as an organisational resource, (2) the role of artification as a mechanism of legitimacy construction, and (3) the integration of luxury brands into tourism ecosystems within creative cities.

Results. *The findings provide insights into the evolving role of luxury brands within contemporary cultural and urban ecosystems. The analysis of Buccellati and Molteni Group shows that luxury brands operate not only as producers of high-end goods but also as culturally embedded actors within networks of cultural production, heritage preservation, and tourism development.*

While product quality, exclusivity, and craftsmanship remain central, contemporary strategies increasingly emphasise cultural meaning, heritage narratives, and experiential engagement (Kapferer, 2014; Batat, 2019). Luxury brands therefore extend their role beyond traditional marketing by engaging in exhibitions, cultural initiatives, and collaborations with artistic institutions.

The cases illustrate how intangible cultural heritage functions as a strategic resource generating symbolic value and institutional legitimacy. In both firms, heritage is embedded in formal organisational structures—such as archives, museums, and curated cultural initiatives—rather than being limited to symbolic narratives. Legitimacy is strengthened when heritage is institutionalised across organisational practices.

From a theoretical perspective, heritage and artification emerge as complementary mechanisms operating at different levels. Heritage supports authenticity and continuity at the organisational level, while artification operates at the field level by aligning firms with cultural institutions and symbolic systems. Together, these mechanisms enable luxury brands to achieve legitimacy within both market and cultural domains.

Interview data highlight that managers explicitly frame archives and exhibitions as tools for reinforcing brand legitimacy rather than mere communication devices.

Proposition 1 (heritage). *Luxury brands that institutionalise intangible cultural heritage through organisational infrastructures (e.g., archives, museums, formalised practices) transform heritage from a symbolic narrative into a legitimacy-stabilising mechanism, thereby reinforcing their institutional positioning within luxury fields.*

The analysis also highlights the role of artification in shaping contemporary luxury branding strategies. Both cases show how exhibitions, museum collaborations, and cultural programming position products within artistic contexts and connect brands with institutions that confer symbolic recognition. Artification operates as a mechanism of legitimacy construction by embedding products within institutional cultural networks. In this sense, artification enables luxury brands to align with broader cultural frameworks and access sources of symbolic recognition beyond the market domain.

Proposition 2 (artification). *Artification strategies—such as exhibitions, museum collaborations, cultural programming, and curated heritage spaces—function as mechanisms of institutional alignment, enabling luxury brands to transfer legitimacy from the cultural field to the market by embedding their products within recognised artistic and institutional frameworks.*

The findings further highlight the integration of luxury brands within urban tourism ecosystems. In Milan, both companies contribute to cultural life through exhibitions, heritage spaces, and institutional collaborations. Corporate museums and flagship spaces increasingly form part of cultural itineraries, attracting visitors interested in design, craftsmanship, and creative industries. These initiatives participate in the co-production of symbolic value within urban cultural ecosystems and contribute to shaping tourism experiences. At the same time, they influence the visibility of heritage by privileging specific narratives of taste, exclusivity, and cultural value. This suggests that heritage is not simply preserved but selectively constructed, raising questions about which cultural narratives are legitimised, which remain excluded, and how market logics shape these processes.

Proposition 3 (ecosystem). *By developing heritage infrastructures and cultural spaces, luxury brands act as institutional intermediaries within urban ecosystems, contributing to the co-production of symbolic value and the structuring of tourism experiences in creative cities.*

Finally, the findings emphasise the role of authenticity and historical continuity in sustaining luxury brand legitimacy. In both cases, heritage operates as a dynamic institutional resource that is continuously reinterpreted through exhibitions, collaborations, and curated spaces. This enables firms to balance tradition and innovation, maintaining relevance in highly competitive markets and reinforcing legitimacy over time.

Discussion. *The findings deepen the understanding of luxury brands as actors embedded within cultural and urban ecosystems by showing that heritage and artification operate as complementary mechanisms of legitimacy construction across organisational and field levels.*

Intangible cultural heritage emerges not merely as a narrative resource, but as an institutionalised infrastructure embedded in organisational practices such as archives, museums, and curated cultural initiatives. These infrastructures stabilise legitimacy over time by anchoring brand identity in historically grounded and socially recognised cultural forms. At the same time, artification operates at the field level as a mechanism of institutional alignment, enabling luxury brands to embed their products within recognised cultural frameworks and to access sources of symbolic recognition beyond the market domain.

Together, these mechanisms allow luxury brands to extend their role beyond market exchange and position themselves within broader systems of cultural production. In this sense, legitimacy is not only constructed through symbolic communication, but also through the organisational and institutional embedding of cultural resources.

The analysis also highlights the integration of luxury brands within tourism ecosystems in creative cities. Through heritage infrastructures and cultural initiatives, firms contribute to the co-production of symbolic value and to the structuring of tourism experiences. Corporate museums, flagship cultural spaces, and exhibitions increasingly function *as institutional interfaces between brands, cultural institutions, and visitors, shaping how heritage is interpreted and experienced within urban contexts.*

The findings suggest that luxury brands should not be understood as passive participants in cultural and tourism ecosystems, but as institutional intermediaries that actively structure the production, interpretation, and circulation of cultural meaning. Through heritage infrastructures and artification processes, luxury brands contribute to defining the symbolic boundaries of cultural value and to shaping the experiential and representational dynamics of creative cities.

At the same time, this role is inherently ambivalent. The integration of luxury brands into cultural tourism may involve processes of selective representation, privileging certain forms of heritage aligned with exclusivity while marginalising others. Moreover, the transformation of heritage into curated experiences may lead to forms of commodification, raising questions about accessibility, inclusiveness, and the broader societal implications of market-driven cultural production.

These findings support an ecosystem-based interpretation of luxury branding, in which value creation emerges from the interactions among multiple actors embedded within destination systems. However, they also extend this perspective by highlighting the active role of luxury brands as institutional agents shaping the structure and meaning of these ecosystems. In doing so, luxury brands emerge not only as market actors, but as institutional agents that actively shape the production and valuation of culture within contemporary economies.

Research limitation. *This study presents some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is based on a qualitative multiple case study focusing on two Italian luxury firms operating within the Milan context. While this approach enables in-depth analysis and theory building, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other geographical contexts, industries, or types of luxury brands.*

Second, the study relies on a combination of interviews, corporate documents, and publicly available materials. Although data triangulation strengthens the robustness of the analysis, access to internal strategic processes remains partial, and interpretations may reflect the perspectives of key informants and curated organisational narratives. In addition, the study does not directly examine audience reception, as it does not include empirical data on how visitors or consumers perceive and interpret heritage-based and artification practices in terms of legitimacy and symbolic value.

Third, the research adopts a cross-sectional perspective, focusing on current practices of heritage mobilization and cultural initiatives. Future studies could adopt longitudinal approaches to examine how these strategies evolve over time and how they influence long-term brand legitimacy and destination development.

Future research could extend this study by comparing luxury brands across different cultural and institutional contexts, exploring the role of digital technologies in heritage communication, and investigating the perspectives of visitors and consumers to better understand how heritage-based experiences are perceived and valued within tourism ecosystems.

Managerial implications. *The findings offer several implications for managers operating in luxury industries. First, they highlight the strategic importance of intangible cultural heritage as an organisational resource. Firms should move beyond symbolic storytelling and invest in the institutionalization of heritage through archives, museums, training programs, and structured cultural initiatives. This approach strengthens authenticity and supports long-term brand legitimacy.*

Second, the study emphasises the role of artification as a strategic mechanism for positioning luxury brands within broader cultural frameworks. Collaborations with cultural institutions, curated exhibitions, and artistic partnerships enable firms to reinforce symbolic value and gain institutional recognition beyond traditional market boundaries.

Third, the results suggest that heritage spaces and corporate cultural initiatives can function as platforms for engaging with tourism ecosystems. By developing museums, flagship cultural spaces, and experiential environments, luxury brands can contribute to the attractiveness of creative cities and attract visitors interested in craftsmanship, design, and cultural production.

At the same time, managers should be aware of the potential risks associated with heritage commodification and selective representation. Balancing cultural authenticity with market-oriented strategies is essential to avoid over-commercialization and to maintain credibility within both cultural and tourism contexts.

Originality and contribution of the paper. *This paper contributes to the literature by offering an integrated perspective on luxury branding, cultural heritage, and tourism ecosystems. It advances existing research by reconceptualising intangible cultural heritage as an institutionalised organisational resource embedded in structured practices, rather than as a purely symbolic narrative.*

Furthermore, the study extends the concept of artification by interpreting it as a field-level mechanism of legitimacy construction. This perspective highlights how luxury brands align with institutionalised cultural frameworks and gain recognition within broader cultural fields.

Finally, the paper bridges luxury branding and tourism research by adopting an ecosystem-based approach. It demonstrates how heritage-based branding practices contribute to tourism ecosystems in creative cities and positions luxury brands as cultural mediators operating between cultural production, symbolic value creation, and destination development.

By integrating these dimensions, the study responds to calls for more cross-disciplinary research and provides a coherent framework for understanding the intersection between branding, cultural legitimacy, and territorial value creation.

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