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# Artification in the Industrial Sector: Exploring Florim Ceramiche's Integration of Art Into Business

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of artification within the industrial sector, focusing on Florim Ceramiche, a leading Italian ceramic manufacturer. While artification has been extensively explored in the luxury and fashion industries, its application in industrial contexts remains under-researched. Using a case study approach, we investigate the processes and factors involved in artification at Florim, producing its impact on external outcomes, such as brand identity enhancement and market results. Key findings reveal that Florim's artification is supported by a top-down governance approach that reflects corporate values. A trust-based partnership between Florim and collaborating artists further enhances the cultural authenticity of the artification process. Artification is also an inside-out process underpinned by physical artworks that enrich the workplace environment and promote employee well-being, aligning with corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives. The process operates through concentric engagement, starting internally with employees and extending to visitors and the local community. This research highlights artification's potential to foster both social sustainability and brand differentiation, providing insights for managers in the industrial sector aiming to integrate art within CSR frameworks.

## 1 | Introduction

In today's competitive market, organizations constantly look for innovative methods to differentiate themselves and influence customers. One such technique is the reference to art and aesthetics in corporate procedures, referred to as "artification" (Bargenda 2020; Saito 2012; Shapiro 2019), resulting in the transformation of non-art objects or practices into art-like entities, enhancing their cultural and aesthetic value (Shapiro 2019).

This approach, frequently explored in the luxury and fashion industries, enables organizations to align with creativity, culture, and innovation, thereby enhancing both internal working conditions and, as a result, the external reflection of such improvements, visible in terms of brand image and market presence. The existing literature shows that integrating art into products

or services or including it in business practices through philanthropic activities, increases brand authenticity (Léo & Élisabeth, 2023). The consistent, authentic integration of art into the entire value chain has positive effects on brand value (Kapferer 2014; Masè, Cedrola, and Cohen-Cheminet 2018; Masè et al. 2020). Hence, companies can differentiate themselves from their competitors and create a unique brand identity that can increase their value and customer loyalty (Batat 2019; Jelinek 2018). In addition, the process of artification can help companies enter new market segments and reach new target groups (Jelinek 2018).

Although artification has been extensively explored within fashion and luxury, its application in the industrial sector remains understudied. Choosing Florim as the focus of this study addresses this gap in the research. Prior studies have predominantly examined the nexus between art and the fashion

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## Summary

- We look at artification exploring the incorporation of art into business strategy in the industrial sector, emphasizing how artification can improve corporate identity and enhance corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Our framework provides a better understanding of how artistic practices can be integrated into business and philanthropic strategies, fostering innovation, creativity, and inclusivity.
- Corporate artification is driven by a top-down governance model and depends on trust-based partnerships with artists. This practice fosters a concentric engagement that initiates internally improving employee well-being and extends to clients and the local community.
- Companies in the industrial sector can implement artification strategies to improve brand perception, differentiate in the marketplace, and promote social sustainability.

and luxury sectors (Chailan 2018; Kapferer 2014; Massi and Turrini 2020) or the incorporation of art within corporate museums, galleries, wine labeling, and hospitality (Addis et al. 2023; Hüttl-Maack 2018; Joy et al. 2021; Zelenskaya, Druzhinina, and Berezina 2022). This prevailing focus has tended to neglect the pivotal role of art integration within the industrial sector, despite its rich and significant history. Tracing back to the late 19th century, the Arts and Crafts movement emerged as a counterpoint to the dehumanizing effects of the Industrial Revolution's mass production techniques (Rubinson 2010). Champions of the movement, such as William Morris and John Ruskin, advocated for the revival of handcrafted goods imbued with traditional craftsmanship and artistic merit. They posited that the infusion of art into quotidian objects could enhance the quality of life and engender a more profound connection between consumers and the products they utilize. Despite the ever-present relationship between art and industrial design, both artification and sustainability studies have so far given limited attention to this area of study. In light of the exploratory and qualitative nature of this study, the use of a case study emerges as an effective methodological tool for starting a more comprehensive examination of artification within this context. In our paper, we examine how artification was implemented at Florim Ceramiche (Florim), an Italian ceramic tile manufacturer based in Fiorano Modenese in the province of Modena, Italy. The company is internationally renowned for its innovative designs, exceptional quality, and use of environmentally friendly production methods. Florim is also known for its commitment to sustainability and has been recognized for its efforts to reduce carbon emissions but most importantly for its commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and business ethics. In keeping with its philosophy, Florim has entered, for example, into a philanthropic partnership with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice to support and promote art. In addition, the company constantly collaborates with and supports renowned artists and designers by commissioning artworks. The advantage of examining artification on an industrial scale, compared with the luxury and fashion sectors, lies in the clearer transition from non-art to art (Saito 2012). In

luxury and fashion, artification often results in synergies, hybridizations, and collaborations that blur the boundaries between art and production (Dion and Arnould 2011; Massi and Turrini 2020; Jankowska and Sorokowska 2023). In contrast, the industrial sector presents a much crisper contrast between the two. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Florim's role in the artification process, focusing on the factors and processes that contribute to positive outcomes, which are evident in both brand enhancement and strengthened commitments to sustainability and social responsibility.

The research methodology includes in-depth interviews with key informants from Florim, enabling a comprehensive examination of how artification supports business sustainability strategies and fosters cultural participation, with an eye to CSR initiatives encompassing environmental responsibility, community development, and artistic collaboration. The generalizability of the findings points to the key conditions necessary for the artification process. Specifically, the artification process is widely applicable beyond the creative industries and relies on crucial enablers, such as premium positioning, financial resources, trust, and a strong commitment to CSR. These enablers foster artification by building relationships with artists, supporting sustainable practices, and activating new “art-oriented” touchpoints.

## 2 | Theoretical Framework

Artification has its roots in the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century, which responded to the dehumanizing effects of industrialization by promoting craftsmanship and artistry in mass-produced objects (Hosea 2019). The movement underscored that design could embody artistic expression, setting a precedent for modern artification practices in industries such as fashion, interior design, and industrial manufacturing. These historical foundations continue to influence modern industries, particularly through the principles of artistic expression in design and manufacturing (Shapiro 2019).

Artification enhances product aesthetics and reinforces exclusivity in the luxury market (Kapferer 2014). Luxury fashion brands utilize art collaborations to transform their products into cultural artifacts, blending fashion and art to increase desirability (Kim, Deng, and Unnava 2020). In industrial contexts, artification is emerging as a means to increase brand value, innovation, and sustainability (Zelenskaya, Druzhinina, and Berezina 2022). Artification serves as a strategic tool for enhancing brand value by imbuing products with cultural and aesthetic significance. According to Kapferer (2014), artification is particularly effective in luxury branding because it helps maintain exclusivity and elevate symbolic power. The emotional and intellectual connections that art-infused products create foster long-term consumer loyalty (Batat 2019). Xu (2022) highlighted how curatorial activities by luxury brands, such as exhibitions, serve as a platform for reinforcing brand values and engaging younger, more discerning consumers.

The art infusion effect, as described by Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008), explains how art positively impacts consumer perceptions, leading to improved product evaluations. This

process is supported by the stimulus-organism-response model, which demonstrates how artistic stimuli elicit emotional responses that heighten consumer appreciation, as art not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of products but also triggers emotional responses that lead to more favorable evaluations of both the product and the brand (Gupta and Joshi 2023). The same effect can be supposed to hold respect for employees (Saito 2012) or the community at large. Art infusion is indeed a tool for creating shared value (Johnson, Barlow, and Ghuman 2022). This concept aligns with CSR strategies, proposing that luxury brands can use art collaborations not only to elevate their status but also to benefit society by promoting underrepresented artists and supporting the propagation of art in culture (Johnson, Barlow, and Ghuman 2022). Artification is shaped by social and institutional dynamics, with collaborations between brands and cultural institutions playing a key role in legitimizing artistic transformations. These partnerships enhance the cultural and social significance of products, reinforcing a brand's position and appeal to ethically engaged consumers (Shapiro 2019). This deeper integration into CSR reinforces the idea that artification transcends aesthetic value, extending the reach of ethical corporate philanthropy to a societal dimension.

Grassi (2020) noted that artification can enhance consumer engagement, particularly when linked to CSR goals. By collaborating with artists and cultural institutions, companies strengthen their commitment to both social and environmental causes. A deeper integration into CSR reinforces the idea that artification transcends aesthetic value, embedding social and ethical dimensions into corporate strategies.

Schiama (2018) introduced art-based management, which proposes that integrating art into business processes fosters creativity and innovation. Artistic collaborations inspire new product designs, production techniques, and sustainable practices. This creative approach links artistic creativity with ethical production, appealing to consumers who prioritize both aesthetics and sustainability.

While artification provides numerous benefits, it also presents challenges, such as the risk of overcommercialization and the need to maintain the authenticity of artistic collaborations (Pedroni and Volonté 2014). However, these challenges are outweighed by opportunities to differentiate brands in competitive markets, particularly by appealing to ethically conscious consumers.

Indeed, de-artification occurs when products lose their artistic value due to mass production. Re-artification, on the other hand, restores this value through artistic collaborations. Van de Peer (2014) described re-artification as the process by which companies reposition products as culturally significant artifacts.

Overall, the literature on artification highlights its positive impact on various outcomes (e.g., brand image, loyalty, innovation, and stakeholder engagement, to name a few); however, there is still ambiguity regarding the processes or factors involved in its implementation. For instance, what factors play a central role in the artification process? What is the role of the artist in the relationship with the company? Is artification a top-down or bottom-up process? Is it primarily internal or external? What

role does governance play, and what is the role of the broader community? This study leverages the distinct contrast between art infusion within corporate culture and outcomes in production and CSR, especially within the industrial sector, to address these research questions.

### 3 | Methods

Qualitative research is a well-suited approach to gain a deeper understanding of evolving events or phenomena such as artification due to its ability to capture the nuances and complexities of ever-changing trends and practices (Brooks, Ellis, and Emerson 2012). More specifically, this research employed a case study methodology, beginning with an analysis of secondary data from a single case study followed by exploratory in-depth interviews with key informants to gain further insights.

The interview methodology offers two primary strengths. First, it elicits a direct account of the interviewee's experiences within a specific life domain, thus capturing personal narratives (Holstein and Gubrium 2017, 2). Second, it stands as a robust qualitative research method, facilitating the acquisition of immediate insights into participants' experiences, viewpoints, and emotional responses (Denzin and Lincoln 2018, 50). Given the concentration on the company's internal mechanisms, interviews are an effective method of soliciting firsthand insights from the employees of the organization. Consequently, the selection of interviews as the research methodology aligned seamlessly with the aims of this study.

Data were collected from five key individuals within Florim and its broader network of stakeholders. The inclusion criteria for these informants were as follows: a minimum of 5 years of experience working at Florim or with any brand under its ownership and occupying a senior-level position. The informant cohort comprised communication managers, business-to-business partners, participating artists, and managers in charge of overseeing cultural associations or foundations supported by the company (please see Table 1 below). This purposive sampling approach was applied to garner comprehensive and varied insights into the company's operations, thereby ensuring a multifaceted understanding of organizational dynamics from multiple vantage points.

#### 3.1 | Data Collection

The interviews were conducted by two researchers using the video conferencing technology provided by Microsoft Teams. With the consent of the interviewees, all sessions were recorded on the Microsoft Teams platform. They were later transcribed using Microsoft Teams' artificial intelligence transcription tool. The transcriptions were then corrected by the two researchers.

The researchers used an inductive approach to establish coding categories. The language of the interviews was Italian, which matched the interviewees' native language.

The informants were asked to narrate their stories and opinions about how they would define the artification process

**TABLE 1** | Informants' table.

Informant	Name and surname initials	Role	Gender	Age range
#1	C.L.	Top management	Male	70–75
#2	M.B.	Top management	Male	45–50
#3	A.Z.	Middle management	Female	30–35
#4	M.N.	Architecture and design partner	Male	50–55
#5	F.G.	Artist	Male	70–75

**TABLE 2** | Overview of data sources.

Interviewee	Interviews (# of min)	(# of pages)
#1 (C.L.)	86	38
#2 (M.B.)	111	79
#3 (A.Z.)	45	23
#4 (M.N.)	60	37
#5 (F.G.)	87	23
Total	389	200

within Florim. The questions ranged from investigating their conceptualization of art and the role of art in the business model adopted and personal experience. The interviews are numbered in Table 2 according to the sequence in which they were conducted.

Each interview lasted approximately 77 min, on average, and followed a semi-structured protocol.

In total, the researchers conducted about 6.5 h of interviews with five key informants.

Thus, we collected 200 pages of transcriptions, which presents our basis for analysis. The researcher first provided general instructions, answered questions, and obtained audiotaped oral consent in the participants' preferred language (Italian). Oral consent included permission for videotaping and interviewing.

#### 4 | Florim: Company Overview

Established in 1962 by Ing. Giovanni Lucchese in the Sassuolo ceramic district, Florim has evolved into an important player in the high-end ceramic sector. Throughout its 60 years of existence, the company has focused on expanding its presence in Italy, as well as internationally. Florim's trajectory has been characterized by a focus on innovation, sustainability, and design, strengthening its status as a key player in the ceramics industry. The company's sustainability reports offer a systematic overview of its continuous endeavors to balance economic performance with environmental and social objectives.

#### 4.1 | Innovations Through the Years

Florim's dedication to technological innovation has been evident since the beginning. The company was among the pioneers in Italy in manufacturing extruded clinker tiles in the 1960s. By the 1970s, Florim began manufacturing *single-fired white-body tiles*, marking a notable advancement in ceramic manufacturing during that period. During the 1980s, Florim contributed to the global adoption of *porcelain stoneware*, positioning itself as a pioneer in ceramic innovation. The company has consistently strengthened its market position through acquisitions both nationally and internationally, such as the acquisition of Florim USA. The 2017 relaunch of Ceramiche d'Italia (CEDIT) marked a further step toward the company's goal of merging creative expression with functional design.

#### 4.2 | Global Expansion and Market Position

Florim's growth has been marked by adaptability and strategic expansion, allowing the company to evolve in response to changing market demands. The creation of Florim USA in 2000 was a significant milestone, marking the company's expansion into the North American market.

Florim has established a strong international presence through a network of flagship stores and production facilities around the world. The company's main production plants are located in Fiorano Modenese and Mordano in Italy (in the Sassuolo-Modena Ceramic Italian District), with an additional production facility in Clarksville, Tennessee (USA). These strategically located facilities allow Florim to maintain a robust production and distribution network. In addition to its production sites, Florim operates flagship stores in major global cities, including Milan, New York, Rome, Los Angeles, Paris, Singapore, Frankfurt, Abu Dhabi, London, and Moscow.

#### 4.3 | Financial Performance and Workforce

Florim's financial performance in recent years, as shown in its sustainability reports, has been notably robust. In 2021, the company attained a revenue of €584 million, reflecting 22% growth relative to the prior year. In 2023, the company reported revenue of €467 million, indicating a minor decline, presumably due to prevailing worldwide market conditions. Despite this, Florim continues to make investments in innovation and

sustainability, allocating €121 million to new initiatives designed to increase its manufacturing capacities and mitigate its environmental impact. The company employs 1452 individuals worldwide, with 95% of its workforce on permanent contracts. The majority of employees are based in production facilities and logistics centers in Fiorano Modenese, Mordano and Clarksville. This workforce structure suggests significant operational stability underpinned by a dedication to preserving quality in manufacturing and logistics.

#### 4.4 | Corporate Governance and Core Values

Florim's corporate governance prioritizes ethical management, transparency, and responsible business development. Florim's mission is to produce sustainable, high-quality ceramics for architecture and design, while its vision emphasizes leading innovation in the field. Additionally, Florim engages stakeholders and evaluates suppliers on ethical, social, and environmental criteria.

#### 4.5 | Integrating Sustainability, Culture, and Community: A Holistic CSR Approach

Florim's CSR is deeply integrated into its business model, emphasizing sustainability and ethical practices and creating value for society and the environment. Formalized in 2020, when the company became a Società Benefit (a legal Italian designation that commits Florim to generating positive social and environmental impacts alongside profit) and achieved B Corp certification, which verifies its adherence to rigorous standards of environmental performance and transparency, Florim is dedicated to balancing profitability with responsible business practices.

The CarbonZero initiative, launched in 2023, further demonstrates its focus on reducing its carbon footprint through investments in green technologies and renewable energy. The initiative supports Florim's goal of minimizing the environmental impact of its production processes while maintaining the high quality of its ceramic products. In addition, the company actively engages with local communities for charitable initiatives, through Fondazione Ing. Giovanni Lucchese, offering scholarships, supporting education, and funding community development initiatives. Florim also supports healthcare through partnerships with local hospitals, offering significant financial contributions to healthcare initiatives with a strong presence in and attention to the sustainability of the territory.

In 2022, Florim was recognized in the 13th edition of the "Fabbrica nel Paesaggio" award, which was promoted by the Italian Federation of United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) clubs. Florim received the highest recognition in the private sector for its "next-generation factory," which successfully embraced the ecological transition, integrating industrial development with respect to the natural landscape and environmental sustainability. This achievement underscores Florim's dedication to sustainable development principles and landscape protection, aligning with UNESCO's ideals.

In addition to the already strong commitment to ESG goals, Florim's artification is most evident in the cultural collaborations with prestigious institutions, such as the MAXXI Museum in Rome and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. A fundraising initiative for the Peggy Guggenheim collection consisted of a tile capsule collection designed by contemporary Italian artist Elena Salmistraro and inspired by her original work of art "Hotel Chimera" (a ceramic work of art of 20 m<sup>2</sup>) commissioned by Florim and displayed in the headquarter of Fiorano. The tile capsule collection was presented at the Milan Design Week in 2021 and achieved significant popularity and sold out in a very brief period. The proceeds from the initiative were donated to support the project "Doppio Senso, Percorsi Tattili," which focused on providing tactile art experiences at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection to visually impaired children, offering them a unique introduction to the world of art.

In addition to "Hotel Chimera" by Salmistraro the company's headquarters in Fiorano house site-specific artworks commissioned to contemporary artists, including "Il Cavallo" by Mimmo Paladino, "Percorso Amoroso" by Giuseppe Gallo, "Il tempo è nostro amico" by Olivo Barbieri, "Alta definizione" by Luca Pancrazzi "Archeologie" by Franco Guerzoni, highlighting Florim's belief in the transformative power of art.

## 5 | Discussion and Findings

### 5.1 | Florim's Use of Artification in Business Strategy

Florim has distinguished itself in the high-end materials sector by blending artistic craftsmanship with industrial production, which can be considered the result of *artification*. Through initiatives such as CEDIT, the company collaborates with renowned artists to transform functional ceramic products into works of art. This is very evident from the point of view of the artist. F.G., the artist, states, "The collaboration between Florim and artists has created an opportunity where creativity and industry meet, resulting in products that are artistically and functionally significant" (F.G., interview #5). This strategy very likely enhances Florim's brand identity by positioning it within the broader context of cultural and artistic heritage, thereby elevating its products beyond functionality (Kapferer and Bastien 2009).

In this process, aesthetics play a major role within the company, and this emphasis is then reflected outward as a reflection of the company's deep commitment to aesthetic values. C.L., one of the key figure in the top management of Florim, emphasizes the importance of aesthetics in everything the company produces. C.L. explains, "I do not want Florim to be the biggest. I do not want Florim to be the richest. I want Florim to be the most beautiful" (C.L., interview #1). This commitment to aesthetics aligns with the evolving definition of luxury, which now encompasses more than exclusivity or high quality. Florim's large-format ceramic slabs have become integral components of prestigious international projects, such as the Aston Martin Tower in Miami and the Doha Airport Lounge, where the fusion of art and function enhances the perception of luxury (M.N., interview #4).

## 5.2 | Artification and CSR

Florim's commitment to CSR is closely tied to its use of artification as stated by M.B. "The company does not only do things to get a straight return; it invests in the future, for next generations, for the people of the local area, and for the care, promotion, and dissemination of culture, art, and beauty" (M.B., interview #2). The company's collaborations with artists such as F.G. highlight how the integration of art into industrial spaces not only enhances aesthetics but also contributes to cultural sustainability. F.G.'s large-scale ceramic installations at Florim's headquarters are a testament to this, transforming the industrial environment into a canvas for public art. He describes how "The wall at Florim is not just a structure; it transforms into part of the landscape, connecting art to the environment in a meaningful way" (F.G., interview #5).

C.L. further emphasizes that art is central to Florim's corporate identity and social responsibility, noting that the company sees art as a way to contribute to society. He explains, "Art must be shared with the public. That is why we've placed important works like the Paladino horse where everyone can see them, not just our employees" (C.L., interview #1). This aligns with the Bauhaus philosophy, which sought to merge art, design, and functionality for societal improvement (Shapiro 2019). Florim's installations serve not only as aesthetic enhancements but also as public contributions to the cultural fabric of the local community. Through the way these artworks communicate with the public, Florim takes a strong illocutionary stance, encouraging employees to commit to the company's mission of promoting beauty and aesthetics worldwide.

Of course, the primary audience consists of a select group of visitors and customers who visit the company's premises. A.Z., a key figure of the middle management, explains that the company's emphasis on art extends to how it engages with visitors and clients: "Art aligns seamlessly with our company's creative approach. We start from a form, a line, a texture, which are all common elements in both our art and our products" (A.Z., interview #3). This reinforces the idea that art is not merely an accessory to Florim's industrial operations but an integral part of how the company interacts with the world.

## 5.3 | Trust in Artist–Corporate Relationships

Due to the intimate and authentic nature of the artistic performance, the element of *trust* that nurtures the relationship between the artist and the company is fundamental to the successful integration of artification into corporate contexts. F.G. emphasizes the importance of trust in his partnership with Florim: "It was a sweet trust, I entrusted them with my work, knowing they would caress the image and not impose upon it" (F.G., interview #5). This trust reflects how Florim honors the artistic process while aligning it with its corporate mission, ensuring that the integrity of the artwork is maintained. Of course, because trust must be reciprocal for the relationship to be authentic, C.L. highlights the importance of creating an environment of trust within the company's artistic collaborations. He states, "We work with artists because we believe in their vision,

and we trust that their work will enhance the soul of Florim. It's not just about decoration; it's about creating something meaningful" (C.L., interview #1). This trust underlines how artification serves both as an aesthetic element and a cultural foundation for Florim.

## 5.4 | The Role of Trust in Artist–Corporate Relationships: A Parallel With Gallerists and Patrons

In the context of collaborations between artists and companies such as Florim, trust emerges as a foundational element. This relationship parallels that between artists and traditional figures in the art world, such as gallerists or patrons, where trust is central not only to the success of the project but also to the mutual definition of roles and responsibilities (Zucker 2020). Trust allows for the creation of a collaborative dynamic in which the goals and values of both the artist and the company are aligned.

According to F.G., his relationship with Florim was built on a "sweet trust," wherein he was able to entrust the company with his artistic vision, confident that it would nurture the image rather than impose upon it. As F.G. explains "The first time I met with CL was simply a conversation. I have known him for a long time, and I truly trust him as he is a reliable and consistent person. He encouraged me to go ahead, to just do it without worrying, and assured me that we would figure out together if we could make it happen. I must admit that, in a way, not wanting to disappoint him helped drive the idea forward through his encouragement to try. Taking on a piece of art is a responsibility that Florim's management team, staff, and technicians fully embraced, which both surprised and delighted me. I was fascinated and thrilled, as I could never have imagined such a vast outcome in its final execution" (F.G., interview #5). This reflects the dynamics often seen between artists and gallerists, where the artist relies on the gallery to present and respect their work without compromising their creative integrity (Fillis 2019).

This trust, in turn, reflects the broader understanding of corporate collaborations with the arts, where companies such as Florim take on the role of modern-day patrons or *mecenati*, fostering cultural projects that align with their identities and values. Historically, patrons provided resources, and artists committed to producing works that resonated with shared values (Dawson and Holmes 2022). Florim's role as a patron is evident in the way it promotes artistic initiatives in line with its CSR strategy, as outlined in its sustainability reports (Florim. 2023).

## 5.5 | Trust as the Foundation of Creative Collaboration

The trust an artist places in a company is critical, allowing the artist to believe that their creative vision will be respected and supported with the necessary resources. In Florim's case, this trust enabled F.G. to maintain creative freedom while integrating his artwork into an industrial environment. This parallels the relationship between artists and gallerists, in which trust

acts as a mediating factor between the artist's work and its audience (Fillis 2019). A.Z. highlights this trust within Florim's collaborations, explaining that the company's approach is not to treat art as a mere decorative element, but as part of its core creative philosophy: "Art aligns seamlessly with our company's creative approach" (A.Z., interview #3). Art, therefore, becomes an intimate cultural object, assuming a role that goes well beyond mere aesthetic response.

Florim's corporate support for artistic endeavors is akin to the support patrons have historically provided to artists. This trust allows artists greater creative freedom, knowing that they can rely on consistent institutional and financial support (Muller, Davis, and Bishop 2021). In Florim's case, this ongoing support is part of the company's mission to promote cultural activities as an extension of its CSR strategy, reinforcing the company's commitment to fostering creativity within a corporate framework.

## 5.6 | Trust as a Mechanism for Legitimization

Trust not only facilitates collaboration but also serves as a mechanism for legitimizing both the artist and the corporation. Just as patrons historically legitimized the artist through their support, in modern collaborations, companies such as Florim legitimize the artist's role within the corporate setting and beyond, while the artist, in turn, legitimizes the company's commitment to culture and social responsibility (Thompson 2023). This reciprocal legitimization is fundamental in collaborations between artists and businesses such as Florim.

For instance, C.L. views the inclusion of art at Florim as part of a larger mission, where art elevates the company beyond mere production (C.L., interview #2). This perspective underscores how trust plays a vital role in both legitimizing the artist's contributions to the company and the company's broader role as a cultural patron.

## 5.7 | Florim's Contribution to Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility

Florim's transition to a B Corp and its B Corp certification reinforce its commitment to sustainability and ethical business practices. As M.B. highlights, Florim's investments in sustainability initiatives, such as the CarbonZero project and water recycling systems, are concrete examples of the company's efforts to minimize its environmental footprint. According to M.B., "We've made sustainability a cornerstone of everything we do at Florim, from our production processes to how we engage with our community" (M.B., interview #2).

This sustainability mission is also reflected in how Florim approaches its art partnerships. A.Z. explains, "Sustainability and creativity are intertwined for us. Our products and art pieces reflect both our environmental commitment and our passion for design" (A.Z., interview #3). Thus, Florim's artification strategy is intertwined with its sustainability goals, contributing to a holistic approach that balances environmental, social, and cultural responsibilities.

## 5.8 | Artification and Global Brand Identity

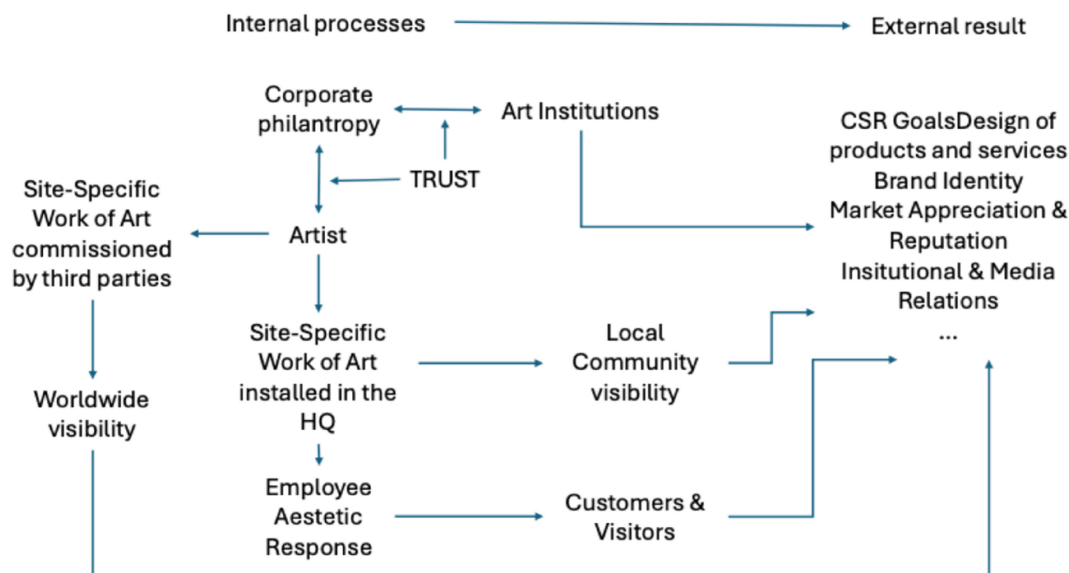
Florim's global brand identity has been significantly enhanced through its focus on artification. M.N. emphasizes that Florim's products, particularly its large-format ceramic slabs, have become central to high-end architectural projects around the world. "Florim's ability to combine artistic innovation with cutting-edge technology makes it an indispensable partner for luxury projects globally," he notes (M.N., interview #4). This has allowed Florim to establish itself as a leader in the design-driven sustainability space, where art and environmental responsibilities are seamlessly integrated.

The company's collaborations with cultural institutions, such as the Peggy Guggenheim Collection and the MAXXI Museum, further bolster its reputation as a global leader in design and art. Through these partnerships, Florim not only promotes Italian art and design but also "reinforces its commitment to sustainability and CSR, aligning its brand with the values of cultural and environmental stewardship" (A.Z., interview #3).

## 5.9 | Key Findings From the Artification Processes and Their Link to a Company's CSR

The case of Florim has highlighted a set of factors that serve as precursors to the positive market outcomes of artification (e.g., effects on brand perception and customer engagement). These factors are sufficient to ensure that artification has a meaningful impact on the market. The following insights relate to the processes and factors involved in implementing artification:

1. **Catalyst role of governance:** Given the resources required, artification is necessarily a top-down process initiated by company leadership. As a result, artification acquires a strategic role, reflecting the company's values and identity.
2. **Role of the artist:** A deep reciprocal relationship of trust and respect allows the artist to engage with company leadership, feeling protected by their patrons while also inspired by them. The philanthropic nature of these relationships catalyzes artistic creativity, which flows outward from the company, impacting the community and enhancing brand perception.
3. **Role of the artworks:** Artification is based on physical art objects, sometimes customized for the company but not exclusively, establishing the foundational element of artification and grounding the process in tangible cultural objects.
4. **Inside-out process:** Artification is centered on the company and aims to generate an aesthetic response. It primarily involves those who experience the environment daily, improving working conditions for these individuals (e.g., by providing sources of inspiration and mitigating stress). In this way, artification supports social sustainability by enhancing employee well-being and aligning with CSR goals.
5. **Concentric engagement:** Artification engages people at varying levels of proximity, with the highest frequency among employees who interact with the art daily, followed by visitors (e.g., clients and other guests) and, more distantly, the local community. Artification thus fosters communication and engagement beyond the company's walls, promoting



**FIGURE 1** | A top-down/inside-out artification framework in industrial settings.

societal benefits that align with the CSR goals of community involvement.

The framework in Figure 1 depicts artification in an industrial setting as a top-down, inside-out process.

## 6 | Conclusions

This study has addressed the complexity of implementing artification within a corporate setting, using Florim Ceramiche as a case study to explore the key questions surrounding this process. Florim's approach illustrates how artification impacts various outcomes—such as brand image, loyalty, innovation, and stakeholder engagement—by leveraging several foundational factors.

Central to the artification process at Florim is the role of physical artworks. Artification is rooted in tangible cultural objects, sometimes customized to align with the company's identity. These artworks are integrated into the company environment, creating an inside-out process that begins with those experiencing the art daily—primarily employees. By enhancing the aesthetic experience of the workspace, artification contributes to employee well-being, stress mitigation, and inspiration, thus aligning with Florim's commitment to CSR and social sustainability.

Concentric engagement further broadens artification's impact, beginning with employees and extending to clients, visitors, and the local community. This layered approach ensures that while employees benefit directly from daily interaction with art, visitors and the broader community also experience positive effects, supporting Florim's CSR goals and fostering community involvement.

The top-down role of governance is another crucial factor. Given the resources required, artification at Florim is driven by corporate leadership, which ensures alignment with company values

and positions artification as a strategic initiative. Governance thus acts as a catalyst, making artification a reflection of Florim's core values and identity.

Finally, the role of the artist in the relationship with the company is anchored in a foundation of trust and mutual respect. This partnership allows artists creative freedom while aligning their vision with the company's objectives. Mirroring traditional patronage dynamics, this trust-driven collaboration catalyzes artistic energy, which flows outward from within the company, ultimately enhancing brand perception and promoting consumer trust.

In summary, Florim's artification strategy illustrates how integrating art within corporate culture can advance both CSR objectives and market outcomes. Through a structured approach that combines internal employee engagement, layered community involvement, governance-driven implementation, and trusted artist partnerships, Florim demonstrates how artification can redefine luxury branding, aligning artistic endeavors with social and environmental responsibility to build consumer loyalty and enhance brand identity.

### 6.1 | Limitations of the Study

While this research provides valuable insights into the relationship between artification, CSR, and trust, there are limitations that should be acknowledged. First, this study's reliance on qualitative data from a single case limits the ability to generalize its findings to other companies or industries. While the in-depth interviews provided rich insights into Florim's strategies, future research could benefit from a more diverse range of data sources, including quantitative analyses to assess the impact of artification on financial performance or consumer behavior. Second, the study's focus on Florim, a luxury ceramic company, restricts its applicability to other industries. The dynamics of artification and CSR may differ across sectors, and future research should explore how these strategies are implemented



in different contexts, such as the fashion, technology, or mass-market industries.

## 6.2 | Future Research

The findings of this study suggest several promising avenues for future research that could explore how artification is utilized in other industries beyond luxury ceramics. Comparative studies could investigate whether the strong link among artification, CSR, and trust found in Florim applies similarly to other sectors, such as fashion, automotive, or even technology, where aesthetics and innovation play key roles in brand positioning. A comparative approach would also help identify sufficient and necessary causes of the success of the artification process among those evidenced in the findings.

Furthermore, a quantitative approach could measure the specific impact of artification on consumer trust, brand loyalty, and financial performance. A mediation test could investigate the inside-out hypothesis that market benefits are rooted in what the work of art does respect to employees first, thus further investigating the chain of effects linking internal responses (e.g., employees' well-being) to market reactions. By using metrics such as consumer perception surveys or sales data, researchers can finally quantify the benefits of integrating art into corporate strategies.

The growing influence of digital and virtual art forms suggests that digital artification—such as augmented reality, virtual reality, or non-fungible tokens—can be integrated into corporate strategies. These innovations may offer new opportunities for artification; however, whether the processes through which virtual artification works are the same as the physical form investigated in the paper is to be seen.

Further research could also explore how cultural and geographic variations influence the application of artification in corporate strategies. As Florim is deeply rooted in Italian craftsmanship, studies on companies from different cultural backgrounds may reveal how artification practices adapt to local values and market demands. Florim's case illustrates how artification, when integrated with CSR and trust-building, can reshape the essence of luxury branding. While the study's qualitative and single-case focus limits its generalizability, it offers a valuable blueprint for companies seeking to differentiate themselves in competitive markets. By leveraging the transformative power of art, aligning with CSR, and fostering trust, businesses can redefine their brand identities, build consumer loyalty, and contribute to a more culturally enriched and sustainable future.

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### Data Availability Statement

Restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under license from Florim only for this study. Data are available for sharing from the author(s) only with the permission of Florim.

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### Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.