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Re-Defining Luxury in the Airport's Transitory Environment during the Post-Covid Era

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ABSTRACT The airport provides a unique environment for luxury. The transitory airport space is driven by notions of luxury, leisure, pleasure, and the exotic; they are places of possibility and desire. Since the first duty-free store was established in 1947 at Shannon airport in Ireland, international airports are now considered luxury shopping destinations in themselves. Today, luxury brand stores provide a unique offering, experience, and sensory engagement within the airport environment, which drives the desire for luxurious experiences. This paper demonstrates how the demand for luxury in the airport exists during the post-pandemic era. Despite a severe decline in 2020 due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, the overall global luxury market has bounced back to almost pre-Covid-19 levels. Simultaneously, the interest in air travel continues to grow, which drives the desire for passengers to visit the luxury brands in the airport. This paper considers

how, despite the setbacks of the Covid-19 pandemic, luxury brands maintain a stable identity in the airport. The physical store remains a crucial element of a luxury brand and contributes to the understanding of “what is luxury”; it maintains its status as the best place to experience the difference between luxury and non-luxury. Through an investigation of literature and case studies, this paper considers how luxury brands present themselves, how luxury brand identities are communicated, and how the experience of luxury is articulated, and perpetuated within the airport transitory environment.

KEYWORDS: post-Covid, luxury brand stores, brand identity, airport, transitory environment

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to consider how luxury brand stores play a significant role in the modern understanding of luxury in the transitory environment of the airport since the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.¹ Because all major international airports now offer an extensive range of luxury retail, luxury brand stores represent a unique environment which appeals to aspirational luxury consumers. The scent of expensive perfumes and high-quality leather goods in duty-free stores, the prospect of onward exotic destinations, and the absence of everyday timings, schedules, and stresses – these factors combine to create the lure of the airport environment. However, the pandemic has also created anxieties in passenger behaviour which disrupted the comfort and lure for luxurious things within the airport. The idea of indulging in expensive items contradicted the natural instinct of passengers who went back to basics because the COVID pandemic was linked to health concerns. For example, passengers developed anxieties over trying goods in the airport shops because of the threat of touching items infected with the virus; passengers worried about spraying perfumes in the air because of the possibility of breathing in germs; passengers stopped booking travel altogether because the idea of faraway destinations and the exotic is linked with unfamiliar places and eating foods which may be linked to the source of the pandemic.

Subsequently, luxury brands in the airport had to find ways to make passengers feel comfortable visiting the stores and trying the luxury goods. Within this paper, I argue that, within this unique environment, luxury brands use special branding techniques to remind passengers of the availability of luxury, comfort worried customers, and position themselves as accessible, at the same time high-end. Furthermore, passengers seek luxurious experiences in the airport branded stores because the fleeting moment evokes emotions of privilege and membership, which helps customers feel safe,

accepted, and distinct from the crowd, since luxury goods are considered expensive, unique, and relatively unobtainable.

The luxury market today, which centres on the valuation of luxury brands, has shown a significant expansion in the last decade, and despite a severe contraction in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the market grew by 21% in 2022 (D'Arpizio et al. 2023). Simultaneously, the interest in air travel continues to bounce back since the Covid-19 aviation crisis.² However, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on society and the economy worldwide. For example, the closure of physical borders to slow the spread of the disease was devastating on aviation, the global travel industry, and airport retail.³

Considering the impact of Covid-19 on aviation and the evolving idea of luxury, this paper explores how luxury brands maintain a stable identity in the transitory environment of the airport. Using existing knowledge and theories, I explore the role of the airport environment, what it is to be luxury, and the idea of luxury brand identity. I also present specific airport luxury brand store case studies to demonstrate the significance of luxury display. Through this, I consider how the physical store remains a crucial element of a luxury brand and contributes to the understanding of "what is luxury"; it maintains its status as the best place to experience the difference between luxury and non-luxury, and which continue to lure passengers during the post-Covid era.

Luxury in the airport

The airport provides a unique environment. Passengers move from security to shops and restaurants, to the aircraft departure gates, and continue their journey. People do not stay in an airport; they are moved between one destination and the next. The airport has therefore been described by Augé (2012) as a *transitory non-place*, spaces of perpetual renewal. This unique airport environment offers passengers the opportunity to visit shops and restaurants which they may not normally be drawn to, because they are away from their everyday routine, free from everyday stresses and pressures, and exposed to a defined set of rules,⁴ timings, shops, and facilities. This might be considered the "tourist gaze" (Urry 1995). This paper considers how luxury brands can maintain a stable identity in a transitory environment.

Luxury today is not just about the familiarity of luxury brands; luxury is understood through the availability of luxury goods and services. Through the accessibility of luxuries, people can experience unnecessary indulgences throughout society and cultures. The dictionary definition of luxury bridges the broader idea of old and new luxury, as "something that is considered an indulgence rather than a necessity" (OED. 2012), because luxury consumers today seek unique experiences and spend money on goods and services for the experience. Furthermore, the contemporary understanding of luxury

today is not new. Luxury today has origins within a moral context, with its roots in Latin “luxus,” which implies indulgence, lavish or excessive lifestyles, and carries with it connotations of sumptuousness, luxuriousness, opulence and lust (Dubois and Czellar 2001). In unstable times, and here, I consider luxuriousness, because, by making something luxurious, there is an enhanced separation of “luxury” products from the everyday, which increases their allure by distancing them from the reach and experience of much of the population. Luxuriousness can therefore be considered a means of social division, determination, and organization, which is particularly important when we consider how indulging in luxurious things, in all its forms, is so available today. The high price goods, high quality furniture using expensive materials, and high-end service in the airport luxury brand stores creates the lure for passengers in the airport today to experience luxurious things.

Today, consumers can “dip” in and out of luxury. The availability of luxury products as a consequence of globalization has increased exponentially, with anything considered a “treat” bearing the name “luxury” has enabled more consumers to access them. “Affordable” luxuries, allow new customers to enter the previously inaccessible luxury sphere, while existing luxury consumers, to counteract this, are willing to pay considerably more for luxury products (Chevalier and Gutsatz 2012, Kapferer and Bastien 2012, Thomas 2007, Wright 2011). This new luxury is characterised as being a reward for oneself, produced in large quantities, by luxury brands that have established a premium position in the market and are targeted at middle-class consumers (Chevalier and Mazzalovo 2012). This plays with the notion of luxury as sinful and immoral as it makes the “treat” greater.

Indeed, luxury in the airport has come a long way since the first duty-free offering in Shannon Airport in Ireland in 1947, which served Trans-Atlantic airline passengers, whose flights stopped to refuel on the outbound and inbound legs of the journey (Pinder and Roberts 2022). Even before the Covid pandemic, airport-based luxury brands created lucrative retail strategies which act as profit for the airports.⁵ The luxury brands target passengers in this unique airside environment, where the normal everyday pressure and stresses of life give way to a search for pleasures and hedonism. This has been particularly important since the pandemic, to help passengers relax and find escapism away from travel and health anxieties. The fact that most luxury retail purchases are based on impulse, demonstrates how at ease airport passengers are. For example, once passed security, there are increased levels in anticipation and excitement, which has been referred to as the “golden hour” (Coney Pinder 2023, Pinder and Roberts 2022). Additionally, travel and its promise, offers a heightened sense of what we might describe as a “holiday mood” in which money is spent more freely and “treats” are considered “souvenirs.” Luxury becomes part of this equation, when the environment of the airport - a space long associated with the lifestyle of the

rich and famous, or “jet-set” - adds glamour and notions of the “exotic” into the mix. The key here is the democratisation of luxury (Coney Pinder 2023, Hamilton 2013, Van Oel and Van Den Berkhof 2013).

When customers visit a luxury brand store, they do not just buy the product but a complete package including intangible benefits that appeal to the emotional, social, and psychological levels of their being. Luxury products are no longer considered “conspicuous waste,” as Thorstein Veblen⁶ suggested, rather as quality and service in a sophisticated environment. The luxury brand stores create the sophisticated environments, which convey the identity of the brand. Customers symbolise the luxury brand stores as high-class lifestyles which have been created through special display characteristics that generate and perpetuate the brand's identity. The combination of space, display, identity, and lifestyle narrative, establishes a mutual understanding of luxury goods and experiences within the airport environment. Therefore, the importance of luxury brand stores in the airport is established through the luxurious experiences on offer, the familiarity or the intriguing look of the brand, the knowledge of what the place represents, and the circumstances under which the visit is made. This is the identity of the luxury brand and has been fundamental in reminding passengers that luxury still exists in the airport, even after airports were closed during the pandemic. This represents the “new normal.”

Even though the idea and positioning of luxury in the airport has continually changed through aviation crises, such as 911, the ensuing financial crash of 2008,⁷ and the Covid-19 pandemic, today, airports are still considered places of possibilities and desire. For example, the meaning of the airport in contemporary consciousness is driven by leisure, pleasure, and the exotic. Since the pandemic, passengers, more than ever, see their travel experience through a tourist gaze and are in the mood to spend because “revenge spend”⁸ behaviour serves as a release from the tough lockdown restrictions. The fusion of these ideas, with the articulation of luxury today through the luxury brand stores, continues to drive the desire for luxury experiences and moments of glamour in the airport (Coney Pinder 2023).

The significance of luxury branding

What is luxury branding? Why is luxury store branding in the airport transitory space important? Essentially, the physical store remains a crucial element of a luxury brand and contributes to the understanding of “what is luxury.” This is because, luxury brand stores create an environment where there is an expectation of unique and special experiences through the promotion and maintenance of luxury ideals established and expressed by brands, but also articulated as desirable to consumers: this is the lure of luxury. Luxury is articulated in different spaces and to different audiences. In the airport, luxury is expressed to a broad audience, in an environment where the tropes

of luxury, such as security, greeters, scents, sound and strong ambience, are largely lost.

As we consider luxury as a sensory experience, we should start with the look of the stores and our primary sense, sight. There are specific constructs in place which have led airport passengers to believe that visual luxury cues and a sense of glamour must still exist in the airport. For example, luxury stores need to be appealing to attract passengers, but also to maintain the myth of the airport as a luxury space. Familiarity with the brand is fundamental to this process and is established through the identity of the luxury brand, how they are recognised, and represented through specific ideologies, images, and display tactics. As in Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital, the production of luxury through display tactics, appeals to values of taste, which, fundamentally, drives the fascination for luxury brands in the airport. How issues of cultural capital, taste, display, and luxury manifest themselves and continue to drive the appeal of luxury in the airport. For example, the display of luxury and the consumer appeal of social representation, fuels the reasons why modern luxury brands are driven by consumerism and the pursuit of pleasure. The differentiation between regular brands and a luxury brand is the experience it offers through visual cues, and tangible elements, located within a branded space (Carter 2000). Therefore, luxury brand store display tactics have the principal aim of attracting a specific customer through an identity, with the intention of distinguishing the products or services of the seller from its competitors. This creates the physical brand identity and is what creates brand loyalty, because the brand identity reflects individual's consumer identity, ethics, and taste. However, within the airport environment, where luxury brands face the issue of transient customers, airport luxury brand stores experience lower levels of loyalty.

So, what must luxury brands do to convey their brand identity within the airport environment? The key to the expression of luxury in the airport is through physical luxury branded spaces. Expressing luxury through a physical space became a strategy implemented amongst the key luxury firms⁹ during the 1990s, when luxury brands discovered ways of displaying branding and luxury identity. Because the concept of luxury means that consumers have high expectations, the identity of the luxury brands must fulfil these expectations of consumers. Luxury brands do this through the expression of luxury characteristics, display tactics and sensuous experiences. These messages must maintain a level of visual consistency, so that a consumer experiences the same store atmosphere, wherever they are in the world. These concepts help capture consumer preference and loyalty, as customers will have a greater opportunity to trust the brand when they are more exposed to its brand identity (Chevalier and Mazzalovo 2008 p.275, Kotler 2001). Luxury branding and expression of brand identity through visual merchandising has evolved into one of the crucial tactics' luxury brands adopt in articulating the form of luxury, because is it obvious, tangible, and quick to

translate by the consumer (Morgan 2016). An example of this is the Chanel store at London's Heathrow Airport, Terminal 5, as seen in the following image.



Figure 1

Chanel boutique, Heathrow Terminal 5, London.

Source: Heathrow (2023) (accessed 12.09.23)

The Heathrow T5 Chanel store image (Figure 1) represents all aspects of the luxury brand's visual merchandising (CHANEL 2021). The key visual merchandising signifiers within this image are the wall displays, the glass cabinets, the lowered central ceiling, the tiled flooring, the materials used for the interior design throughout the store, the lighting, the glass box back wall displays, the models wearing the clothes, the product displayed within the display cases, the spacious layout of the furniture, and the minimal black, white and gold colours used throughout the interior display. All these elements, and the position of them within the store, signifies luxury. This is because, the fabrics, materials and layout suggest expense, and enhances the feeling of calm and opulence. The customer identifies with luxury brands through chic, minimal displays, using iconic colours and elements from its brand identity, which is associated with the brand. The lines are straight, the furniture is well spaced out, the lighting highlights specific displays, and the product is arranged in a specific pattern on the centre of a display case or shelf. Subsequently, a customer can navigate through the store easily, and they consider the products special, because they are showcased on or under glass, which offers a sense of exclusivity - they are untouchable and museum-like. The lighting highlights specific products, like they are special, almost holy, as such, carry associations of otherworldliness and exclusivity. The black and gold lines on the furnishings act as a highlighter to draw the consumers attention to specific focal points on displays and products.

A study by Coney Pinder (2023) investigates the differences between the airport luxury brand store and the non-airport luxury brand store, through the analysis of a set of luxury store observations carried out in London's Heathrow Terminal 5, and the luxury district of Mayfair in London. The study reveals the differences in levels of luxuriousness within the luxury branded spaces in and out of the airport are according to variations in the display tactics employed. These display tactics affect how the spaces construct, express and articulate luxury. The findings reveal there are key markers in defining airport and non-airport luxury, and there is an opportunity to raise levels of design through specific display tactics within the airport luxury brand stores. These are highlighted as: window display tactics, technology, museology, wellness and relaxation experiences, natural living elements and sensory atmospherics. The following image demonstrates these findings.



Figure 2

Mulberry boutique, Heathrow Terminal 5, London.

Source: Coney Pinder (2023).

The above image of the airport Mulberry luxury store exhibits an architecturally designed space for luxury displays. How is this done? Firstly, the displays in the centre of the shop floor, and permanent wall fixtures around the edge of the store are spatially organised. The ceiling within the stores is lower than the main concourse in the terminal building, and there is a defined and obvious store space with a door and a window. The shape and format of the store is very simple, and there is only one room representing the saleable shop space. These design elements signify the architectural style of these buildings is new,¹⁰ which contradicts the age of the Mulberry luxury brand flagship store on Regent Street, London, which is deemed old.¹¹ The display elements arranged in this way encourages the customer to pick up products and try, like in the comfort of one's

own home. The lighting over the handbags illuminates specific products, so they are more special and tempting to try. The museum display case makes the products something to behold of cultural value, just like historical expensive pieces in a museum. The sofa looks comfortable, reminiscent of those in the nineteenth century department stores that enticed customers to linger. The possibility of staying longer within a transitory space disrupts the notion of its transitory-ness, and in turn challenges the perceptions of normative behaviour in such places, which might be considered "naughty." This transgression heightens the luxuriousness of lingering.

Therefore, the key signifier this store is luxurious, is the feeling created by space. Duncan (1995) asserts that the sparser the space, with the fewer objects and the empty surrounding walls, the more sacred the space, which is evidenced in the luxury stores in the airport. Likewise, isolating objects, as in a display case or highlighting them on shelves, forges visual contemplation. This influences the perception of betweenness within the store, consequently, the level of luxury: higher levels of spatial arrangement, or betweenness, through museum display practices, creates higher levels of luxuriousness. However, at the same time, the product within the airport stores must be displayed in a fashion to make it visible, accessible, and welcoming, which encourages the democratisation of luxury (Coney Pinder 2023).

This airport luxury brand store is appealing to a varied and non-loyal luxury consumer in several ways. Firstly, the simple shape and small size of the store appeals to customer in a hurry. Airport passengers do not have time to walk around a large store and spend time browsing products, therefore, the architecture of these stores tempts passengers in a hurry to enter the stores. Secondly, the layout of the airport luxury brand stores has clear customer walkways, principally straight through the middle of the store. The positioning of the displays, and the open doorways, produces a free-flow layout through the store, which is associated with a sense of luxuriousness (Okonkwo 2007). The colours displayed within the store is a reminder of luxury, because they have historical associations with dark and neutral tones, limited to three variations (the three colour principle), associated with bourgeois and wealth (Baudrillard 1968). However, because of the store layout and visual merchandising of the airport luxury stores, some luxury display and spatial practices are not apparent. For example, creating zones and spaces of luxury product through betweenness¹² is present, however, presentation technique,¹³ the Invariant Right Rule,¹⁴ relaxation areas, and museology tactics to create a sense of place within the stores are not (Angell et al. 2018, Duncan 1995, Underhill 2009, Urry 1995).

This example of an airport luxury brand store demonstrates how levels of display tactics adopted by the brands signify levels of luxuriousness. In the transitory space, away from familiarities and normal routine, the airport is a space where people can momentarily forget

everyday stresses and disable personal morals and values related to consumption behaviours, allowing passengers to “step into” luxury. Why consumers are attracted to the visual cues of luxury reveals the importance of how luxury brands establish, perpetuate, and maintain brand identity. This is the psychology of luxury, which informs us how we arrive at a positioning of luxury today, particularly when faced with crises. Although the luxurious experience in the luxury branded spaces is fleeting, it serves as an important marker for the understanding of luxury and a reminder of its significance in the airport today, specifically since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 on luxury and aviation

The COVID-19 global crisis has had an unprecedented impact on aviation and the luxury goods market. Initially, airports struggled to regain control over passenger numbers, and many luxury goods companies had to restructure their business models. Aviation was one of the worst affected sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, at no other time in the history of aviation airports have had to close its doors to passengers for such a length of time.¹⁵ A report by Allianz (2021) suggests the key issues in air travel caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have been the consequence of losing staff, damaged grounded aircraft, and pilots out of practice. Subsequently, passenger air rage has increased because of travel disruption. However, the following chart demonstrates, despite the issues the airline industry faces, the number of international arrivals through airports between 2010 and 2022 has increased substantially.

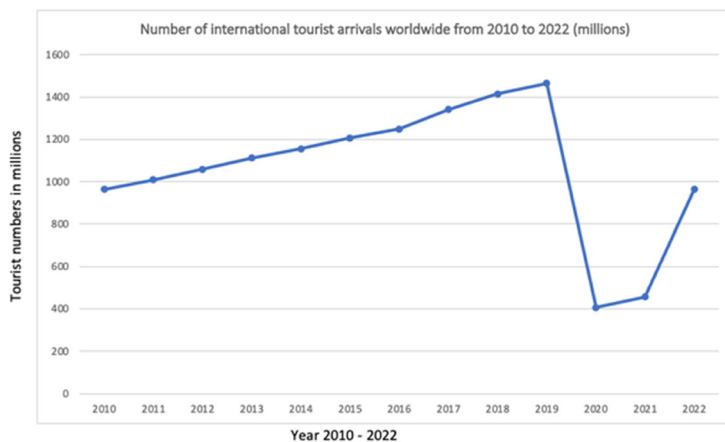


Figure 3

Number of international tourist arrivals worldwide from 2010 to 2022 (in millions).
Source: Compiled from Statistica (2023b).

Figure 2, above, validates that during 2020, at the height of the pandemic, passengers passing through international airports dropped by 72% compared with the previous year. Because airport

retail square footage is lucrative for the luxury brands, the COVID-19 pandemic had a catastrophic effect on this evaluation.¹⁶ Dufry, the Duty-Free store, which has a flagship location in Heathrow Terminal 5, had severely reduced footfall throughout 2020, with sales in the month of April down 95% compared to the previous year, and total sales reduced by up to 70% (Statistica 2023a). Because of the reduced airport passenger flow, airports had to scale back their operations regarding the number of flights operating out of the airport, in addition to retail and passenger experience facilities. Airports popular for luxury goods shopping, such as Changi airport in Singapore, had to close its stores, its theatres, and the rain vortex was closed down due to pathogen protection and the lack of passenger traffic to justify the operating expenses (Williams 2020).

However, the post-COVID luxury landscape has regained customers, demonstrating how robust the luxury sector is and how luxury branding has maintained its strength and appeal. The surge in air travel has also demonstrated that passengers have not been deterred by global health concerns. What has changed is how luxury goods brands must redefine what "luxury" means in a post-COVID world, where luxury goods consumers have become more conscious of their spending habits. The lockdown policies enforced upon nations caused the closure of retail stores, and a halt in travel, subsequently, customers moved to online shopping, and increased social media usage. This development in the way people now behave towards travel and shopping, means companies have had to consider how to reach a new generation of luxury goods consumers, as well as how to keep their current customers engaged. Additionally, companies have had to focus on developing innovative solutions to challenges posed by the pandemic, such as supply chain disruptions and travel restrictions.

While the short-term effects of the pandemic were initially devastating, luxury retailers quickly responded by developing new strategies to adapt to the changing environment, such as enhanced online shopping and virtual services. The surge in air travel was combined with a high pent-up demand for overseas exploration, the need for revenge spending, and the desire for the discovery of new and luxurious experiences not possible during the height of the pandemic. These desires were partly driven by the enhanced world of social media, and its capability of promoting individuals' experiences and self-worth, with the idea of capturing beautiful images as a form of self-promotion. Many luxury brands responded by creating unique, personalised experiences for their customers within the luxury stores and online, as well as introducing new and exclusive products tailored to the restricted shopping environment. For example, luxury brands had to find ways to continue providing luxurious experiences while also ensuring the safety of their customers. Luxury brands offered virtual consultations and experiences, created contactless

payment methods, and found ways of investing in high-end materials, unique designs, and sustainable practices to maintain the luxurious appeal to their environmentally minded new generation luxury consumers (Allianz 2021).

Overall, the impact of luxury in the airport in the post-COVID era, has been profound. Luxury goods and services provide a sense of identity, comfort, security, and status to consumers in transitory environments, spaces which have the opportunity to diffuse luxury. The purchase of luxury products has a positive impact on consumer psychology and contributes to overall profit and economic growth within the airport environment. Therefore, the increase in passenger numbers within the airport has helped boost the number of customers visiting the airport luxury brand stores, and rebuilding confidence in luxury shopping behaviour. These ideas help shape how we view luxury in the airport today.

Implications for luxury in the airport during the post-Covid era

Since the pandemic lock down restrictions were lifted, people have been able to carry on with their lives with lower risk of health implications, companies have welcomed employees back to work, and businesses have established their idea of the “new normal.” Luxury brands continue to seek new ways of capturing unique customer experiences to meet the needs of the new luxury consumer. Luxury brands have realized they must focus on creating tailored experiences which emphasise hedonism, comfort, and safety. In the Post-Covid enhanced digitalised era, this means contactless and digital solutions such as virtual appointments, remote consultations, and contactless payment methods. This also includes online pre-ordering luxury goods, and product personalisation. Luxury brands are also finding ways of reaching a wider audience through digital marketing and must respond to the shift in consumer behaviour by offering products and services that are more accessible, sustainable, and affordable. Furthermore, the aviation industry has demonstrated remarkable resilience since the pandemic, with a restoration of consumer confidence in air travel and increased vaccination rates and health protocols (IATA 2023). Airlines continue to take stringent measures to ensure passenger comfort and safety, including sanitation practices, and touchless technologies.

What does this mean for luxury retail in the transitory space of the airport? Before the pandemic restrictions were lifted, an airport retail consumer survey conducted by Alix Partners (an airport retail consulting firm), revealed that: the majority of respondents (86%) said they would travel less frequently and spend less in airport shops once restrictions are lifted; three-quarters of respondents felt they would not be comfortable in an environment that did not have health protection measures in place; 43% said that they would avoid interaction with sales staff when in shops; and 38% said they would

avoid entering shops altogether. The results also suggest that airport passengers would be more reluctant to enter into the airport luxury stores (Neil-Boss 2020). Even though these concerns were short lived (see arrivals Figure 3, above) airports must continue to focus on optimising passenger time in the airport due to health and hygiene concerns, and there are additional measures airport retail operators must consider if the luxury brand store is to attract customers and maintain sales.

Firstly, luxury brand stores – more so than their high street counterparts – must appeal to passengers by creating a safe space with pleasurable experiences. The airport luxury brand stores must offer exceptional services, exclusive products, and personalisation to appeal to reluctant shoppers. Secondly, luxury brand stores should promote their health protection measures and create store interiors which are relaxing and appear hygienic, in addition to allowing space for social distancing within the stores. This may also mean offering appointments to customers who express anxiety over sharing shopping space in the high-end retailer stores. Thirdly, luxury brand stores should consider technology, online shopping facilities and “click and collect” opportunities for those passengers with anxiety over entering the store space (Coney Pinder 2023). For example, luxury brands must find a way of engaging customers online, or through augmented or virtual reality inside or exterior to the store, to encourage the purchase of products and services.

The pandemic crisis revealed that the distinct sensory environment of the luxury brand store is important in maintaining a sense of familiarity, escape, exclusivity, and otherness, from the external stresses of the real world, and the busy, fast-paced, noisy airport terminal building. This unique sensory environment is constructed through special display tactics and appeals to airport passengers. Luxury brands must maintain the display of luxury as a reflective mode, which is identified by individuals, and signifies a sign of social class where luxury emulates wealth. This is supported by Bourdieu's theory on cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). This paper highlights the significance of luxuriousness within the luxury branded spaces in the airport, which are according to variations in the display tactics employed. These display tactics affect how the spaces construct, express and articulate luxury. The findings in the Coney Pinder (2023) study reveal there is an opportunity to raise levels of design through window display tactics, technology, museology, wellness and relaxation experiences, natural living elements and sensory atmospherics within the airport luxury brand stores in the post-Covid environment. This is because, although the luxurious experience in the luxury branded spaces is fleeting, it serves as an important marker for the reminder and understanding of luxurious experiences in the airport today.

Furthermore, within the wider space of the airport, the use of technology is required to create a contactless passenger journey.

Pre-airport check in with facial recognition, artificial intelligence to understand who and where passengers are within the airport, and contactless payments within the luxury brand stores to comply with health and safety measures during a pandemic. For example, new airport terminal designs must focus on space, not just for the coronavirus disease, but for other respiratory illnesses. If we are faced with new strains of global spreading diseases in the future, airports must allow space for people to spread out to ensure social distancing, additionally, they must offer high-efficiency particulate air filtration systems, and they must distribute free masks. They must also include health screening zones in their terminals, in addition to stop and check areas, contact tracing facilities, temperature check zones and virus testing and antibody tests pre-boarding. Therefore, post-pandemic airports must make medical facilities a priority, otherwise airports will not regain passenger confidence, and airports will not be commercially viable. Finally, because environmental sustainability has become a paramount concern for the aviation industry, airlines must seek ways to reduce their carbon footprint and embrace greener practices. The adoption of sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs), more fuel-efficient aircraft, and carbon offset programs are steps in the right direction towards achieving carbon-neutral growth in the industry. These measures will help attract passengers, which, in turn, raises the opportunity for customers to visit the airport luxury brand stores.

Conclusion

The pandemic has undoubtedly changed the way we view, and experience luxury, and brands must take a holistic approach to their strategy to stay relevant. As our society and the world around us continues to adjust to the “new normal,” luxury brands must adapt to the changing times and embrace the need to reimagine luxury to ensure future success. By creating a holistic experience for customers, brands can ensure that luxurious experiences remain an integral part of the airport experience and reflects the values and aspirations of an ever-changing society.

During the post-Covid 19 era, where airport and luxury brands have been recovering from damaged aviation profits, closed luxury stores, and hampered consumer confidence, this taught us that aviation is not exempt from global crises, and the airport must continually respond to consumer desires and passenger expectations. Luxury brands must consider how they continually renegotiate what luxurious experiences mean in the post-Covid environment, specifically for modern and younger generation airport luxury consumers. The luxury brand stores play an important role in providing a reference point and an anchor for the familiarity of luxurious experiences in the airport, and therefore, developments in the look and feel of the branded spaces is important for the future success of luxury in the airport. These developments include considerations over

sustainability issues, wellness practices, technological expectations, and exotic experiences within aviation. Technology and a sense of the exotic are also important factors in maintaining a sense of which passengers have come to expect from premium brands.

It is evident that air travel will continue to gain interest, and luxury engagement retains its importance in the international airport. Luxury brands must not ignore the significance of implementing special display tactics and spatial practice, in establishing, articulating, and defining luxury experiences in the airport during the post-COVID era.

NOTES

1. In December 2019, an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (COVID-19) was identified in Wuhan, the capital of the Hubei province in China, and resulted in an on-going global coronavirus pandemic during 2020. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the 2019–20 coronavirus outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on the 30th January 2020, and a global pandemic on the 11th March 2020 (WHO 2020). Statement on the Second Meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee Regarding the Outbreak of Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV).
2. In 2022, there were 963 million international tourist arrivals at airports, compared to 407 million during 2020 (Statistica 2023a). In 2022, the value of the airport personal luxury goods market worldwide was roughly €11 billion, which accounted for 3% of the overall market (Statistica 2023b).
3. The number of arrivals through airports dropped to 406 million in 2020 & an estimate by the International Airport Travel Association (International Airport Review 2020). Analysis of Coronavirus Impact on Aviation Industry. *International Airport Review*. London: International Airport Review. suggests that the 2020 global revenue loss for the passenger business was up to \$113 billion (Statistica 2023a), when counties adopted 'lock down' policies and civilians were unable to travel.
4. Airport security, customs, passport control, baggage allowance.
5. Deregulation and privatization in the airline industry have, then, facilitated a transition from airports as largely government owned and operated public utilities towards firms, increasingly privately owned, delivering a range of services to privately operated airlines, terminal retailers, and passengers (Pinder and Roberts 2022).
6. In Veblen's (1899) discussion on conspicuous consumption and the purchasing of luxury goods, he considered that in order to display ones personal wealth and economic power, consumer goods are regarded as a marker for differentiation of economic status, and a means of showing the spread of mass consumption and the rise of a 'leisure' society (Veblen 1899; Diggins 1999). He coined the term *conspicuous consumption* to describe excessive consumption and the display of ostentatious consumer behaviour.
7. The 911 disaster triggered the financial meltdown of the US carriers, whose net losses in 2001 totalled \$8 billion (Doganis 2006).
8. *Revenge Spend* is "the incremental increase in consumer spending (versus normal levels) after an unprecedented adverse economic event (for example, the COVID-19 pandemic). In simpler terms, revenge spending is the urge to spend money to make up for lost time" (CFI. 2023).
9. The key luxury firms were considered L'Oréal, Estee Lauder, LVMH, Kering and Richemont, who were at the forefront of the production and mass marketing of personal luxury goods.

10. The store has been built within the last 50 years, as described by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation Architectural buildings are buildings of architectural and historical interest, of more than 50 years old, within national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, and world heritage sites (Institute of Historic Building Conservation 2021).
11. The Mayfair luxury brand stores are located within old buildings, constructed from large grey stone, built within the Regency era. Mayfair buildings have associations with grandeur and wealth. The shops on Regent Street were the world's first retail shopping street. John Nash was the architect working on the Regent Street shopping area in the 19th Century and took 14 years to complete. The project was backed by Prince Albert Regent, which Regent Street is derived, and completed in 1819 (Rowan 2017).
12. How a luxury space is identified by the objects within it, is called betweenness. This characterizes the spatial relations between objects. It defines how the organisation of goods within the airport luxury brand store constructs levels of luxury within the space (Urry 1995). *Consuming Places*, London, Routledge.. This is because, as Urry (1995) argued, space is defined and identified by the objects within it (the products and people), subsequently, these patterns form, and create socially functioning spaces.
13. Angell et al. (2018) refer to *presentation technique*, referring to a staged distance between consumers and exhibits, use of thematic displays and educational signage. In the museum, this can also be created with physical barriers, be it in the form of a physical distance or glass, between exhibits and visitors to minimize touching, contamination, and damage.
14. *The Invariant Right* is a theory created by Underhill (2009), who placed cameras in retail stores to understand consumer behaviour once they walk into a store, and the results showed most customers veered to the right.
15. 9/11 was the first-time airports globally were affected by a crisis. It entailed four coordinated terrorist attacks flew two aeroplanes into The World Trade Centre Twin Towers in New York, one into the Pentagon in Virginia, and another plane which was originally intended to fly towards Washington D.C., but passengers thwarted the hijackers and it eventually crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. The attacks resulted in 2,977 victim fatalities and over 125,000 injuries (Dunlap 2008). The Toll From 9/11 Grows Again, to 2,751. *New York Times*, July 10, 2008.. This caused U.S and global airports to close for 24 hours. This event triggered the financial meltdown of the US carriers, whose net losses in 2001 totalled \$8 billion (Doganis 2006).
16. For example, Los Angeles Airport reported revenue of \$3036 per square foot, compared to a Los Angeles mall retailer who takes around \$325 per square foot.

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