

How Museum's Brand Name Affect the Perception Through Imaginative Experience: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

The fierce competition in the arts context and the modern marketing knowledge push museums towards a careful brand management. Our hypothesis is that the museum brand affects not only the selection of the museum by the subject, but the perception of the artwork itself. We claim that this effect is not due to the traditional memory network theory but to a new approach we would like to propose: the imaginative experience. Drawing on the aesthetic perception literature and on recent marketing research streams, our work shows that perceiving a painting is an overall experience that occurs into the imagination. This "imaginative experience" blends together the represented object and the museum attributes. On the contrary the memory network theory would explain the museum effect on the artwork perception in term of associations among nodes.

We conduct an experiment: 160 subjects look at the same paintings with different information regarding the host museum and the artist. Results seem to confirm our hypothesis: when exposed to the museum brand name, subjects change their perception of the artwork according to the suggested imaginative experience approach rather than memory network theory.

Possible extensions to credence goods are eventually discussed.

Keywords

Marketing of the Arts, Perception, Brand management, Museum management, Imaginative Experience.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of the museum brand in the arts management context. By using the experimental method, we try to measure how the exposure to the museum brand name affects the meaning of an artwork. The issue raised by the paper seems worthy of being studied, since brand marketing is a growing aspect of modern arts management and, by extension, credence goods marketing.

Kotler and Levy (1969) were among the first scholars in broadening the concept of marketing. They included inside the marketing fence not-for-profit organizations too, like any other organization engaged in exchange activities. Since then, marketing has become a part of

modern cultural institutions and specifically museums. Cultural institutions holds a peculiar position towards marketing. A cultural institution is buffered from the marketplace thanks to grants, tax exemption, public funding; yet it has to build its audience and match the cultural offer with the customers' requests (Rentschler, 1999). Thus, public approach and marketing approach has to go together. Moreover cultural institutions reverse the traditional marketing approach: "Instead of seeking to meet consumer's needs by offering them a product they desire, the arts manager seeks consumers who are attracted to the product" (Colbert, 2003, 31).

The main streams of marketing applied to the cultural field are three: strategic marketing, experiential marketing, service marketing.

According to Kotler and Andreasen (1996) strategic marketing consists in positioning the organization towards a customer-focused approach. Strategic marketing deals with audience development, communication and distribution, objective setting and their measurement (Kotler and Kotler, 2000). It guides the formulation of the operative marketing mix. Traditionally this mix is articulated into the four 'Ps' of classical marketing (variously integrated by other 'Ps', such as people, processes, physical evidence) (Rentschler, 1999, 9).

Experiential marketing focuses on the moment of the visit and the sensations felt by the subjects. This approach stresses the study of the environment and how the institution can manage it in order to create a satisfying experience (Goulding, 2000).

Other scholars consider museums and other cultural institutions as service providers and they consequently apply the service marketing theories (Rentschler, Gilmore, 2002; Mejón *et al.*, 2004). Customer loyalty, satisfaction, repurchase rate, relationship become terms that enter the museum management field intended as service management (Harrison, Shaw, 2002).

Our intent is to focus an understudied stream of marketing research in museums: brand management. The need for such privileged approach is stated by Colbert: in "today's competitive environment, arts managers must also develop and position a brand for the organization" (2002, 31). A strong and well recognizable brand is a necessity for modern museums. The museum brand is a filter for the other marketing approaches.

The above-mentioned marketing approach can benefit from this focus to brand.

Strategic marketing should go beyond the traditional marketing of four 'Ps'. Moreover, any marketing strategy should start from the consideration that the museum's identity – synthesized by its brand – affect every strategy and marketing mix.

As to experiential marketing, when brand is taken into consideration, it appears that the experience of visiting a museum begins before entering the facility. It begins when the prospective visitor is exposed to the museum's brand and communication. As this work will try to demonstrate, the experience of the arts is influenced by the brand.

Due to the intangibility of services and the arts, a clear brand position can help the visitor in choosing and (as we will see later) interpreting the service provided. In particular, according to the service theory, museums as service provider help visitors define the meaning of the artworks the s/he observes (Rentschler, Gilmore, 2002). This function is played inside the museum's rooms, when the subject is actually visiting. In our work we claim that the interpretation of the collection begins before the visit. The subject starts to interpret the

collection that s/he will visit from the very moment that s/he knows the brand name of the museum showing that collection.

A marketing approach would require the museum to focus not only on the management of a good visit experience inside the museum, but to the preparation of that visit too, starting from the brand management.

Brand management is a relevant issue for modern museum marketing. The British Museum is a case of this. Acknowledging the growing relevance of brand, the British Museum required the help of Interbrand, a consultancy firm specialized in brand management (renown for its ranking of international brands). The associations raised by the British Museum brand were many – British history, archaeology, ancient Greek's pieces - and they had to gather them under a common umbrella. Modern museum management is discovering franchising. Tate is an example. Today in Great Britain visitors can enjoy two Tate museums: Tate Modern and Tate Britain.

Theoretical Background

Memory Network Theory

A brand is the systems of associations in the subjects' mind regarding a given product or service (Howard, 1977; Keller, 1993 and 1998). The associations refer to the features and benefits of the brand. Through the brand image, the subject form expectations about the service or product that s/he going to use. "A brand is a synthesis of product characteristics in the mind of the consumer" (Colbert, 2003, 37). Specifically, our research deals with brand name. Brand name is the first step for the subject to catch the brand image (Aaker, cit. in Lerman, Garbarino, 2002). In particular, brand names have effect when the product is not clearly distinguishable for design or other attributes (ibidem).

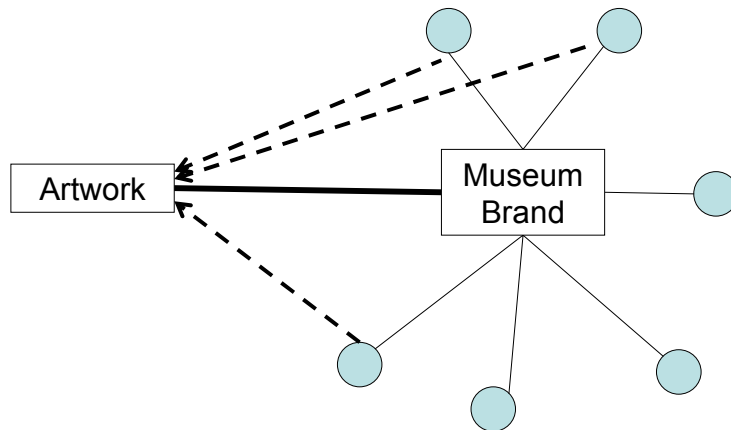
Caldwell and Coshall (2002) study the associations elicited by the museums brand in the visitors minds. The aim is to shed some light on the decisional process that leads the choice of a museum. Brand affects the choice of the museum. Museum's brand raises associations that affect the visitor's perception of the museum, creating some expectations that the visit will satisfy/dissatisfy. Brand can also – and that is the point of our work – distort the perception of the artwork.

According to the memory network theory, memory can be conceptualized as a network of nodes connected by links. The activation of the central hub of this network spreads to its nodes, favoring the recall and the awareness about these nodes (Baker, 2003; Lerman, Garbarino, 2002). The brand name is a hub of such a system of connected nodes. The brand name Ferrari, for instance, likely activates nodes such as sport car, luxury, car races, red color. The system of the nodes activated through the brand represents the domain of meanings given to the product. The probability that the activation of a node will activate a connected node depends on the strength of the tie. This strenght is built by the organization through communication, events, advertising. The subject becomes used to activate some nodes automatically when exposed to the brand. The subject's perceptions derives from the activated nodes.

By applying the memory network theory to the art field, the artworks can be considered a node of the museum brand network, hence the painting participates to the brand name network of associations, gaining a meaning. For instance, if the brand name of the museum is associated

to classical art, the interpretation of an artwork associated to that museum should lean towards classical rather than modern art (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 : Memory Network Theory:
perception of the artwork through the brand name associations**



Other ‘brands’ could affect the interpretation by the subject, namely the name of the artist. According to the memory network theory, one might expect that a well-known and reputable painter would affect the perception of the artwork, since the artist’s name acts as a brand. In this case, the artist might empower or deplete the museum’s effect when, respectively, the artist’s profile is coherent with the museum or not.

The larger literature about brand management and brand extension is built upon these effects. Fundamentally, according to this approach, the subject and consumer reacts to the stimulus via the conditioned learning.

Imaginative Experience Approach

The memory network theory does not fully explain the aesthetic experience of perception. According to Walton, the aesthetic experience of perception is essentially an imaginative activity. When a subject looks at a painting, she imagines to experience the represented object: this is the way she can perceive. When one looks at the Malevich’s abstract painting “The Red House”, one perceives a red house based on how she should perceive a red house in the world she imagines (Nanay, 2005). The observer is conscious of being in front of a representation but she perceives it as true in the imaginative world where she is embedded: perceiving as true comes from a make believe game. Representing, and so painting, is making true something through the imagination of the observer: “looking at the picture constitutes a perceptual game of make-believe” (Walton, 1990).

Thus, we propose to define the aesthetic perception as an “imaginative experience”, in the sense that the observer experiences the world he imagines, thanks to the painting. Without imagination perception could not occur. Imaginative experience builds worlds of possibilities that need ‘bricks’ and elements. The museum brand name is one of these elements. Its role is not that of being a hub of attributes, but an element of the imaginative world experienced. Attributes of museum brand name are not activated through links, but they are included as bricks of the imaginative experience. The imaginative world is a sort of backdrop where the perception can stand out. Imaginative experience is not a question of associations among nodes, but it is a question of overall experience of imagination. Within this large experience what is sought by the perception is not a link, but a coherent story which builds a meaning. The museum is part of this story and by this way the museum brand attributes are transferred to the painting. If the museum, through its brand name, is prompted to the observer of the painting, the museum becomes part of the experience of perception and thus it enters this perception.

For instance, if I see the “Red House” painting and I am said that it is exhibited in a museum known for its contemporary collection, I experience both the red house and the museum into a single experience where the two elements are blended together. One has to notice that it is not to imagine to be in that museum observing the painting.

In the memory network theory the perception occurs before the activation of the nodes and this justifies the transfer of attributes from the brand to the object. In the imaginative experience approach, the imaginative world occurs before perception and perception is justified just in that specific world.

The concept of imaginative experience may be considered an oxymoron, according to the experiential marketing literature (Pine, Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999). This literature considers experience as a bodily immersion in physical situation. Based upon this stream of literature, the aesthetic experience has been recently studied by Joy and Sherry (2003). They look at the aesthetic experience as an embodied imagination and consider the multisensory experience that occurs within a physical place. This implies that the same artwork is perceived differently depending on the museum setting and that the physical context where people are embedded influence the perception of the artwork.

Adopting a different approach, d’Astous and Deschênes (2005) claim that consumption does not occur only in a physical setting, but also in the dreamy imagery of the subject. The mind memory traces of a dreamed consumption are the same of those created by a material consumption: “the study of consumption dreams does not appear to be fundamentally different from the study of tangible consumption” (d’Astous, Deschênes, 2005, 26). Thus experience can be also imaginative. The *American Heritage Dictionary* states that experience is “the apprehension of an object or emotion through the senses *or* mind” (italics not in the original). Also in this definition experience can occur just in the mind and not necessarily in the physical world.

Actually, the proposed imaginative experience approach blends together these two streams of thought. It is not necessary to physically visit a museum in order to experience it, its mere prompting is enough because we imaginatively experience it. We do not mean that we can just imagine the experience of being inside that museum and live the sensory stimuli that we would have there seeing a painting.

The museum brand name is the main prompt of this mind experience. In order to be a prompt for an imaginative experience, the museum needs to have been experienced, in a physical or imaginative way. For instance, even though a subject never visited the Guggenheim Museum, she can “consume” it in her mind thanks to the notoriety of this name.

Among the implications of this approach it is worth to mention that in order to be a backdrop that influences the perception, a noun as to be “experienciable”. Experienciable means that people can participate into an imagine or a story built around that name. That is why an unknown museum or an artist’s name would not influence the perception: in the first case one cannot experience anything and in the second it is more difficult to experience a person.

Hypotheses

According to the memory network theory, we would expect that:

- a) The perception of the painting and the perception of the museum name are different experiences and it exists a transfer of attributes from the museum to the painting and this would explain the influence of the museum brand name on the perception of the artwork
- b) The perception of the painting will be affected by the museum brand and by the artist name as well. In fact both museum and artist’s names would spark associations within the network.

On the contrary, according to the imaginative experience approach:

- a) The perception of the painting and the museum pertains to the same experience. The modification of the perception of the painting by the museum name does not derive from a transfer of attributes, but it occurs since perception of their attributes are blended together in a single perception. This allows us to use the same attributes that refer to the museum for the painting perception: for instance, if the museum is perceived as rounded, the painting is perceived as rounded. This could not occur in the memory network theory.
- b) Only the museum brand, and not the artist name, would affect the perception of the painting. This is due to the fact that the artist cannot be experienced. People have experience (real or imaginative) of a museum, not of an artist. It is easier to imagine a visit to a museum than imagining an experience with an artist.

We would like to demonstrate that the imaginative experience approach would work better than the memory network theory. Thus we formulate the following hypothesis:

- H1: The artwork’s perception is affected by the museum’s brand name through the embedding of the museum (thus its attributes) in the same experience of the painting perception.*
- H2: The museum’s effect on the artwork’s perception (H1) is NOT affected by the artist’s name.*

The memory network theory would let to expect that the associations with a museum brand name hold particularly for abstract paintings. Abstract paintings do not have recognizable images and so their meaning should need the help of information supplied by the museum brand name under the form of activated nodes. On the contrary, the imaginative experience approach would suggest that the perception of both abstract and non abstract paintings would be affected by the museum brand. This is due to the fact that for both types of paintings perception is an imaginative experience whose meaning derives from the world the observer imagines. Thus we suggest the following hypothesis:

H3: The effect of the museum brand on the perception of the artwork does not depend on the abstraction or realism of the painting.

If the three hypotheses will be verified, we may conclude that the imaginative experience theory explains better the phenomenon of art perception.

Table 1 synthesizes the difference between the two approaches.

Table 1: Comparison between Memory Network and Imaginative Experience Approaches

	Memory Network Theory	Imaginative Experience Theory
Museum Brand Name	Does affect perception via associations	Does affect perception via imaginative experience
Artist Name	Does affect perception via associations	Does not affect perception
Abstract/Realistic Painting	Abstract paintings are more influenced	Are equally influenced

Method

The method applied was organized in two stages: a focus group and then an experiment. The focus group was conducted with 6 undergraduate students in order to explore the topic and define the idea associated to the brand name of a well-known museum to employ it in the experiment. We chose to use undergraduate students for the focus group because of consistency with the experiment group formed by undergraduate too. The intent of our study is not to analyze a typical museum visitor, but to investigate the way brand name affects the perception of an artwork. This is a cognitive process and literature on perception does not observe any differences between young and old people, but only between genders. For this reason our sample was made almost equally by girls and boys.

The museum chosen for the focus group discussion was Guggenheim. The choice of Guggenheim as the museum of the experiment is due to its strong brand, “readily identifiable even among people who have never visited them” (Colbert, 2003, 37). A recent managerial research by IBM (2004) confirms that Guggenheim is the third top of mind brand for brand awareness. The focus group confirmed this strength. Thus Guggenheim is an “experientiable” museum brand name. Required to write down some adjectives that they associate to Guggenheim, the focus group participants identified (independently from each other) five concepts: rounded (referring to its characteristic design), international, modern, strong-ambitious, careful (in its exhibits). We developed a scale made by 5 couples of opposing adjectives to use in the experiment.

The experiment was administered to 160 undergraduates students. The experimental design consisted in a factorial design with repeated measures with the following three independent variables, each one with two states (in parenthesis): museum brand (primed/not primed), artist's name (primed/not primed), complexity of the painting (abstract/realistic). The first two variables were within subjects treatment, the third one was the between subjects treatment (see Table 2).

Table 2: Experiment Design

	No museum name		Museum name	
	No artist name	Artist name	No artist name	Artist name
Realistic Painting	G1	G1	G1	G1
Abstract Painting	G2	G2	G2	G2

G1: Group 1; G2: Group 2

The artist name was Picasso. In the focus group we did not collect the attributes referred to this name, since we are interested in the interaction effect of the artist name and the museum brand name.

In the experiment each subject was required to observe a sequence of four modern art paintings. The paintings were randomly assigned. For each painting the participant had to fill in a questionnaire made of the above mentioned 5 couples of opposing adjectives. The application to the paintings of the attributes that the focus group referred to the Guggenheim museum is a core part of the method, since our approach would suggest that Guggenheim attributes contribute to define the overall perception.

For each painting the questionnaire's heading mentioned or not the museum brand and the artist's name. Information about the intention to buy merchandising with the painting depicted and the expertise in arts were collected too. The between group treatment was administered showing abstract paintings to one group and realistic paintings to the other.

Results

We conduct a factor analysis with Varimax rotation on the 5 items that we would expect to be associated to the Guggenheim Museum (see Table 3).

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix of the Guggenheim items

	Component	
	1	2
Squared/Rounded	,820	-,213
Modern/Traditional	,807	,159
Strong/Weak	,658	,348
Global/Local	,400	,263
Careful/Careless	,061	,932

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax. This table refers to the condition Museum, No Artist. Analogous results for the other three conditions.

Four out of the five items actually aggregate in one factor, with an acceptable value of Cronbach's Alpha. This aggregation occurs for every condition, regardless the state of the independent variables. The four items are: squared/rounded, modern/traditional, strong/weak, global/local. This factor is a sort of 'Guggenheim scale', measuring how much the painting is

affected by the Guggenheim museum brand. This factor confirms our expectation, except the squared/rounded opposition: we expected the opposite sign, rounded/squared. This exception may be explained by the form of the images shown, effectively squared in their frame. One item does not load in the factor: careful/careless. This last result can be explained by the fact that the concept of 'care' was referred by the focus group to the quality of the exhibits organized by the museum, thus it cannot be referred directly to a single artwork.

We create a new dependent variable, averaging the four items that form the Guggenheim factor, then we conduct a multivariate test using this variable as dependent variable and the above mentioned three independent variables (museum, artist, complexity). The museum brand does have an effect that is significant at the 90% level (see Table 4). Thus H1 is verified. By prompting the museum brand, people perceive the painting differently as compared to those who are not exposed to the brand.

As forecasted by the imaginative experience approach – and differently from what the memory network theory would suggest - the artist's name does not influence the museum effect. In fact there is no interaction effect between the two variables. Thus H2 is verified.

As to H3, it is verified as well: the type of image (abstract versus simple) does not influence the brand name effect. In fact, the combination of museum brand and type of painting is not significant. This means that the museum brand name acts independently from the type of image. Also this result is consistent with the imaginative experience approach and not with the memory network theory.

We also measure the intention to buy merchandising depicting the artist's and museum's name. The data show that the purchase intention is significantly (95%) affected by the interaction of artist and complexity (see Table 5 in appendix). Namely, when the painting is abstract, the artist's name increases the purchase intention.

Table 4: Multivariate Tests: Meanings Attribution

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Museum	Pillai's Trace	,020	3,112(a)	1,000	156,000	,080
	Wilks' Lambda	,980	3,112(a)	1,000	156,000	,080
	Hotelling's Trace	,020	3,112(a)	1,000	156,000	,080
	Roy's Largest Root	,020	3,112(a)	1,000	156,000	,080
Museum * complex	Pillai's Trace	,004	,650(a)	1,000	156,000	,421
	Wilks' Lambda	,996	,650(a)	1,000	156,000	,421
	Hotelling's Trace	,004	,650(a)	1,000	156,000	,421
	Roy's Largest Root	,004	,650(a)	1,000	156,000	,421
Artist	Pillai's Trace	,005	,808(a)	1,000	156,000	,370
	Wilks' Lambda	,995	,808(a)	1,000	156,000	,370
	Hotelling's Trace	,005	,808(a)	1,000	156,000	,370
	Roy's Largest Root	,005	,808(a)	1,000	156,000	,370
Artist * complex	Pillai's Trace	,011	1,679(a)	1,000	156,000	,197
	Wilks' Lambda	,989	1,679(a)	1,000	156,000	,197
	Hotelling's Trace	,011	1,679(a)	1,000	156,000	,197
	Roy's Largest Root	,011	1,679(a)	1,000	156,000	,197
museum * artist	Pillai's Trace	,002	,247(a)	1,000	156,000	,620
	Wilks' Lambda	,998	,247(a)	1,000	156,000	,620
	Hotelling's Trace	,002	,247(a)	1,000	156,000	,620
	Roy's Largest Root	,002	,247(a)	1,000	156,000	,620
museum * artist * complex	Pillai's Trace	,006	1,007(a)	1,000	156,000	,317
	Wilks' Lambda	,994	1,007(a)	1,000	156,000	,317
	Hotelling's Trace	,006	1,007(a)	1,000	156,000	,317
	Roy's Largest Root	,006	1,007(a)	1,000	156,000	,317

*a Exact statistic; b Design: Intercept+complex Within Subjects Design: museum+artist+museum*artist*

Discussion and Conclusions

The research shows that the museum brand name affects the artwork perception via a theory framework which is different from the traditional approach of memory network.

Current marketing emphasizes the experiential dimension of consumption. The experience is considered as factual, lived by the subject. Our approach, drawn from aesthetics, would suggest that the experience can be imagined, lived inside the mind of the subject. Recent contributions seem to explore this new stream of thought (d'Astous, Deschênes, 2005), showing the

relevance of the inner world created by the consumer. The perception of a product is not built upon the associations of attributes that brand adds to the product. The perception origins inside a world which occurs in the imagination of the consumer. This world comes before the product is perceived and perception needs this world. In this way products acquire a specific meaning which influences its evaluations and the resulting consumer behavior.

Careful brand management is encouraged by the conclusions of this research. The museum brand does not operate only as an aid to select the museum to visit, but it affects at a deeper level, by influencing the perception of the artwork itself.

Our work is built upon the aesthetic experience of perception, but it can contribute to the marketing literature and it can be extended to a broader range of products. A painting can be compared to a *credence good* (a movie, a novel and, in general, several edutainment goods): the subject does not have a clear framework of meaning, s/he meets difficulties in defining either *ex ante* and *ex post* the meanings of the good. In this circumstance the brand plays a role of experience driver.

As to the purchase intention, the museum brand has no effect, while the interaction artist-complexity does. This result may be interpreted as the existence of two different levels of brand effects: the first one at the perception level (by the museum brand), the second at the evaluative and commercial level (by the artist's name). For instance, in the book industry, the publisher's brand should play a role in defining the type of books published (scientific-non scientific, well edited or not, for large or restricted audience, and so on), while the author's name likely drives the purchase intention. The same author can publish with two different publishers and her/his books would be perceived differently by the reader, independently from the purchase.

A second example comes from movie industry, where country can be considered as a brand. American movies are perceived differently from European ones, people give different meaning according to their country of origin but they decide to pay the ticket for a film looking at the director or at the main actress actor.

Perception and purchasing lie at different level and the way they affect each other will be a further trajectory of this research.

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Appendix

Table 5: Multivariate Tests: Intention to Buy

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Museum	Pillai's Trace	,001	,168(a)	1,000	155,000	,683
	Wilks' Lambda	,999	,168(a)	1,000	155,000	,683
	Hotelling's Trace	,001	,168(a)	1,000	155,000	,683
	Roy's Largest Root	,001	,168(a)	1,000	155,000	,683
Museum * complex	Pillai's Trace	,002	,319(a)	1,000	155,000	,573
	Wilks' Lambda	,998	,319(a)	1,000	155,000	,573
	Hotelling's Trace	,002	,319(a)	1,000	155,000	,573
	Roy's Largest Root	,002	,319(a)	1,000	155,000	,573
Artist	Pillai's Trace	,000	,035(a)	1,000	155,000	,851
	Wilks' Lambda	1,000	,035(a)	1,000	155,000	,851
	Hotelling's Trace	,000	,035(a)	1,000	155,000	,851
	Roy's Largest Root	,000	,035(a)	1,000	155,000	,851
artist * complex	Pillai's Trace	,038	6,127(a)	1,000	155,000	,014
	Wilks' Lambda	,962	6,127(a)	1,000	155,000	,014
	Hotelling's Trace	,040	6,127(a)	1,000	155,000	,014
	Roy's Largest Root	,040	6,127(a)	1,000	155,000	,014
Museum * artist	Pillai's Trace	,007	1,027(a)	1,000	155,000	,312
	Wilks' Lambda	,993	1,027(a)	1,000	155,000	,312
	Hotelling's Trace	,007	1,027(a)	1,000	155,000	,312
	Roy's Largest Root	,007	1,027(a)	1,000	155,000	,312
Museum * artist * complex	Pillai's Trace	,005	,837(a)	1,000	155,000	,362
	Wilks' Lambda	,995	,837(a)	1,000	155,000	,362
	Hotelling's Trace	,005	,837(a)	1,000	155,000	,362
	Roy's Largest Root	,005	,837(a)	1,000	155,000	,362

a Exact statistic

b Design: Intercept+complex Within Subjects Design: museum+artist+museum*artist