CultureCase

How brand museums turn products into heritage

This research was conducted by **Damien Chaney**, **Mathilde Pulh** and **Rémi Mencarelli** at the **Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne** and **two other institutions, France**

Summary

This paper is about the museum of the Laughing Cow, the commercial brand of cheese manufactured by Bel Group. It shows how, through the use of a museum and what the authors call ‘heritage technologies’, the company is able to transform the Laughing Cow brand into a source of collective memory and community identity.

In 2009 the Bel Group opened a 27,000-square-foot museum called Laughing Cow House

The study is based on a review of corporate documents, interviews, observations of the museum and the perspectives of visitors themselves. The data revealed how visitors perceive places like Laughing Cow House as ‘real museums’. This may be because they have all the components of a museum (collection, preservation, display, interpretation), as well as the aesthetic qualities of a conventional museum or gallery experience. By redefining their ‘products and objects as arts objects, brand museums propose a sensory experience for consumers and invite them to consider these objects as artistic spaces’.

Brand museums are increasingly common across Europe

There is the Aéroscopia museum by Airbus in France, a museum of Nestlé in Switzerland, and IKEA has opened one in Sweden. By ‘exhibiting their brands in

a museum, companies go beyond a purely commercial relationship with their customers to redefine their brands as heritage artifacts’. Brand museums are typically the subject of research into how organisational memory works, or how companies go about improving their image. The authors in this study think there is something more profound at work: that by becoming recognised as a 'heritage object' a brand can become ‘a sacred and inalienable common good’ rather than just a commodity in a commercial market.

Keywords

branding **interview** **museum** **France** **observation**

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