

# **The Production and Consumption Activities Relating to the Celebrity Artist**

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## **Abstract**

This paper develops the work of Kerrigan et al. (2011) by considering the impact of the celebrity artist on the associated production and consumption activities. It also considers the role which entrepreneurial marketing plays in helping to create the celebrity artist aura. The artist Thomas Kinkade is used to illustrate how this occurs in practice. Here, authenticity and nostalgia dimensions are also influential factors. Underpinning these relationships are the roles played out by the media, including communication of celebrity artist identity, and the catalysing of its commodification within the celebrity artist brandscape. An enduring celebrity brand results due to the market creation activities of the celebrity artist. A conceptual model is developed which synthesises the factors behind the production and consumption of the celebrity artist which can stimulate further research.

This paper provides innovative insight into the world of the celebrity artist by interrogating the market making and shaping devices behind successful production and consumption practices.

**Key words:** celebrity artist, aura, owner/manager, authenticity, nostalgia

## **Introduction:**

The notion of celebrity emerged between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, from its origins in individualism, fame and heroism (McClelland 1989). Fame is durable, while celebrity can be instantaneous and fragile. Mole (2008) associates the emergence of celebrity with print media industrialisation, branding individual identity and its appropriation. Rojek (2001) relates celebrity to the acquisition of glamour or notoriety, feeding its market commoditisation. Celebrity status also has its detractors (e.g. Horkheimer and Adorno 1972) through its perceived association with lower values and standards, aided by the growing influence of consumer culture and the decline in authenticity in public personalities.

The production of celebrity has become a heavily commoditised industry where the sense of reality is partly controlled by the media (Rojek 2014). A celebrity can now be deemed a commercial asset due to the 'genre of representation and discursive effect as a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity and media industry that produce these representations and

their effects' (Turner 2004:9). Celebritisation and media impact are viewed as the driving force behind celebrity culture which has become a 'ritualised distributive space of inventive social formation and transformation' (Kerrigan et al. 2011:1505). This extends the boundaries of celebrity marketing research beyond a focus on endorsement.

Here the term celebrity artist refers to an artist who has acquired celebrity status, rather than a celebrity who also paints or engages in art-based activities. Consumers deliberately engage with celebrities in diverse ways in order to give meaning and context to their own identity projects (Banister et al. 2014). Building on McCracken (1989), Kerrigan et al. (2011) visualise a portfolio of celebrity relationships or celebritiescapes created by consumers to enable movement between various identity positions. This occurs as symbolic consumption where brands, products and consumer identities interact (Solomon 1983). Consumers are proactive meaning makers, taking their cues from brands as cultural resources to shape their own identity (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998).

The aim here is to examine the role of celebrity market making and shaping by considering the factors impacting on celebrity artists as they influences celebrity production and consumption activities. The role which entrepreneurial marketing plays is considered in equipping the celebrity artist with appropriate competencies used to help create the celebrity artist aura. To illustrate how this occurs in practice, the paper interrogates the Thomas Kinkade, whose work is said to hang in one in twenty American households (Boylan 2011). Dimensions which influence celebrity artist activity such as authenticity, nostalgia, aesthetics and kitsch are explored, together with the roles played by the media, including communication of celebrity artist identity, and the catalysing of its commodification within the celebrity artist brandscape. When comparing Kinkade the celebrity artist with other artists

such as Damien Hirst or Andy Warhol, there are differences in terms of the type and role of authenticity involved. Both Warhol and Hirst were not constantly involved first hand in the production of their work, with both using studio assistants. Kinkade, however, first produced the original artwork and then his assistants took over the 'authentic reproduction' process.

***Emergence of the celebrity artist:***

Art and celebrity inform us about the relationship between mass appeal and art. The boundaries between popular culture, art and commodification are blurring (Walker 2003). Incremental celebrification of contemporary artists has been assisted by growing sales, audience demand and the emergence of New Fame helped by a public who recognise the artist (Millard 2001). The increasing role of the media and the positioning of celebrity artists within a broader cultural branded landscape also play their part. Artists contribute to celebrity culture because of their ability to offer up their art works to the celebrity marketplace, with some behaving like the celebrities they perceive themselves to be. Relationship between art and celebrity can involve celebrities as artists and art collectors, artists visualising celebrities in their art work and artists as media stars.

The cult of the individual artist emerged during the Italian Renaissance, due to their distinct professional status rather than as artisans (Walker 2003). Giorgio Vasari (1998/1550) was pivotal in setting up individual artist acclaim through the first biographical study of artists' lives. After the Renaissance, artists' signatures, names and self portraits became important brand identifiers in the growing art collectors' marketplace. Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dali were lauded as the first art stars of the twentieth century. Not only did they produce instantly recognisable art, they courted publicity and were keen to be seen in public and in the international media. The advantages of art and celebrity include the possibility of critical

attention, increased demand for the art work, media attention, free publicity and acquisition of wealth (Walker 2003). However, the downside is often that the art being produced is perceived as traditional, conventional, risk averse and of lower aesthetic quality, often as kitsch. The pursuit of media attention can affect perhaps more deserving artists. Also, the art works often become secondary to the artist as a celebrity. Once the celebrity artist dies, demand for the work often fades. There is also a danger that, when a professional artist secures celebrity status, the perceived need to create to satisfy demand, supercedes the intrinsic drive to create for its own sake. However, Thomas Kinkade's business model has always been based on the value of reproductions, and so this didn't seem to matter to him.

Successful artists are now being viewed as celebrities with powerful brands, or even as brand managers (Schroeder 2005). A brand elicits a consumer response through the meaning associated with it. Consumers construct and play with their own identities and self concept as they engage with brand culture. Schroeder notes the strong visual element of brands, something that Kinkade has exploited fully in developing his own celebrity brand, helped by his recognisable style. Since art is a commodity, it is impacted by market forces and consumer interest, and subject to celebrification processes. Kinkade's particular aesthetic appealed to his loyal fans. More than just the philosophical dimension of beauty, aesthetics also refers to the sensing nature of decision making. Aesthetic experience is a form of tacit, sensory knowledge, while its expression is shaped by impulse and feeling (Gagliardi 1996). Having aesthetic knowledge can result in fresh insight, irrespective of whether or not we can express what we experience, in the same way that celebrity fans find it difficult to explain why they are attracted towards a particular celebrity.

Many artists manage their brands to create a complex public identity as with corporate, luxury and cultural, iconic brands (Muniz et al. 2014). Awareness is needed of the market,

the culture surrounding the artist, the competition and any support systems. The socio-cultural interpretation of a brand is highly relevant to celebrity artists and their audience (Batey 2008). Artists such as Picasso and Kinkade were adept at their ability to read cultural signals and meaning. Today, art and making money are now inextricably linked, with branding becoming increasingly important in enhancing art's intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions (Rodner et al. 2011). The celebrity artist brand includes both tangible attributes of the artwork, and intangible factors like the persona of the artist and their fans. A well known artist can offer a sense of security about the value of the art work, with celebrity artist status enhancing this further. This form of branding heightens marketplace visibility and differentiation. Both consumers and artists engage with artist brand aura; for example the aura surrounding a painting or how celebrity artists attract consumer interest.

### ***Understanding celebrity through the artist Thomas Kinkade:***

Thomas Kinkade, one of America's most successful artists, is imbued with celebrity status. A bad boy of the aesthetic economy with an overt profit motive, he appeals to consumers who have never visited a conventional art gallery (Falls 2011). Kinkade helps us to understand the commodification of artistic values through extension of his lifestyle brand in various product forms (Schroeder 2005). His success was partly due to his type of art and its alignment with consumer demand of personal and cultural longings:

Kinkade's pictures help viewers adapt to a life out of balance with their ideals instead of working toward reconciling conflicting desires in practice...[his] production and marketing apparatus is a fascinating combination of technology, shrewd business sense and showmanship (Clapper 2006:77-78).

Kinkade intertwined his entrepreneurial marketing competencies with mass production techniques, branding and celebrity. His images are "self-consciously branded through the use of a distinctive and consistent visual style, and share a central conceit of the seemingly indefatigable repetition of images of consumer desire" (Pearson 2011: 144). Many art critics

view Kinkade as a business person rather than an artist, with his art work often deemed kitsch by the art world (Greenberg 1986).

Although his original paintings are never sold, the limited edition, signed reproductions drive the business and enhance the perceived authenticity of his work which differs from that of artists who sell the original work. Part of his success as a celebrity artist is his outsider status within the art market and his ability to exploit “an especially shrewd marketing apparatus that leans heavily on a binary opposition between kitsch and high art” (Kjellman-Chapin 2011:207). Kinkade products also include greetings cards, mugs, bed sheets, jewellery and ornaments. He has been a guest on talk shows and over one hundred and forty books have been written about him or by him (e.g. Barnett and Kinkade 2003; Katz 2009). Due to demand, his signed limited editions often increase in value. Most Kinkade art works are sold through dedicated galleries in shopping malls, mail order, Christian stores and online, including eBay. These settings appeal to customers who might feel uneasy in a conventional gallery. The galleries are homely, with house-like store fronts, couches, carpets and fireplaces, creating an aura of genuine art (Clapper 2006). There are Thomas Kinkade galleries throughout North America, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico and Russia, making his celebrity status even more ubiquitous.

Kinkade’s commodification of art responds to the expectations of a customer base seduced by kitsch and celebrity. He also targeted the Christian consumer, with many of his paintings containing biblical messages and imagery. Religiosity is also displayed by his customers in their brand community, developing long term loyalty in their consumption practices as they align to Kinkade the brand and its associations with family, faith, hope and inspiration (Muniz and Schau 2005). The purchasing of a Kinkade image can have ritualistic qualities as it acquires near communion like status (Rager 2011). Many of his paintings are set within a traditional American historical landscape with no evidence of shopping malls, industry or

technology, making the most of a sense of nostalgia, appealing to a customer base exhibiting national pride.

Rager (2011:125) associates Kinkade's success with "tapping into a latent but powerful psychological need in the postmodern American consumer, connecting with nostalgic, subconscious longing. He believes that Kinkade's nostalgia inducing imagery is deliberate, derived from a precisely and purposefully formulated aesthetic. Kinkade and his customers and critics make use of nostalgia references in discussing his work, associating with a simpler past. At the time of his death in 2012, he was viewed as America's most collected living artist. Even now, consumers can purchase new scenes in the Kinkade style, made by Thomas Kinkade studio artists, such is his enduring appeal. His art galleries even experienced increased demand for his work after his death. Due to technological advancements, counterfeit Kinkade art works are also being produced. Whether he is liked or disliked, Kinkade has become part of American celebrity visual culture and beyond.

***The aura of the celebrity artist:***

The presence of the original object and its physical location gives it an aura or halo of significance (Benjamin 1936). However, mechanical reproduction can shatter this aura. This perspective does not fit with contemporary findings where the media promotes celebrity and its associated aura. It also does not explain the success of Thomas Kinkade's reproductions. The aura tangibilises product values through aesthetic sensing, with feelings of beauty, exclusiveness, uniqueness and authenticity (Bjorkman 2002). Aura production concerns how the aura is constructed, and the impacting dimensions on the outcome of the aura. Bjorkman describes aura as the shimmer or charisma of an object, or an emotionally charged experience. Factors impacting on aura construction include price level, customer valuations, media relationships, marketing strategy, intuition levels and aesthetic knowledge. The customer is involved in aura creation, subsequently coming to own it. This may involve a



sense of worship of an object or celebrity deemed to be sacred, rather than profane (Levi-Strauss 1969). Bjorkman identifies view-aura as the experience of something not previously been touched, owned or used, only viewed; use-aura in how the customer adds their own experiences to the view-aura, and own-aura when the customer begins to form their own relationship with the product.

Benjamin (2006) also refers to a sense of genuine aura in everything. The meaning of aura cannot be tightly defined (Hansen 2008). It involves ‘a strange weave of space and time’, having a unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be. Aura can also concern ‘a form of perception that invests or endows a phenomenon with the ability to open its eyes or lift its gaze’. It can be viewed as the distance of the gaze that awakens in the object looked at, or as “an elusive phenomenal substance, ether or halo surrounding a person or object of perception, encapsulating their individuality and authenticity”. Aura also connects with the past. Technological reproduction, rather than diluting its essence, can heighten its visibility, contrasting with Benjamin’s original thesis and also aligning with what Kinkade has achieved. The nature of Kinkade’s aura stemming from his reproductions differs from that of original artwork,

However, with the successful artist, the power of branding can supercede the aura of the artist and the art work (Turner 2005). The power of aura is what today’s marketers exploit in their branding efforts. We can also think of the atmosphere of a painting as aura (Dorian 2014). Thomas Kinkade’s atmosphere is enhanced in the homes of those who have purchased his reproductions as they connect with him and his subject matter. Here the aura exceeds the basic essence of the product as it becomes part of us and flows around a space (Benjamin 1999). It is possible that objects can acquire a special aura or essence from their past which

then impacts on how we might perceive their authenticity (Newman and Dhar 2011). This is a contagion, acquired through physical contact. However with the case of Kinkade, it is more to do with *the* past or *perceived* past, and a sense of longing and nostalgia. Kinkade was expert at creating a brand aura through his visual and verbal assertions of authenticity.

When celebrity artists decide to write or talk about their success, this often creates a charismatic aura (McCarthy and Hatcher 2005). This emergence of a heightened status contributes to the construction of celebrity. With Kinkade, the media facilitated his celebrity through use of images of his work and his self. Kinkade was also extremely able to leverage value from his visual abilities as a painter. McCarthy and Hatcher talk about how celebrity entrepreneurs have the ability to commoditise their image and path to success. By being able to tell their story and construct ‘attractive, high impact images’ (p.46) they can assign a spiritual status through their seduction of consumers. Semiotics (Barthes 1964) and rhetoric (Burke 1959) can be used to explain the reasons for success of a celebrity artist. Semiotic deconstruction of the meaning contained in visual messages and the strong narrative present in Kinkade’s statements to the press and in his own writings convey his sense of vision and imagination.

### ***The role of entrepreneurial marketing in promoting the celebrity artist aura:***

The ability to create and respond to demand for the celebrity artist is assisted by the use of entrepreneurial marketing. Thomas Kinkade expertly used a range of entrepreneurial marketing techniques to create demand for his work and to establish a loyal following. The marketing/entrepreneurship paradigm (Carson et al. 1995) can be used to explain how and why some individuals experience success, while others struggle. This is due partly to the uneven distribution of competencies, available resources, creativity and the ability to identify and exploit opportunities. Entrepreneurial marketing concerns the areas of commonality

between marketing and entrepreneurship, such as the use of judgement, positive thinking, risk taking, vision, imagination, innovation and creativity (Day and Reynolds (1998). It thrives on situational thinking shaped by individual rather than uniform behaviours (O'Donnell 2004).

Entrepreneurial marketing allows us to better understand the factors behind market creation versus market following in shaping the production and consumption of the celebrity artist. The relationship between artist and consumer is complicated by the fact that artists both create the product and communicate it to consumers, since they represent both product and producer (Kubacki and Croft 2004). Addressing consumer needs also implies that the artist has followed market orientation. However, there are issues with selling products rather than creating markets, which limits innovation. An alternative is the creation of customer lust or desire (Brown 2007), something with which celebrity fans can identify. Some artists may create mainly to express their subjective, aesthetic ideals of beauty and emotion, while others embrace a more commercial ideology. However, creativity is central to the art making process regardless of whether or not it is expressed for its own sake or for commercial reasons (Holbrook and Zirlin 1983).

Celebrity artists with entrepreneurial marketing ability are expert at developing their own brand. Although many products have a long brand history, individuals can also have a brand identity (Close et al. 2011). The higher the level of perceived authenticity of an artist, the higher the possibility of greater brand attachment and equity (Thomson 2006). This perception varies with Kinkade, when compared with other artists selling original work. His customers' cultural and economic capital is different. Lehman (2009) appraises the ability of artists to self market themselves, while Fillis (2004) examines owner/manager branding. These artists become so expert at self marketing that they achieve celebrity status as they

create and grow the market for their work as both an artist and as the owner/manager of their enterprise.

### **Celebrity signs, brands and role of the media:**

Marshall (1997) views the celebrity as a public individual who participates as a marketable commodity with a particular value, enabled by its contextualised sign value (Baudrillard 1983). Rather than just relying on image, celebrity artists are also able to enhance this value through strategic use of semiotics and metaphor. The images contained in a Kinkade painting, for example, combine with the entrepreneurial marketing ability of the artist to enhance his reputation among interested consumers. The celebrity artist and the art work contain signs with meanings beyond their literal self (Adam 2009). For a celebrity brand, there will be a high incidence of agreed meanings among a fan base. At an iconic level, the celebrity becomes embedded in the language of our culture, irrespective of whether or not the individual is still alive. The celebrity sign contains authentic and false cultural value. The celebrity icon consists of an interplay between surface and depth, with the former viewed as a sensuous, aesthetic structure stimulating attachment, while its depth contains sacred and profane dimensions which give meaning (Belk et al. 1989). Celebrity worship may also contain an element of totemism, signifying ritual and meaning. Literal celebrity worship is found among Kinkade's loyal fans who identify with the religious motifs contained in his paintings.

The emergence of the new status system of celebrity shaped by capitalism, mass media and being known (Kurzman et al. 2007) conflicts with Weber's social status theory (Weber 1978/1921; 2009) which is grounded in the belief that status systems are in decline. However, Weber focused on an interpretation based on consumption patterns rather than economic,

production based perspectives. Clark and Lipset (1991) identify the need to account for new, emerging types of social differences. They believe that the social class theme of Weber's work is becoming increasingly redundant due to its reliance on stratification of society and that individuals can be differentiated within this hierarchy. Today, the distinctions are becoming blurred.

Audiences make use of celebrities to escape the mundaneness of the everyday, something Kinkade exploits in his images of a constructed idyll. An audience can be moved to engage in imitative consumption (DeBord 1967), further driving the demand for celebrity. This world of celebrity is a constant source of cultural meaning which can be utilised by the marketer and the consumer (McCracken 2005). Thomas Kinkade, however, is not a manufactured commodity, utilising his entrepreneurial marketing abilities to fully exploit his celebrity status in breaking through the celebrity marketplace noise to get noticed (Pringle 2004). He was more than capable of mixing his artistic and marketing acumen to suit his own purposes. Kinkade was expertly positioned to take advantage of his ability to communicate his message and exploit his celebrity status through his visual imagery and creative practices. This aligns to the medium as the message (McLuhan 1964) as he manipulated media attention in securing his marketplace visibility and viability (Hewer and Brownlie 2009). Artists require a strong brand narrative to be successful in the market. With their visual skills and creativity, many can do this successfully. This branding of the artist aligns with the process of celebrity formation where the human form is commodified and where people evolve into something to be valued and even worshipped (Cashmore and Parker 2003). Also, the distinction between artists and their art is often blurred, with artist creativity and artwork creativity becoming one. If celebrity artists are viewed as cultural brands (Holt 2004) and human brands (Shepherd

2005) this provides additional perspectives to understand the production/consumption process.

The main essence of a brand is to provide an experience (Salzer-Morling and Strannegard 2002). The brand also contains a sign value contained in the image of an object. Effective branding results in the re-enchanting of commodities and help construct the aura surrounding mass produced products (Lash and Urry 1994). Stories are used to communicate brand values (the aura) to the audience. So Kinkade's aura can be communicated via his paintings, prints and imagery. Moving beyond the functional level, the brandscape represents the "aestheticisation of generic goods where images, auras and signs are used as unique selling points" (Salzer-Morling and Strannegard 2002:231). This aestheticisation is inevitably related to everyday life, with taste embedded within celebrity culture (Rojek 2001). Branding today is more about impression creation through the use of appropriate images rather than conveying functional product information. So brand consumption and production is an aesthetic process.

Kerrigan et al.(2011:1504) utilise biographical and archival analysis in order to reveal the dynamic nature of celebrity brands functioning as "map-making devices which situate consumers within networks of symbolic resources.". Their focus is on the celebrity brand rather than celebrity branding and its connections with personal branding efforts. Also, the growing impact of media has resulted in its production becoming increasingly focused on the importance of image and celebrity (McCracken 2005). It is now deemed necessary to move beyond the brand name to also consider the role of commodity images and their identities in offering a more persuasive package of dreams and aspirations which consumers might be drawn towards. So the brand becomes a media object through the processes of celebrification, defined by Kerrigan et al. (2011:1510) as "what happens when the logic of celebrity is

exploited as a mode of production in the service of economic calculation and marketing ends”.

According to Kowalczyk and Royne (2013) the mainstream media are responsible for coming up with the celebrity brand term (brands defined by a well-known celebrity name) but that it has not been explored fully from an academic perspective. The explosion of the Internet and other media forms, including social media, is largely responsible for heightening the interest in celebrity (Page 2012). This is where consumers take their cues in developing strong attachments to their chosen celebrities. Celebrities are now becoming their own enterprises with a degree of control over their relationship with their product. Kowalczyk and Royne (2013:212) define a celebrity brand as:

a clearly defined personality and reputation of a well-known or famous person who professionally labels, manages and promotes him- or herself to consumers and other stakeholders for the purpose of commercially leveraging this unique image.

This is precisely what Kinkade has done and therefore viewing him as a celebrity artist seems justified. The concept of the human brand helps in understanding what happens here with ‘any well known persona who is the subject of marketing communication efforts’ (Thomson 2006:104). What is perhaps additionally different to other celebrity cases is that the celebrity artist is expert at exploiting appropriate skills which shape the creative and marketing self (O’Reilly 2005), and which also impact on shaping the desired competencies influencing artistic production. Taken together, these then influence the development of the artist’s brand. The artistic output also impacts on the artist’s brand via the images and style of the work (Schroeder 2005). Even though Kinkade was proactive in developing his brand, it can also be argued that, by engaging in art making, this also contributes to the construction of the artist’s brand. The branding of a celebrity artist can also be assisted by the impact of the ‘art machine’ (Rodner and Thompson 2013) involving the co-branding efforts of artists’ agents. If

reputation and self validation are two measures of artistic success, then acquiring celebrity artist status further heightens this recognition.

### **The role of kitsch in creating celebrity artist demand:**

Kinkade's art has been described as kitsch, something which also attracts the celebrity fan. Central to any discussion on kitsch are subjectivity, objectivity, social and symbolic value judgement issues (Marshall and Forrest 2011). The origins of kitsch relate to the lowering of taste among post industrial urbanised masses, and a heightened capacity for boredom. Greenberg (1986) describes it as mechanical, formulaic, multi layered and responsible for fake sensations within commodified ersatz culture. Kitsch represents the illegitimate, insincere or inauthentic (Kulka 1996). It is a machine made, synthetic, mass produced sales apparatus capable of stimulating market growth, and produces effect rather than represent a particular cause. Understanding kitsch requires minimal effort while high art requires concentration. Andy Warhol and the Pop Art movement provided a challenge to Greenberg's position on kitsch by reframing, decontextualising and repackaging it so that the boundaries between art and the everyday became blurred.

Kitsch has a radical visual vocabulary which allows consumer access to culture in new ways (Hebdige 1988). It relates to a certain feeling and therefore connects with aesthetics. It also raises authenticity issues as an impediment to the real (Kundera 1984). However, consumers often want what the objects symbolise, rather than what they actually are (Baudrillard 1998). This is certainly the case with Kinkade's consumers and their form of cultural and economic capital. Rather than having fixed qualities of taste (art versus kitsch), taste is more of a learned quality (Bourdieu 2000). Critics make informed value judgements about objects having more or less aesthetic quality but this contrasts with consumers who consume what



they like without having to make in-depth assessments. Baudrillard and Bourdieu see class as a distinguishing factor in understanding consumer product meaning.

Kitsch also involves repetition, imitation and emulation to reinforce nostalgic longing visually (Binkley 2000). This relates to the impact of mechanical reproduction, clearly seen in Kinkade's work both visually and metaphorically (Benjamin 1970/1936). Benjamin argues that even the most perfect reproductions lack a certain presence in time and space, while the existence of the original is a prerequisite of authenticity. The act of reproduction permits increased accessibility of the product but Benjamin believes it has a deleterious effect on its aura. With Kinkade, this actually heightens his aura when combined with creative marketing techniques. Benjamin asserts that mechanical reproduction alters the reaction of the masses towards art. It undoubtedly increases Kinkade's audience, enhancing demand for the celebrity artist through production of replicated art work.

#### **Leveraging authenticity to enhance celebrity artist brand value:**

Perceived authenticity of celebrity artists and their work also influence their brand value (Beverland et al. 2008). This can be raised by embedding brand histories and wider historical, cultural and heritage connections in product narratives surrounding the artist's aura or brand essence (Brown et al. 2003). The authenticity of the celebrity artist impacts on the valuation of the art and consumers' behavioural intentions (Fine 2003). Expressive authenticity of an art work relates to the object's character as a true expression of an individual's or society's values or beliefs (Dutton 2004), clearly evident in Kinkade's work. Interestingly, the criticism of commercial artists like Kinkade who are motivated by profit is ignored by his admirers who exhibit a different form of cultural capital to followers of esteemed artists so that any inauthenticity is over-ridden.

Authenticity, branding and nostalgia can interact to create retro branding strategies (Cattaneo and Guerini 2012). Kinkade's work cannot be described as contemporary. It does have a nostalgic heritage appeal to interested consumers, reinforced with his branding marks. This appeal increases during financial and economic troubles as it minimises perceived risk (Urde et al. 2007). Kinkade's work connects with the past through brand associations using updated reproduction methods producing copies appealing to current tastes (Keller 1993). Kinkade has achieved a brilliant retro-marketing operation (Brown 2001). There is certainly a story behind his brand narratives relating to memory of a past which may never have existed. The quest for authenticity is now central to contemporary culture (Fine 2003). For it to work successfully, authenticity must concern the recognition of difference between the original and the reproduced (Bendix 1997). However, this is often difficult to determine within a celebrity fan base which may overlook these differences. Idealised scenes are contained in Kinkade's work where he makes strategic use of seemingly authentic scenes and messages. These encourage consumers to seek authenticity in their quest for escape from modern life (MacCannell 1976). Postmodernism drives this quest for authenticity by influencing demand for the past (Goulding 2001). The celebrity artist aura assists in connecting consumers with the artist by tangibilising values through aesthetic sensing (Bjorkman 2002). To be effective, it needs to relate to the consumer's mental frame of authenticity and their cultural capital.

### **Nostalgia as a driver of celebrity artist demand:**

Kinkade used nostalgia to appeal to his fans while they revel in 'remembering' as they consume his reproductions. Holbrook (1993:245) defines nostalgia as "the longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore". It invokes a positive feeling and preference for the past and a negative sense of today and the future (Holbrook and Schindler 1991). It can result in a positive mood, raise self esteem and give meaning to life. Some common nostalgic memories relate to birthdays,

holidays and nature (Wildschut et al. 2006), scenes often portrayed in Kinkade paintings. Nostalgia is associated with positive emotion and social bonding more than with sadness. However, it can have psychosomatic symptoms of depression and psychosis through perceived loss of Home (Zinchenko 2011). The growing interest in nostalgia is due to increasing levels of urbanism from an historical rural base, resulting in longings for a lost past (Brown 1999) and the search for a mythological paradise (Jacoby 1985). Nostalgia can be understood sociologically, being seen as a specific state of consciousness separate from the realities of daily life (Davis 1979).

Genuine nostalgia involves passionate longing of someone separated from the past while postmodern nostalgia concerns the reworking of history into “a consumable set of images” and “ a kind of generational periodization of a stereotypical kind”(Jameson 1998: 129). This consumable pastiche of historical stereotypes and styles results in an aesthetics of visual nostalgia (Rager 2011). Nostalgia has been closely related to kitsch with the term nostalgic kitsch being adopted (Olalquiaga 1998). Kinkade’s images appeal to consumers who associate both cognitive and affective dimensions with nostalgic experience (Baumgartner 1992). It is no longer necessary to have experienced the past, only that we can access it through film, retailing, heritage and other avenues in order to feel nostalgic about it (Goulding 1999). Nostalgia is linked with brand attachment (Thomson et al. 2005), brand preference (Holbrook and Schindler 2003) and collecting brand objects (Belk et al. 1988). It is a process of self exploration and sense making, rather than merely an aesthetic or cultural tour of the past (Jafari and Taheri 2013). If celebrity artists like Kinkade are viewed as cultural producers, it can be argued that they deliberately set out to develop a nostalgic mood among their fans (Higson 2013).

### **Discussion and synthesis:**

The factors shaping production and consumption of the celebrity artist are synthesised and visualised in Figure 1. These include the celebrity artist as an owner/manager brand which has been impacted by the artist's entrepreneurial marketing abilities. These influence the creation of the celebrity artist aura which, in turn, creates authenticity in the art and around the artist. With Thomas Kinkade, the sense of nostalgia is also heightened. Authenticity and nostalgia then impact upon celebrity artist and consumption activity which, in turn, affects consumption of the celebrity artist brand. Also underpinning these influences are roles played by the media.

Insert Figure 1 here

How the celebrity artist comes to assert brand identity, and therefore exist as a marketable commodity, depends on several factors. Individuals such as Thomas Kinkade have developed, or may even have innate, skills which can enhance their brand power in the celebrity marketplace. This is helped by being able to exploit their entrepreneurial marketing competencies in enhancing the role of the self through increased marketplace recognition and reputation. Consumer interest in the celebrity artist is then stimulated, driven by a combination of visual and intrinsic metaphors contained in the artist's outputs. These become of interest to potential consumers as fans, enhanced by the strategic tools contained within the celebrity artist's entrepreneurial marketing competency portfolio. Enhanced artistic and market reputation drive up the sign value and power. How celebrity fans respond to the messages communicated by the artist and others within the art machine (Rodner and Thomson 2013) can be understood using consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005) and metaphoric transfer (Hunt and Menon 1995). Consumers construct their own

interpretations of the celebrity artist and their work, in addition to responding to the intended metaphors constructed by the artist.

The role of entrepreneurial marketing is implicit and explicit. Its inherent creativity affects the practices of the celebrity artist and stimulate how consumers respond to the art product and the acts of the celebrity artist. Market creation by celebrity artists sits differently in the wider marketplace dominated by market oriented activities. Competencies such as intuition, judgement, imagination and vision are used strategically to differentiate what they do from other artists. The flexibility of the celebrity artist helps shape physical artistic output and the narrative surrounding it. Kinkade was expert at exploiting his media connections in order to tell his story, enabling him to quickly connect with his fan base. All artists should implicitly be able to exploit their imagination and originality but it is the celebrity artist who seems best equipped to make the most effective use of these competencies. Another issue is whether or not the artist has deliberately set out to acquire celebrity status. Once positioned within the celebrity marketplace, artists may be better placed to exploit the conditions because of their heightened communication abilities.

Additional impacting dimensions include authenticity and nostalgia. Kinkade was expert at incorporating these within his work in appealing to his fans drawn by its aura. Heightened sense of aura among a celebrity artist fan base enhances the levels of perceived brand attachment, equity and value. This value is both financial and intrinsic. Celebrity artist fans actively seek out brands which reflect their own desired identity. Kinkade embedded a sense of his own brand history within his artwork, in conversations and interviews held with the media. The strategic selection of images in his art and their metaphors heighten the sense of relevance felt by his fans as they seek meaning in their lives. This also strengthens his status

as a celebrity artist. What might differ to a degree between celebrity artists and other celebrity brands is the extent of subjective judgement involved. The art product differs greatly from many other sectors in that it contains additional dimensions which conventional marketing theory cannot explain (Hirschman 1983). The artistic community often rejects the materialistic association of 'product', while consumer demand does not necessarily represent the primary driving force behind art.

### **Conclusions and suggestions for future research:**

This paper has responded to the special issue call by challenging contemporary understanding of celebrity within marketing and consumption studies in moving beyond celebrity endorsement and conventional brand positioning viewpoints. It also contributes to our understanding of celebrities as market making and shaping devices. Thomas Kinkade is part of the wider celebrity industry as he has thrived on promoting his aesthetic effects to his eager public. By hanging Kinkade's reproductions in the living room, this contributes to his consumers' identity construction as his art is both part of the everyday and an art object. The durability of Kinkade as a brand has been considered. Often, once a celebrity dies, or, in the case of a celestoid, fails to attract further media interest, consumer attention also fades. However, this has yet to be realised with Thomas Kinkade as his entrepreneurial marketing techniques ensure longevity of his brand. The focus on the celebrity artist has enabled a number of additional dimensions to be considered which would probably not have impacted if short term media celebrities had been the focus. By evaluating Thomas Kinkade, the paper has demonstrated how and why consumers are drawn through compulsion, captivation and fascination to the celebrity artist. The religiosity and worship dimensions inherent in the consumer/celebrity artist relationship are not just sociological. For many they are deeply religious in a more traditional way.

Celebrity culture is becoming ritualised but the celebrity artist is able to influence the process, in addition to the media. Consumer and celebrity artist identities are important elements in constructing relevant brand narratives. Kinkade drove his own commodification process, resulting in a distinctive celebrity artist cultural brand. This research confirms the blurring of the boundaries between popular culture and art, and raises questions about the distinction between kitsch and high art. It also makes consider the need for conventionally authentic products in the marketplace. Kinkade was clearly a successful artist *and* brand manager who intertwined his entrepreneurial marketing competencies with a particularly recognisable visual, nostalgic aesthetic which clearly appealed to his audience. His celebrity artist aura is central to his success. Identification and exploitation of nostalgic, seemingly authentic feelings has been expertly incorporated within his work, and communicated through his media appearances.

By examining how the celebrity artist contributes to the construction of celebrity signs and related brand associations, we can appreciate how the media has accelerated the process of celebrification of specific artists. Although Thomas Kinkade has been the focus of the critique, this has also enabled wider understanding of the role of the media savvy and entrepreneurially minded creative individual in shaping identity in the marketplace of celebrity. Thomas Kinkade was both an artist and an entrepreneurial marketer who knew how to construct meaningful creative messages to communicate with loyal consumers in order to extend their attachment to his celebrity brand. It didn't seem to matter that what they actually owned was only a reproduction of his work rather than the original painting. What did matter was the ability to access it and understand it through the lenses of apparent authenticity and nostalgia.

**The form which authenticity takes when it is associated with a celebrity artist brand varies as it engages with the marketplace and its consumers. The cultural and economic capital relating to Kinkade's celebrity brand is therefore different to that of Warhol or Hirst. Owning a Kinkade reproduction therefore imbues a different form of capital, since they have different reference groups. All these artists have engaged with the marketplace, but it is the nature of the engagement which differs. On examining the celebrity categorisation of ascribed, achieved and attributed celebrity (Rojek 2001), it is clear that this does not align with Kinkade the celebrity artist. The reality is a more nuanced interplay of aura and authenticity.**

Future research should examine different artists and other creative individuals so that we can further improve our understanding of how the concept of celebrity might contribute to the enhancement of cultural value in both intrinsic and extrinsic ways.



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**Figure 1: Influencing factors in the production and consumption of the celebrity artist**





