An Illustration of Continuous Product Line Revitalization: The Case of Picasso

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Visual artists' careers can effectively illustrate marketing principles. This paper reviews Pablo Picasso's career to illustrate the importance of revitalizing product lines. For seventy years, beginning in 1894, Picasso demonstrated a remarkable ability to experiment with new painting styles. Encouraged by dealers, he reinvented himself, adapting to new environmental conditions and remained at the art market's cutting edge. In marketing terms, Picasso developed successful, new product lines throughout his career. Thus, Picasso became a major innovator and influencer in the field of art. His stylistic differences capture the marketer's imagination and demonstrate the rewards of innovative responses to the marketplace.

INTRODUCTION

Marketers recognize that "New products are the lifeblood of a company …" (Kerin, Hartley, Rudelius, 2007). Evidence of the importance of new product development abounds in all forms of promotional communications. Today, we think of new products as results of technology advances, but new products also result for changes in styles. This paper illustrates the importance of new products based on design features by reviewing the career of the famous and influential artist Pablo Picasso who remained active as an artist from approximately 1894 until his death in 1973. In so doing we hope to stimulate a better understanding of practical real-world aspects of marketing strategy. We begin by reviewing the art environment in which Picasso worked. We then review Picasso's career and his shifts from his early Post-Impressionism work, to his Blue Period, followed by the Rose Period, Cubism, the Neo-Classical period, New-Cubism, Surrealism, and Abstract Expressionism. We then consider the marketing intermediaries and facilitators who influenced Picasso at stages of his career. We conclude with reflections on what can be learned from Picasso and fine arts marketing in general regarding acceptance of new products. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are also briefly discussed.

THE ENVIRONMENT OF PICASSO'S ART

Beginning in the middle of the 19th century in Paris, France, new painting styles appeared, which radically departed from the then dominant standards established by the Academie des Beaux-Arts

(Academy of Fine Arts), a government-sponsored organization that also served as a key distribution channel and legitimator for works of art. Typically, artists developing new styles in the last half of the 19th century had difficulty gaining exposure for their works, since paintings in emerging styles, such as Impressionism, were rejected by the Academie, which was itself dominated by Classicism, the style of the great masters of previous centuries. This situation forced innovative artists to develop new distribution channels and to rely heavily on a then developing network of dealers and collectors. Slowly, the monopoly held by the Academie was being replaced by open-market forces, thereby opening opportunities for talented and innovative artists and for the recognition of new painting styles. A listing of the most influential new painting styles introduced in Europe and eventually the United States between 1850 and 1950 would include, in chronological order, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Neo-Classicism, and Surrealism, among others. Together these styles are often referred to as Avant-Garde art and are considered part of the Modernism movement in art of this period, particularly in the early 20th Century. As early as the 1890s, networks of art dealers and collectors open to the new styles had become major market forces in the art world. It was in this environment that Picasso developed his career when he moved to Paris, the center of the western art world in the early 20th century.

The expression Avant-Garde artists often conjures up images of painters mired in poverty, living like Bohemians, and rejecting "bourgeois" values and the capitalist system associated with them. This is an idealized and biased view of artists that does not reflect historic realities. While many Avant-Garde artists struggled, especially at the beginning of their careers, to gain awareness, acceptance, recognition, and acclaim for their works, which would be reflected in the prices their works could draw, it does not necessarily follow that they refused to be part of the market system that allowed them to survive, develop, and in time prosper. In fact, many artists accepted the logic of the market system. For example, Renoir, a major Impressionist painter, is quoted as saying: "There is only one indicator for telling the value of paintings, and that is the sale room" (Grampp, 1989, p. 15). Still, in most cases, authors writing about modernist painters and their achievements have focused primarily on their works and have tended to obscure the role played by the dealers and collectors, museums' curators, and critics, essentially ignoring the influence of the marketplace (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 3).

PICASSO'S CHANGING STYLES

Picasso was born in 1881 in a Spanish middle-class family. His father, a painter and professor of fine arts, noted that Picasso was interested in and had a gift for drawing at an early age. Beginning when Picasso was age seven, his father trained him in figure drawing and oil painting. He attended Academies of Fine Arts in Barcelona and Madrid. Throughout his career, considered to have started in 1894, Picasso demonstrated a remarkable ability to experiment with new painting styles and to reinvent himself. This flexibility and capacity to adapt to and excel in every style was arguably one of his greatest strengths and served him well as he dealt with dealers and collectors and interacted with various social and intellectual circles. From a marketing perspective, it can be said that Picasso, due to his talent and openness to experimentation, was able to develop successful, new product lines at various stages in his career. Often these new styles developed in response to changes in his external environment, in an attempt to meet the changing needs of his various "customers," and to be perceived as a foremost innovator in his artistic endeavors.

Academic Realism and the Blue Period

In his early years (mid-1890s), Picasso, still living in Spain and following classical training, had a style reflecting Academic Realism, with such works as *The First Communion*, or *Portrait of Aunt Pepa* (Richardson, 1991a, p. 204-205). However, Picasso made his first trip to Paris in 1900. Between 1901 and 1904, he shared his time between Paris and Barcelona. His works during these years are associated with the Blue Period, since most of his paintings are in shades of blue or blue-green, reflecting a somber mood and often depicting destitute people, such as beggars and prostitutes. At that time Picasso appeared to have suffered from severe depression, starting in the later part of 1901 (Richardson, 1991a), perhaps

brought on by the suicide of his close friend Carlos Casagemas in early 1901. The artist later stated, "I started painting in blue when I learned of Casagemas's death" (Wattenmaker and Distel, 1993, p. 192). He painted several portraits of his friend after his death, the most famous one being probably *La Vie (The Life)* (1903). From a marketing standpoint, works from this period actually hurt Picasso's success and finances, because at the time, they were not well received by either critics or the public and potential buyers.

The Rose Period

As Picasso gradually recovered from his depression, his painting style changed, marking the beginning of the Rose Period (rose is the French word for pink), characterized by the use of pink and orange colors. Here we see a product line transition with some consistency with the past in terms of structure but with a shift in color and subject matter. In this period, his paintings of happier scenes often depicted harlequins and circus characters. One of his most famous pictures and a good example of this period is *La Famille de Saltimbanques (Family of Saltimbanques)* (1905).

Early Cubism

Following the Rose Period, which ended about 1906, Picasso was exposed to African art that was popular in Paris. At the same time, he was also influenced by the Post-Impressionist painter Paul Cezanne. Cezanne wanted to "treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone" (Wikipedia, 2014a) and represented objects as if they were seen from different angles simultaneously. This approach stood in contrast to traditional, classical, ideals of single-point perspective. This led to an early form of Cubism, perhaps best seen in Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907). Continuing to be influenced by Avant Garde Parisian artists, Picasso then worked closely with the highly respected, and possibly first, Cubist painter, George Braque. Through collaboration, they developed Analytic Cubism (1909-1912) using monochrome and neutral colors. This new style was radically different from Picasso's early work with Academic Realism, and from the style of his Blue period and Rose Period. *Girl with a Mandolin* (1910) is a good representation of this new approach. This was followed later by further experimentation with Synthetic Cubism (1912-1919), in which pieces of paper and other materials were incorporated into paintings.

Neoclassicism

During and after World War I, Picasso, now enjoying fame and involvement with members of "high society," again changed his painting style. In contemporary marketing terms, he introduced a new "product line." At least in part, he moved away from Cubism and developed instead a form of Neoclassicism, perhaps to serve better the wants of this new market segment. Due to his new associates' ability to relate to his neo-classical works, Picasso was selected to design the curtain, costumes and sets for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes' *Parade* ballet, which premiered in May 1917. The ballet's curtain was painted in a neoclassical style reminiscent of the Rose period (Fitzgerald, 1996, p 30-31). Picasso continued with his neoclassical style until 1924. The style is well illustrated by the painting *Seated Harlequin* painted in1923.

New-Cubism and Surrealism

In 1924, Picasso introduced via the sets and curtains for the ballet Mercure, a new painting style that has been described as "New-Cubism." In New-Cubism "lines float free of mass to suggest fluid, multilayered reliefs…backed by curvilinear flats to represent scenery and characters, particularly Mercury and the Three Graces… the minimalism of this rendering suggested an invention and spontaneity that was highly prized" (Fitzgerald, 1996, p.137-138). Picasso's work was criticized by members of the audience at the premiere. However, Andre Breton and his friends, who were trying to promote a new movement, Surrealism, vigorously supported Picasso, stating that he was "the eternal personification of youth", and skillfully aligned his new style with Surrealism. Thus, with a revitalized product line developing, Picasso was repositioned in the vanguard of contemporary Avant Garde art (Fitzgerald, 1996).

Picasso's New-Cubism had a flexible framework, allowing him to accommodate in the same picture seemingly contradictory styles without diminishing its visual attractiveness. This can be seen for example in the *Red Table Cloth* (1924) (Fitzgerald, 1996). Starting in 1925, and for the next two decades, Picasso's art, while keeping its Cubist underpinning, incorporated more and more elements of Surrealism and Expressionism (Rubin, 1972).

Neo-Expressionism

After World War II, Picasso's style changed again, as he reinterpreted the works of the great masters, such as Velazquez, Goya, Poussin, and Delacroix. In the final years of his life, Picasso's works were a mixture of styles, more colorful and expressive, and it can be argued that he innovated again by developing Neo-Expressionism (Wikipedia, 2014b).

INFLUENCES OF DEALERS, COLLECTORS, AND INVESTORS

The success of any product line, new, old, or revitalized, is dependent on the skillful work of marketing intermediaries and facilitators. Throughout his career in France, Picasso relied heavily on dealers and their galleries as channels for marketing his art, but also sold directly to collectors when the opportunity presented itself. This was necessary, in part, because in the early years of the twentieth century, as a Spanish citizen, Picasso had a poor command of the French language. In addition, he tended to distrust organizations. Therefore, he refrained from exhibiting in the salons (Richardson, 1991a). The term salon refers to galleries and shows organized by institutions, academies, for their accepted members. The most influential of these were the Academie des Beaux-Arts and the Salon de Paris. Instead of pursuing this channel, which would have been more restrictive, Picasso focused on the dealer channel, and, in some cases, the dealer channel pursued him.

In 1901 in Paris, the only Gallery dedicated exclusively to twentieth century art was the Galerie Berthe Weill. Berthe Weill, the owner, wanted her gallery to be a "place for youth," and she was probably the first French dealer to sell works by Picasso. As a dealer who gave numerous young artists their first shows, she played a vital role in advancing their careers (Fitzgerald, 1996; Weill, 1933; Wikipedia, 2014c). The well-known dealer Ambroise Vollard, who marketed primarily Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, gave Picasso his first show in 1901, but did not represent him. However, he did teach Picasso some valuable lessons about the realities of the marketplace, which served him well throughout his career (Fitzgerald, 1996). In 1904, a group of investors in contemporary art, known as La Peau de l'Ours (The Skin of the Bear) after a fable from La Fontaine, was formed under the leadership of businessperson and collector Andre Level. This investor group started to purchase paintings of Picasso and other Avant-Garde artists, hoping to resell them later at a profit, which did happen at a successful auction held in early 1914. In addition, in 1905, American art collector Gertrude Stein and members of her family started to acquire Picasso's works, and Stein became one of Picasso's main patrons (Wikipedia, 2014b). Similarly, the Russian collector Sergei Shchukin began to purchase Picasso's paintings. At about the same time, Picasso became associated with another dealer for sales and distribution, Clovis Sagot.

Thus, slowly but steadily, Picasso was building a distribution network of dealers and collectors that sold his works, and legitimated him as a serious artist whose works would become increasingly valuable. The development of this network provided Picasso with a stream of income and convinced major dealers, such as Ambroise Vollard and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, to invest substantial amounts of money in Picasso's art (Assouline, 1990; Fitzgerald, 1996; Richardson, 1991a,b; Kahnweiler and Cremieux, 1971). Consequently, Picasso's financial situation improved markedly, yet at this point in his career, he could not count on a steady income that a formal contract with a dealer would have provided. Hence, he pursued this goal by actively courting dealers, and his efforts paid off when Kahnweiler signed a contract with him in December 1912. Kahnweiler, with strong connections to dealers in Germany, Switzerland, and Eastern Europe, proved to be an effective promoter of Picasso's art. The impressive profits generated in early 1914 by The Skin of the Bear auction of modern art works acquired over the previous 10 years by these

investors proved that investing in Avant-Garde artists' paintings could be highly profitable. Since Picasso's works were one of the stars of the auction, he could envision a successful career in the years ahead with Kahnweiler as his dealer (Assouline, 1990; Kahnweiler and Cremieux, 1971; Wikipedia, 2014d).

The outbreak of World War I in early August 1914 disrupted Picasso's hopes. His dealer Kahnweiler, who was a German citizen, had his entire inventory sequestrated by the French government, leaving him unable to pay a substantial amount of money he owed to Picasso. This ended their relationship for many years. Picasso found himself suddenly cut off from his main channel of distribution and had to find a replacement. Also, because of the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the war, collectors cut back drastically their purchases. Isolated, Picasso turned to Andre Level, the former leader of the Skin of the Bear group of investors, for help and advice. Andre Level introduced him to Leonce Rosenberg, an art dealer who enthusiastically supported Cubism and was willing to work with Picasso. However, this dealer's purchases did not live up to Picasso's expectations, and their business relationship started to unravel in 1916 (Fitzgerald, 1996).

Fortunately for Picasso at this point in time, French poet and artist Jean Cocteau introduced him to Eugenia Errazuriz, a prominent member of Chilean society and patron of the arts in France, who in turn, convinced Sergei Diaghilev, founder of the Ballets Russes, to retain him to design the sets for the ballet Parade (Fitzgerald, 1996). Thus, Picasso was able to enter the circles of Parisian "high society" where he had found another market for his art. This was confirmed in the summer of 1918, when Errazuriz invited Picasso and his recently espoused wife, Olga Koklova, to spend their honeymoon at her villa in southern France near the Atlantic Ocean. There, he interacted with members of the aristocracy and, most importantly, negotiated agreements with two of the most important art dealers in France and beyond, Paul Rosenberg (brother of Leonce Rosenberg) and Georges Wildenstein, whereby they would represent him worldwide. This provided Picasso with the financial security and prestige that he had only dreamed about in the past (Fitzgerald, 1996) and marked the beginning of a successful relationship that was to last until the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

Paul Rosenberg played a leading role in dealing with Picasso, who had finally found a reliable and highly effective channel to distribute and promote his art. By 1939, Picasso had become a worldwide celebrity. The onset of World War II ended his relationship with Rosenberg, who as a Jew fled to the United States for safety reasons. Picasso stayed in Paris during the war but did not exhibit his works because his artistic style did not fit the occupying Nazis' ideals of art (Wikipedia, 2014b; Kahnweiler and Cremieux, 1971). After the war, he re-established his earlier association with Kahnweiler, who became his exclusive dealer (Assouline, 1990; Kahnweiler and Cremieux, 1971). Given the stature of Kahnweiler in the world of art, Picasso had again found an outstanding channel to market his art.

The Promotional Role of Dealers

Throughout his career, Picasso seems to have maintained an entrepreneurial spirit, making skillful use of marketing techniques to promote his art and advance his career. In his early days in Paris, as an unknown quantity, he was well aware of the critical need to build up his credibility in the eyes of dealers and convince them of his earnings potential. One of his favorite tactics was to paint or draw portraits of dealers willing to give him a chance by organizing a show of his art, as Ambroise Vollard did in 1901, or by purchasing some of his pictures. These portraits were a way to flatter potential dealers and to provide them with free samples of his talent. The same tactic was used for critics writing complimentary reviews of his works and for anybody that Picasso perceived as developing his reputation and improving his financial situation (Fitzgerald, 1996). Picasso used again this approach later in his career, with dealers such as Kahnweiler, Leonce Rosenberg, and Paul Rosenberg. He fully understood the vital role played by dealers to create a market for modern art, and is said to have asked what would have become of the Parisian artists who were Picasso's peers without Kahnweiler's business sense (Richardson, 1991a).

For example, Andre Level, who led the Skin of the Bear investor group and purchased Picasso's and other Avant-Garde artists' works starting in 1904, proved to be a remarkably effective promotion manager when time came to sell the works at auction at the Hotel Drouot in Paris. He succeeded in

reserving for the exhibition two rooms opening off the Hotel's grand staircase, instead of smaller chambers. He also grouped together separately the works of leading artists such as Picasso and Matisse to amplify their importance and facilitate their recognition. In addition, to generate as much traffic as possible for the preview before the sale, he convinced many newspapers to announce the event in their pages. Finally, he created an attractive catalogue explaining how the collection came into being and improved the overall experience of visitors by displaying plenty of flowers throughout the exhibition rooms (Fitzgerald, 1996). These actions were designed to influence visitors' moods and increase the likelihood that they would bid for the works on display. Clearly, Andre Level knew how to use atmospherics as a marketing tool and, not surprisingly, the sale was a resounding success.

As another example, the dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler helped promote Picasso's works and reputation by introducing him to the practice of *Beaux Livres (Beautiful Books)*, i.e., by having him illustrate texts of contemporary poets and writers such as Max Jacob (Wikipedia, 2014b; Kahnweiler and Cremieux, 1971). Then, starting in 1910, Kahnweiler loaned his artists' works to galleries or exhibitions outside France. Thus, Picasso's pictures appeared in twenty-one shows between 1910 and 1913, mainly in large cities in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in Great Britain and the United States (Fitzgerald, 1996).

Paul Rosenberg is arguably the Parisian dealer who made the greatest efforts to promote Picasso's art between 1918 and 1939, propelling the artist to worldwide fame by the beginning of the Second World War. He achieved this goal by holding a series of exhibitions of Picasso's works in his elegant Paul Rosenberg Gallery located rue La Boetie. These shows sometimes emphasized one particular painting style of Picasso, allowing Rosenberg to position Picasso in the minds of the visitors. For example, the show held in the fall of 1919 was focused entirely on Picasso's return to classicism and was very well received. By not including any Cubist picture, the show sent the message that Picasso was open to exploration rather than dedicated to a single style (Fitzgerald, 1996). In contrast, the 1921 exhibition was a retrospective of Picasso's work aiming to show the artist's accomplishments as a Cubist and Neoclassicist (Fitzgerald, 1996).

Rosenberg also played a key role in promoting Picasso's art to America in the early 1920s. For example, he convinced American collector John Quinn to start purchasing the artist's works, and he organized an exhibition in 1923 at the Georges Wildenstein Gallery in New York, being careful to exclude Cubist works from the selection, so as not to turn off the American public. The exhibition then moved on to Chicago and back to Paris. In 1925, as the economy and the demand for modern art improved, Rosenberg renovated his Gallery in Paris and organized an exhibition of Picasso's recent works in 1926, showcasing his "revitalized Cubism, an expansive form of Cubism that embraced the full range of his styles from Neoclassicism to realism and the newest Surrealist departures" (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 43). Picasso this time was repositioned as a Cubist painter, and Rosenberg kept a "salle Picasso" where his pictures were surrounded by the works of masters such as Renoir and Degas, thus creating the perception that Picasso was also a master (Fitzgerald, 1996). Rosenberg as a marketer had the insight and skills to customize and promote Picasso's shows for maximum attractiveness to an audience at a particular time or a particular place. There is no doubt that these marketing strategies were developed in close cooperation with Picasso.

Throughout the 1930s, Rosenberg promoted Picasso via exhibitions at galleries and museums, in the United States and Paris. In Paris, a major retrospective of the artist's work took place in 1932 at the Galeries Georges Petit, where Picasso carefully displayed and grouped his pictures according to topics, rather than in chronological order, as was the standard practice. This was a way for him to highlight the "remarkable consistency of subject matter and the variety of interpretations" (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 114). In America, another show was organized in 1934 at the Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum in Hartford, Connecticut, and heralded by the museum's director as the "first American retrospective exhibition of Picasso." Not surprisingly, the Cubist years of 1907-1918 were de-emphasized, most likely in order to make the show more attractive to the American public. Two more shows are worth mentioning here. One, held in 1936 at the Galerie Paul Rosenberg in Paris, focused on Picasso's recent works. The other, held in 1939 in New York, was the Museum of Modern Art retrospective. This show, in many ways, marked the

culmination of Picasso's association with Rosenberg, and the celebration of the artist as a major force in the development of modern art. It was, in short, an "apotheosis" (Brassai, 1964, p. 52).

After World War II, Picasso's fame grew even stronger and reached near adulation status among professionals, the media, and the public. In 1947, he signed an exclusive contract with his pre-World War I dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who remained his primary dealer until Picasso died in 1973. Interestingly, Francoise Gilot, Picasso's companion from 1946 to 1954 (Gilot and Lake, 1964), recounted how Picasso carefully planned his meetings with visiting dealers by having her and him engage in role-playing, taking turns in pretending to be the artist or the dealer, to extract the best possible deal from the dealer. Clearly, Picasso was a shrewd negotiator and knew how to engage in effective salesmanship (Fitzgerald, 1996; Gilot and Lake, 1964).

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Pablo Picasso's rise to prominence as the leading modern painter of the twentieth century is attributed by many to his extraordinary artistic talents. While there is no question that the artist's talent was considerable, explaining his fame and career longevity only in those terms does not capture completely the reasons behind his exceptional destiny. His flexibility and openness to new styles allowed him to appeal to many tastes in art, while also demonstrating a range of skills that enhanced his reputation beyond any single work or style. His willingness to develop new product lines in new styles of art assured continuing interest from dealers, collectors, and the art consuming public at large.

However, new styles or product lines alone are insufficient to succeed. New art styles, like all new products, require the legitimation and promotion that must come from dealers and collectors. In the realm of new products, whether based in new technology or new art styles, the marketer often must lead the public into new places as he or she shows the benefits and value of the new product or approach. It can be argued that Picasso was also a shrewd businessperson and marketer, as were his dealers, and that he was quick to learn and adapt to the changing marketplace and its environment. He and his dealers made skillful use of marketing tools and techniques to advance his career, in particular continuously refurbishing his product line to remain fresh in the mind of his marketplace.

Certain limitations of this study should be noted. The study has maintained a limited scope by addressing only one artist, by primarily focusing on one marketing concept, the revitalization of product lines, and by using a qualitative case study approach rather than a more generalizable quantitative approach. While this was appropriate for an exploratory case study seeking to illustrate a marketing principle, valuable further research may be suggested. First, it would be helpful to review the careers of other artists to note whether changing artistic styles may be common and associated with long-term market success and personal notoriety. Such research could focus on comparisons and contrasts of careers of prominent figures in the history of art such as Rembrandt whose long-term career involved diverse methods (Alpers, 1988) with that of Van Gogh whose career was relatively short with little market success in his own lifetime and a somewhat consistent post-impressionist style (Rewald, 1978; Hulsker, 1980; Gayford, 2006). Second, additional work could be done on the importance of developing the artist's brand as a factor in market success. Previous research in this area has addressed the branding of contemporary artists (Schroeder, 2005, 2006).

Third, efforts should be made to develop methods for operationalizing indicators of marketing success and objective assessments of stylistic changes, and methods for selecting probability samples of visual artists for analysis using robust statistical measures. However, it must also be recognized that in the field of visual art, the development of these measures will be challenging. Samples of professional artists who are registered with major artist associations might be used, but this would be limited necessarily to contemporary artists whose careers are developing. Non-probability samples of major and minor figures in the history of art might be used to extend the current approach. Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches would add greatly to the current effort to illustrate basic marketing concepts via the engaging and colorful work of creative artists.

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