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# Why Are Themed Brandstores So Powerful? Retail Brand Ideology at *American Girl Place*

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### Abstract

Although there is growing interest in themed brandstores, we still know very little about the source of these retail environments'™ power to affect consumers profoundly. Utilizing an ethnographic study of *American Girl Place*, a culturally rich and highly successful retail environment, we find that effective retailing in these contexts is an intensely ideological affair. In our participant-observation of, and on-site interviews with, consumers at *American Girl Place* we find that the ideology of the brand manifests powerfully through a variety of different and distinct areas within the store: the Museum, the Library, the Caf  , the Salon, the Theater, and the Photo Studio. Ideological expression is central to each of these places. Tracking the influence of brand ideology through consumers'™ retail experiences, we theorize about the centrality of retail place in ideological branding. Although the confluence of ideology and retailing has been referenced in prior research, this paper focuses on and systematically develops the

theoretical interconnection between the two. The physical immediacy of the themed brandstore experience acts as a quilting point that links together related cultural concepts into a strong retail brand ideology. The implications of this theory draw our attention to ideological and morally-bound retail brand expressions, emphasize the importance of a variety of retail formats within a single store, and provide practical guidelines for retailers eager to build successful brands of their own.



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## Keywords

Consumers; Brand ideology; Brand museum; Flagship store; Ethnography

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