Crafting Authenticity: How Heritage Shop Owners Shape the Consumer Subject

Arianne Paquin

A Thesis

in

John Molson School of Business

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Science in Administration (Marketing)

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March, 2025

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Arianne Paquin

Entitled: **Crafting Authenticity: How Heritage Shop Owners Shape the Consumer Subject**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MARKETING

complies with the regulations of this University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

_____ Chair

Dr. Bianca Grohmann

_____ Examiner

Dr. Bianca Grohmann

_____ Examiner

Dr. Caroline Roux

_____ Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Zeynep Arsel

Approved by _____

Dr. Mrugank Thakor Graduate Program Director

_____

Cédric Lesage Associate Dean

Date ___

ABSTRACT

Crafting Authenticity: How Heritage Shop Owners Shape the Consumer Subject

Arianne Paquin

From the mid-1980s through the early-2020s, Montreal's commercial landscape saw a proliferation of heritage shops selling imported items from South-Asia such as incense, crystals, clothing, jewelry, home décor, and more. Today, the city's zeitgeist has changed, but these shops still remain. Hence, what efforts do these shop owners exert to construct their authenticity and keep this heritage consumer subject alive? Previous research has either taken too vast of an institutional approach in studying this phenomenon or has focused too closely on the product that is the consumer subject itself. Thus, the literature does not take a balanced approach by studying the retail market actors themselves and the actions they specifically take to shape their ideal consumer subject. To fill this gap, this research employs a qualitative approach, combining three research methods: in-depth interviews, fieldwork, and secondary data. Overall, this thesis uncovers the muti-layered process that heritage shop owners undertake to shape consumer subjects. It contributes to the marketing literature by applying existing notions of authenticity to a new commercial niche and geographical context and by investigating the role that shop owners specifically play in the ethnic market sphere. For managers, this study can serve as a beginner's guide for opening a business—or filling in any gaps of an existing business— that employs the construct of authenticity as understood, perceived, and crafted through managers' very own eyes.

Keywords: Authenticity, Heritage Shops, Shaping the Consumer Subject, Montreal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my supervisor Dr. Zeynep Arsel for originally welcoming my thesis topic with open arms, and in that moment, for telling me that I had made it home. Taking her Qualitative Methods course not only taught me firsthand about the ethics that guide this type of research but also helped me find my place in the MSc Marketing program altogether. Thank you, Zeynep, for your continuous support, reassurance, and guidance throughout the year. While taking Qualitative Methods, I also formed a special friendship with another student in the class. We worked on the group project together, but unbeknownst to us, we would end up having the same supervisor and would experience this thesis journey side-by-side in the following year. Thank you, Alana, for all your encouragement, laughs, tea-spilling sessions, and cat stickers.

I would also like to thank my personal support system: my parents Tere and François, my brother Christian, and my boyfriend Samy. Thank you, Mom, for your uplifting emotional support and grammar tidbits. Thank you, Dad, for encouraging me to apply for the master's program, even if it was two weeks before the application deadline! Our weekly phone chats have been a source of strength, giving me the push I need to keep going. Christian, thank you for pulling my mind away from the work sometimes just to have fun and to receive some big brother guidance. I always felt more refreshed going back into my work afterwards. Samy, thank you for being so considerate every step of the way— from helping me get more comfortable riding a Bixi in the city for fieldwork visits to making me yogurt parfaits while I coded. Thank you for being nothing but understanding, kind, and supportive about my other big commitment this year. I truly could have not completed this thesis without the moral support of those closest to me.

Finally, I would like to take and moment to thank my committee members, Dr. Bianca Grohman and Dr. Caroline Roux, for their thoughtful questions, contributions, and feedback.

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1. INTRODUCTION

> In a sense, everybody wears a mask, whether they're wearing a physical mask or not. Everybody portrays themselves as sometimes different than who they really are. You know, in society, in school, to their family, to everybody, they wear a different mask for each group they're standing in front of (Vincent).

Staring through the window display, sitting on the bar's hostess stand, greeting you at the hotel's front desk, lies a Buddha statue. These businesses are typically not spiritual by nature, so why do they choose to display a statue of this Buddhist Teacher? I encourage you, dear reader, to reflect on the last time you saw a Buddha statue in your day to day life. Was it at the dollar store, your friend's house, or the restaurant you ate at last week? Or was it in *that* shop? The shop you could not classify in simplistic terms, but that smells of sandalwood-flavoured incense the second you walk through the door. Here, I am referring to the shops that sell an overwhelming variety of imported products such as incense, crystals, clothing, home décor, furniture, handbags, essential oils, lamps, statuettes, jewellery, and the list goes on. These businesses are typically one-of-a-kind, owner-operated, and sometimes family owned. They import their products from Asian countries, like India, Nepal, Bali, Thailand, Indonesia, and Turkey. These are the types of shops that this study investigates—complex ethnic spaces that borrow from different cultures and that cannot be fit into one single box. I will refer to these spaces as heritage shops.

Today, authenticity is a very popular term employed in the retail and marketing literature. Turning from the literature to real-world settings, however, this raises the question: how do consumers specifically define and recognize authenticity when making consumption choices? Bruhn et al. (2012) define authenticity as "a consumer-desired attribute, reflecting a perception of a brand being unique, genuine or original and to help marketers to differentiate their brands

from competing brands" (as cited in Dwivedi et al., 2018, p. 1387). These definitions place a focus on the consumer perspective, yet it would be interesting reach beyond this and to examine how authenticity is first constructed. Thus, this study aims to fill the gap by answering the following research question: how do heritage shop owners craft authenticity narratives and shape their consumer subject?

To explore this research question, I employed a qualitative approach, combining three ethnographic analysis methods: in-depth interviews, fieldwork, and secondary data. The data was collected over four months, from October 2024 to February 2025, to further understand how shop owners build their businesses from start to finish and how customers engage with these spaces. The final data set comprises 6 in-depth interviews, 25 hours and 54 pages of fieldwork conducted at four different shops, as well as 233 customer reviews retrieved from Google Maps. The study was focused on shops in the Plateau-Mont-Royal area of Montreal, Quebec, Canada. To test the boundary conditions of this study, I expanded my research to one shop based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The findings of this study highlight various theorical and practical implications. In sum, this study contributes to the marketing literature on authenticity by applying the term to a new commercial niche and geographical context and by investigating the role that shop owners play in the ethnic market sphere. This study will also contribute as an extension of Veresiu and Giesler's (2018) neoliberal ideology of multiculturalism model by extending to the marketplace sphere. How are retailers providing suitable market offerings? Who are these supposed retailers? What do suitable marketing offerings even mean for consumers in this context? These are the questions that my research will attempt to address, adding sustenance to the existing literature.

Finally, my study also adds to the literature on market work in several ways. First, this study focuses on heritage shop owners specifically, a type of market actor given little to no attention in the marketing literature. I also shed light on how cultural omnivores are shaped by these specific market actors and their reflective spaces. Additionally, my study transposes the research on coffee explorations in Europe (Pomiès and Arsel, 2023; Karababa and Ger, 2011) to a new commercial niche and geographical context.

For managers, this study also serves as a beginner's guide for opening a business that employs the construct of authenticity. Additionally, for the shop owners whom I have interviewed—and that have already been around for quite some time— this study can serve as a guide to fill in any missing gaps of authenticity. While reading this, I encourage existing managers to reflect on how they define authenticity, how they perceive it, and ultimately how they display this notion into their commercial space(s).

The remainder of this thesis will be presented in the following order. In Section 2, I will review the existing literature on authenticity and the formation of the consumer subject. In Section 3, I will explore the research context centered around Montreal and its zeitgeist. In Section 4, I will delve further into the details of the qualitative methods employed to conduct this study. In Section 5, I will explain the various findings of this study. In Section 6, I will list the theoretical and practical implications uncovered through this study. Finally, in Section 7, we will conclude with the limitations of this study and uncover future research directions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Authenticity

2.1.a Authenticity in Retail and Marketing

What does it mean, to be authentic? This is the million-dollar question that scholars have been exploring since Trilling (1972) published his work, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, which laid out the foundation for future research. Trilling (1972) initially connects sincerity and authenticity as interrelated concepts, with sincerity being defined as "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (p.2). Shortly after, Handler (1986) reviewed Trilling's (1972) work, implying that authenticity merged with sincerity as it entered into the modern world— eventually replacing sincerity altogether (p.2). Thus, Handler (1986) assesses authenticity using three attributes that would stay true to the concept for many years ahead: authenticity is a concept shaped by the modern Western cultural context, it is deeply connected to Western ideas of individuality, and the connections between authenticity and individualism are strong in both everyday understanding and anthropological perspectives on culture (p.2). To this day, scholars continue to discuss and refine the definition of this often used, yet loosely defined, term.

Today, authenticity is a very popular term employed in retail and marketing literature. In developing a conceptual framework to better understand how scholars define authenticity in a management context, Lehman et al. (2019) affirm that there is a shared understanding amongst scholars, as well as in everyday usage, that authenticity refers to what is "real," "genuine," or "true" (Dutton, 2003, as cited in Lehman et al., 2019, p. 2). Here, the authors also reveal three emerging patterns from their literature review: "authenticity as (1) consistency between an entity's internal values and its external expressions, (2) conformity of an entity to the norms of

its social category, and (3) connection between an entity and a person, place, or time as claimed" (Lehman et al., 2019, p. 1). While these papers present three distinct perspectives, this research will incorporate all three told through the narratives of shop owners.

Turning from the literature to real-world settings, however, this raises the question: how do consumers specifically define and recognize authenticity when making consumption choices? Nunes et al. (2021) define authenticity in the consumption context as "a holistic consumer assessment determined by six component judgments (accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency)" (p.2). Similarly, Bruhn et al. (2012) define authenticity as "a consumer-desired attribute, reflecting a perception of a brand being unique, genuine or original and to help marketers to differentiate their brands from competing brands" (as cited in Dwivedi et al., 2018, p. 1387). These definitions place a focus on the consumer perspective, yet it would be interesting reach beyond this and to examine how authenticity is first constructed. Without a solid foundation of how authenticity is initially understood and crafted, it becomes difficult—or maybe even impossible—to recognize it within the consumer and their consumption practices. My study sets the stage for future research on authenticity in marketing, which could eventually turn to consumer behaviour.

From luxury wine (Beverland, 2006) to Brazilian cuisine (Zanette et al., 2021), much of the marketing and retail literature on authenticity focuses on the niche of food consumption. The realm of authenticity is vast, so why limit ourselves to just one area? Although the publication dates of these two fundamental texts are separated by fifteen years, it is intriguing to observe the shift in focus from how consumers recognize authenticity through "heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production, and downplaying commercial motives" (Beverland, 2006, p.251) to how producers (chefs)

commercialize their ethnic backgrounds for a dominant culture by emphasizing aspects of authenticity, such as geographic origin, while neglecting other elements (Zanette et al., 2021, p.134). Based on this alone, there is a clear shift in focus from the consumer perspective to those of the producers. Just a few years earlier, Long (2018) highlighted the power struggle and cultural politics surrounding culinary tourism and ethnic foods by highlighting several important questions: “Who gets to make those selections? Whose recipe is used to represent a culture? Whose definition of the cuisine is presented? Who is considered the authority, by whom, and how did they come to be in that position?” (p.316). Once again, the producers are questioned about how they are either respecting or adjusting their modes of production in line with their perceptions of authenticity. Al-Kilani and El Hedhli (2021) take a similar approach by examining how cultural and ethnic dining atmospherics influence authenticity, controlled by exogenous factors like design, ambiance, and social elements. But I wonder, are these truly beyond the restaurant's control? These are choices that the producers make, and this is what my study explores. The craft of authenticity exists on a spectrum, from inherent to entirely fabricated.

The existing literature on authenticity in restoration is extensive, but the literature in fashion and retail seems to be just beginning to emerge. There also seems to be a recurring pattern of linking gentrification to the search for authenticity. Hubbard (2016) explains how gentrification shifts residential neighbourhoods to commercial areas, replacing businesses serving lower-income communities and ethnic minorities with ‘hipster’ spots like artisanal coffee shops and vintage boutiques, offering healthier, eco-friendly, and more 'authentic' options (p.1). Molnar and Walters (2021) explore this idea through their observations of local areas, such as Boundary Street in Brisbane's West End, Australia. My study applies this concept to a new location: the gentrified area of Le Plateau Mont-Royal in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

2.1.b Ethnic Markets

At its core, the term 'ethnic' is derived from the word 'ethnicity.' Weber's (1961) definition of ethnicity is "a shared sense of common descent extending beyond kinship, political solidarity vis-a-vis other groups, and common customs, language, religion, values, morality, and etiquette" (as cited in Cohen, 1978, p. 385). In other words, ethnicity is a combination of various factors, but the definition of ethnic marketing remains an ongoing discussion. The latter definition is applied in *Ethnic Marketing: Theory, Practice, and Entrepreneurship*, a foundational work on ethnic markets by Pires and Stanton (2018). However, the authors acknowledge that ethnic marketing lacks a single definition and explore related terminology (p.3). They pull from Jamal (2003) and Cui (1997) to lay the foundation that "ethnic marketing is referred to as marketing focused on ethnic minority consumers or ethnic minorities" (Pires and Stanton, 2018, p. 3). Although definitions may differ slightly, there is a common agreement that "ethnic marketing is a response to differences, seeking to better communicate with, and understand the differences in order to improve the value offer" (Pires and Stanton, 2018, p. 6). My research highlights the overlooked role of ethnic entrepreneurs in shaping marketing systems aimed at ethnic communities (Pires & Stanton, 2018, p. 6).

2.1.c Critiques and Challenges of Authenticity

Like any theory, authenticity comes with its fair share of critiques and challenges. As mentioned earlier in the context of authenticity and food consumption, authenticity can be harmful when complex cultures and traditions are simplified to appeal to a dominant culture (Zanette et al., 2021). In this process, producers must adjust or resist their production methods to be successful in their businesses (Zanette et al., 2021). The writers of this text present four perspectives that

these producers adopt when confronting this dilemma: "(1) internalization of the envisioned Otherness, (2) transfiguration of tradition, (3) preservation of ethnic culture, and (4) ambiguous resistance" (Zanette et al., 2021, p.135). The authors find that local actors with limited involvement in the ethnic community may adopt 'otherness' as a marker of authenticity, while ethnic producers who view identity as tied to history, traditions, and communities align with narratives of resistance (p.142). Hence, it would be worth exploring how these findings can be extended to a new context.

Employing a problematization methodology and adopting a decolonial lens, Zakrzewska et al. (2022) take on a critical review of authenticity literature and identify potential ethical risks for scholars, which include: "the dominance of instrumental rationality, Eurocentric meanings, and a "West vs rest" focus in understanding marketplace authenticity" (p.16). The authors go on to say that this "puts researchers at risk of becoming complicit in the maintenance of oppressive power structures and the reproduction of epistemic coloniality and dismissing or even covering up internal practices of oppression by local elites, especially in former Western colonies" (Zakrzewska et al., 2022, p.16-17). Thus, I ensured to include diverse perspectives and remained mindful of the dynamics present in my research. By collaborating with local shops and being open about my positionality, I aimed to listen and learn from these shops rather than impose any of my beliefs as a white individual.

2.2 Shaping the Consumer Subject

2.2.a Retail and Service Settings

Picture this: an individual jumping on a "2 for 5$" incense deal at one local shop and purchasing a 200$ brass Ganesh statue at another, all whilst enjoying them simultaneously. This

phenomenon is what Peterson (1992) refers to as a cultural omnivore, a segment that consumes a variety of highbrow and lowbrow cultural products. Typically, this type of behaviour is a privilege executed by those of higher social classes (Bryson 1997; Peterson and Simkus 1992). To demystify these consumption patterns, Pomiès and Arsel (2023) conducted a 7-year ethnography of coffee consumption in France and uncovered that consumers initially experience a general appreciation for coffee and then develop a more formal appreciation throughout their coffee consumption journey. It is particularly worth noting that the study also captures the role that market professionals play in forming these consumer subjects, namely through qualification, captation, and activation (Pomiès and Arsel, 2023). This is a prime example of market work, which Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier (2013) define as the continuous efforts of market professionals to shape and structure markets. My study adds to the literature on market work in a few different ways. First, my study adds to the literature on market work by focusing on heritage shop owners, a type of market actor given little to no attention in the marketing literature. In studying this, I also shed light on how cultural omnivores are shaped by these specific market actors and their reflective spaces. Finally, my study also transposes this research on coffee explorations in Europe (Pomiès and Arsel, 2023; Karababa and Ger, 2011) to a new niche and geographical area.

2.2.b Institutional Processes

Similarly, Veresiu and Giesler (2018) explore the creation of an ethnic consumer subject, which they define as "an immigrant or indigene who negotiates his/her cultural background(s) and engages with different ethnicities predominantly through individual consumption choices made in a multicultural marketplace" (p.554). Here, the authors do not focus on ethnic consumers'

lived experiences; instead, similar to Pomiès and Arsel (2023), the focus is on the institutions that influence these consumer subjects in the contemporary Canadian marketplace (Veresiu and Giesler, 2018). Here, the authors create a neoliberal ideology of multiculturalism, which is defined by the authors as "an institutional mechanism for attenuating ethnic group conflicts through which immigrant-receiving cultures fetishized strangers and their strangeness in their commodification of differences" (p.554). The authors create the following figure to showcase the institutional processes that shape the ethnic consumer subjectivity, namely through the political sphere (envisioning), the marketplace research sphere (exemplifying), the marketplace sphere (equipping), and the consumption sphere (embodying) (p.567):

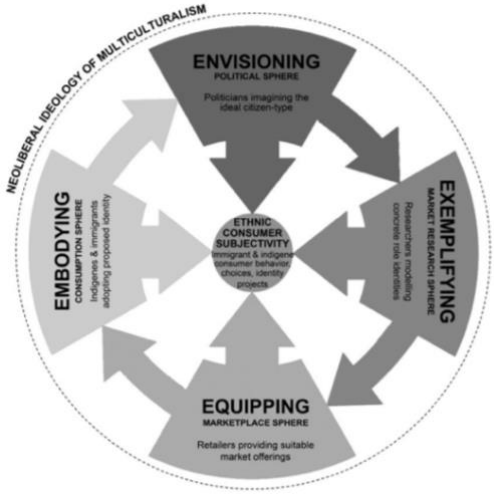

Figure 1 - Veresiu and Giesler's (2018) Market-Meditated Multiculturation

Not only this but Fionda and Moore (2008) also argue that claims of heritage can also be indicators of authenticity. Aside from highlighting authenticity attributes such as historic positioning, brand culture, exclusivity, as well as store environment and service, Fionda and Moore (2008) do not extend the conversation much beyond that. Although I agree with these attributes, it would be insightful to dig deeper and uncover how they appear tangibly. I am curious to pinpoint concrete examples in my data about how shop owners may or may not create

a historic positioning, if they have thought about brand culture, how exclusive they believe themselves and/or their business(es) to be, and most importantly, why the environment and service are interrelated. Are all of these attributes necessary for one to consider themselves authentic? My research will delve into these questions.

Finally, Dion and Borraz (2017) consider how brands manage status, tuning into how interactions in the service encounter influence the status of consumers. I will be taking on a similar endeavour in my study by understanding how shop owners educate consumers about their heritage and product origins, which in turn may influence how consumers' view their own status.

3. RESEARCH CONTEXT

3.1 Zeitgeist

To encapsulate the time and place in which these shops were booming in popularity, I employ the concept of Zeitgeist, a German word translating to "spirit of the times." To diversify the concept into something more than a simple reference to history and geographical context, Krause (2019) develops this phenomenon into a sociological analysis tool to reflect "a pattern in meaningful practices that is specific to a particular historical time-period, links different realms of social life and social groups, and extends across geographical contexts" (p. 1). Instead of being bound to historicism, zeitgeist can rather be expanded to include other cultural patterns such as "fashion," "style" and "ideology" (Krause, 2019, p.3). These few elements will be particularly useful to understanding the term zeitgeist as it relates to my Montreal study.

Furthermore, how does the term's significance carry over to the retail and marketing context? Although zeitgeist is an exceptionally rare term in the marketing literature, Houchens (2010) provides an excellent example in the introductory chapter of his book, entitled *Brand Zeitgeist: Embedding Brand Relationships Into the Collective Consciousness*. Here, Houchens (2010) exemplifies the most mainstream use of the zeitgeist concept: Google Trends, a Google feature showcasing search trends over any specific timeframe— ultimately providing insight into what people had on their minds at any time period (p.1). Houchens (2010) argues that it may be easier to picture the zeitgeist in "periods from a Jazz Age flapper dancing the Charleston to a hippie putting flowers in her hair on the corner of Haight-Ashbury" than it is in the era we are currently living (p. 2-3). How can the concept of zeitgeist be re-imaged to also incorporate the modern-day era? Despite these advancements, Houchens (2010) suggests that the importance of today's zeitgeist lies in "having your product be on the forefront of the consumer's mind" (p.4).

3.2 The Plateau-Mont-Royal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada (1985 – 2020)

My study encapsulates the zeitgeist of Montreal, Quebec, Canada with a specific focus on the Plateau area between the years of 1985 and 2020. First, I am focusing on the years from 1985 and 2020 because my data reflects that this is the time period in these heritage shops began opening and were most popular. This study also pays particular attention to the Plateau because 5 out of the 7 shops I interacted with were located within the parameters of the area— and there seemed to be a cluster of heritage shops in the area in general as well.

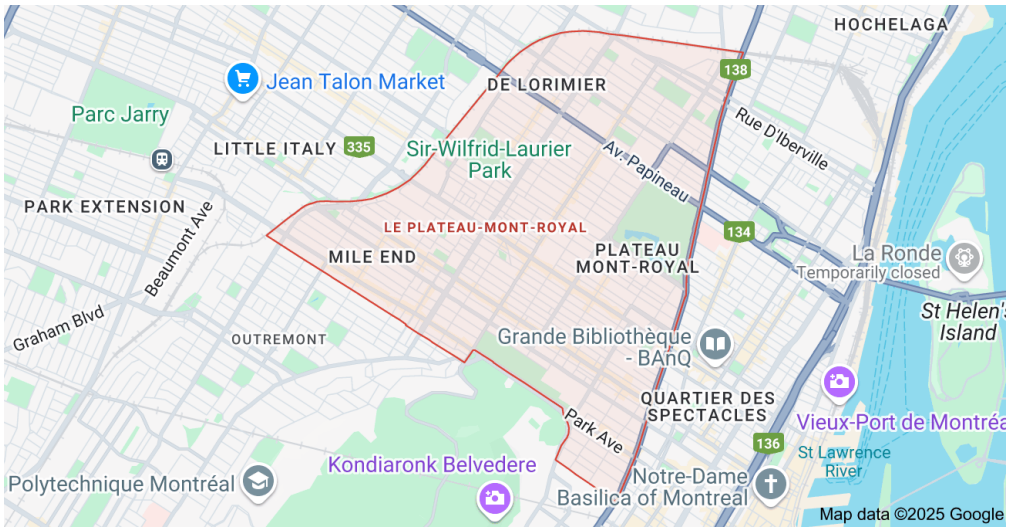

Figure 2 - Map of The Plateau Mont-Royal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Today, Tourisme Montréal (n.d.) describes the Plateau in the following manner:

> For many, the Plateau is quintessential Montréal. Spiral staircases, bagels, Arcade Fire – it all started here in this rich and vast neighbourhood north of downtown. Hip, trendy and artsy, the Plateau – especially its famed enclave of Mile End – is known as much for its residential quaintness as its festive nighttime antics. By day, kids play in the parks and friends debate politics in cafés; by night, restaurants and bars teem with people.

How was this Plateau culture originally established? Well, Rose (2004) uncovered that, after condominium developments became available in the mid-1990s, the Plateau became the "trendiest" inner-city neighborhood in Montreal, with more gentrification than any other area (Ley 1996; Rose 1996). In conducting her study, Rose (2004) also uncovered “a high

concentration of interviewees in the blocks close to the boulevard Saint-Laurent (the storied 'Main', the city's traditional multi-ethnic 'corridor'), which cuts through the Saint-Louis and Mile End neighbourhoods on the western fringes of the Plateau" (p.291). This is the general area in which the heritage shops I researched are located.

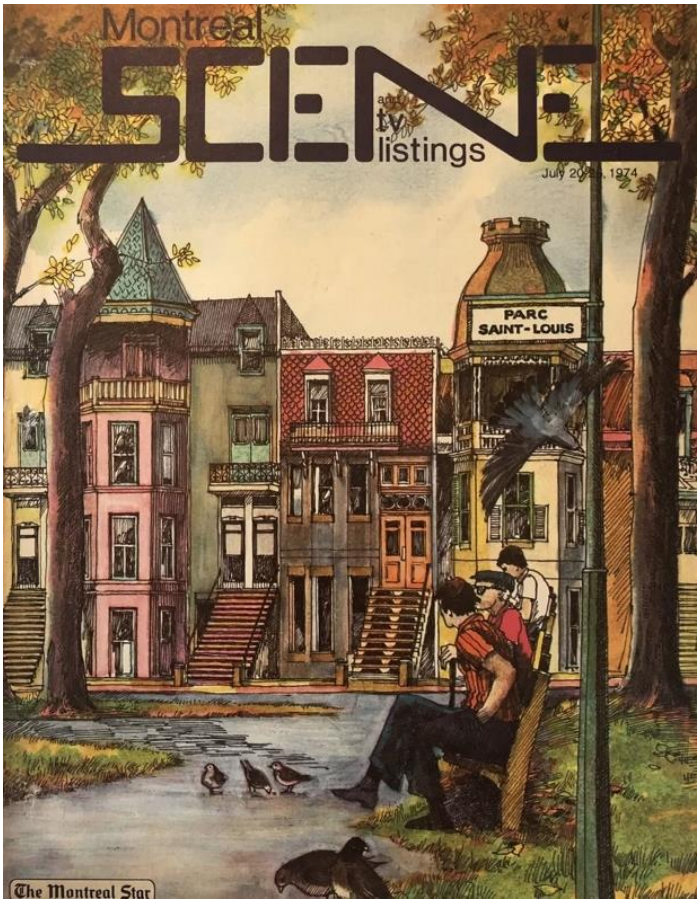

Figure 3 - "SQUARE ST LOUIS" Published by The Montreal Star in 1974 (@mtlretro)

Nowadays, to protect the heritage of buildings in these designated areas, additional permits and authorization are required under the Cultural Heritage Act, which obliges owners of heritage properties to maintain and preserve the original characteristic of their building to "help enhance the history of [the] city." ("Properties of heritage interest," 2021). At the end of the day, I insist that heritage shops are an essential element of this zeitgeist and ultimately make up a vital component that constructs Montreal's history and culture as it stands today.

3.3 Heritage Shops

As mentioned, heritage shops emerged in the Plateau area around 1985. “When we bought the building and opened the shop back in 1989, […] there were about 20-55 boutiques from Sherbrooke to St Denis” said shop owner, Mr. Devi. At the time, these shops catered to the new influx of population settling into the Plateau after the condominium developments in the mid-1990s (Rose, 2004). These shops, selling imported items from South-Asian countries, helped develop the Plateau into the “trendiest" inner-city neighborhood in Montreal (Ley 1996; Rose 1996). These shops are direct capsules of the era of Montreal between 1985 and 2020.

Figure 4 - Inside View of a Heritage Shop

Although the demographic of these shops and the area in general has changed, the Plateau remains a marker of Montreal’s history and culture. Nonetheless, heritage shop owners are faced with the challenge of reviving these historic times—markers of authenticity— to claim their relevance in today’s commercial landscape. We must also uncover how the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the zeitgeist that lit up these streets before supposedly turned dark.

4. METHODS

To study my research question, I used a qualitative approach, combining three methods: in-depth interviews, fieldwork, and secondary data. The data was collected over four months, from October 2024 to February 2025, to further understand the underlying process of how shop owners craft their businesses and how consumers engage with these spaces. The final data set comprises six in-depth interviews, 25 hours and 54 pages of fieldwork conducted at four different shops, and 233 customer reviews retrieved from Google Maps. The study was focused on the area of the Plateau-Mont-Royal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. To explore the boundary conditions of this study, I expanded my focus to one shop in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. After conducting fieldwork and realizing how challenging it was to interact with customers without disrupting their shopping experience, I gathered Google reviews as a secondary data source to gain an insider's look at consumers thoughts and feelings about these spaces.

Method	Sources	Data Set	Goal
Interviews	6 owners	6 in-depth	Understanding the owners' intentions that shape these businesses
Fieldwork	4 heritage shops	25 hours 54 pages 205 photos	Exploring the product selection, layouts, and atmospheres of these shops Analyzing consumers' shopping experiences and interactions with staff
Secondary data	Google reviews	233 reviews	Understanding consumers' impressions of heritage shops

Table 1 - Data Table

Overall, the primary data collection process occurred in the following sequence: first, I researched and carefully selected sites according to an established set of criteria; second, I got in contact with heritage shop owners to begin interviewing them; and finally, in the meantime, I

made multiple fieldwork visits to selected shops. As for collecting secondary data, I extracted customer reviews from Google Maps. Once I compiled all primary and secondary data sources, I then coded and analysed the latter.

4.1 Primary Data

4.1.a Site Selection

Between May and September 2024, I identified a list of shops in Montreal according to the following set of criteria:

1. It must sell imported items from foreign countries (like incense, crystals and stones, clothing, jewelry, furniture, home décor, figurines or deities, singing bowls, etc.)
2. There should be only one independent shop (or two), but not a chain.
3. It must be an owner-operated business.

The following table lists the shops I studied in a randomised order, with each one being given a pseudonym so that the shops themselves, the owners, and staff members all remain unidentifiable and untraceable. Each shop is also assigned a self-classification based on the response I received directly from the owners during the interview, reflecting how they choose to categorize their own shops. The table below also contains the countries from which each shop imports from, Full Moon being an exception since the owner works with a local supplier and the product origins were not shared.

Pseudonym	Self-Classification	Product Origin	City
Nucifera	“Metaphysical Store”	India and Brazil	Toronto
Soundscape	“New Age Meditation and Healing Shop”	India	Montreal
Good Fortune	“Bohemian Style Shop”	India, Thailand, Turkey, Nepal, Indonesia, China	
The Teacher	“Buddhist and Zen Home Décor Store”		
Full Moon	“Metaphysical and Spiritual Shop”	Unknown	
Under the Sun	“Cultural Lifestyle Boutique”	India and Turkey	
Around the World	“Arts and Handicrafts Store”	Mexico, Guatemala, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Nepal, Africa, and Hong Kong	

Table 2 - Sample of Heritage Shops

4.1.b In-Depth Interviews

To gather valuable insights from local business owners, I conducted 6 in-depth interviews between the months of October 2024 and February 2025. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the crafting process, including the owners’ backgrounds, the cultures they grew up in, and how these factors have influenced the sourcing, creation of their shop, and the selection of their product offerings. In other words, the interviews provide insight into how owners’ authenticity markers eventually become a form of consumption for others.

After compiling a list of shops and doing preliminary visits, I used various contact methods (in-person, phone, email, and social media) to arrange three consecutive interviews. Based on these initial findings, I reviewed my interview guide, then conducted three more interviews to gather more refined data. First, I had previously contacted and spoken with Varsha, so I knew she would be my first interviewee. I recruited this participant by reaching out via

email, followed by a phone call. Next, I visited Harish's business and asked to speak with him. Although he was not there, I inquired about his preferred method of contact. The employees gave me a business card, and I reached out through Instagram's direct messages via the shop's page. We then had a phone call to set up the interview. As for Vincent, I walked into the shop and found the owner was the only one working there. I obtained his contact information, and we scheduled both an initial interview and a follow-up interview over the course of two weeks. The situation was similar with Mr. Devi, as it is a family-owned business; I met him in person right away. Mr. Devi denied doing a recorded interview but allowed me to take notes while we had a conversation. Furthermore, I approached Maria and recruited her over the phone. I then stumbled upon Ayda, whom I also recruited over the phone. Overall, I secured a sample of six participants: one was a previous contact that I reconnected with over email and phone, one I contacted through Instagram, two were approached in person, and two were recruited strictly over the phone. For the one shop owner in Toronto, I conducted the interview over Zoom.

Pseudonym	Industry Experience (Years)	Heritage
Varsha (W)	11	Finnish and Indian
Harish (M)	21	Indian
Vincent (M)	39	Canadian; Hungarian Parents
Mr. Devi (M)	37	Indian
Maria (W)	10	Canadian; Italian, Syrian, and Egyptian Parents
Ayda (W)	10	Kenyan

Table 3 - Sample of Participants

To maintain the interviewees' anonymity and protect the shops from becoming identifiable, both the shop owners and their businesses were given pseudonyms. Regardless of

their heritage, they all now operate in the same two Canadian cities, each with 10 to 40 years of experience in the local industry. Of the six participants I interviewed, 3 were men and 3 were women. In terms of heritage, one participant was Finnish and Indian; two were Indian; one was Canadian with Hungarian parents; another was Canadian with Italian, Syrian, and Egyptian parents; and one was Kenyan.

As part of my ethics application to Concordia's Ethics Committee, I submitted my preliminary interview guide, which was inspired by my initial visits to the shops over the summer. At the time, I had four main research questions that explored the classification of these shops, their atmosphere, the intentions behind the shop's design, and the role these shops play in shaping Montreal's commercial landscape and culture. The questions and probes outlined in the guide served as a reference to help steer the interview discussion and provided prompts to spark the conversation when needed. Naturally, questions that weren't on the original interview guide also came up during the discussion. After the three initial interviews, I revised the guide to place more emphasis on the shop owners' journeys, focusing on four key areas: their upbringing, the process of sourcing their products and how it reflects the values instilled during their upbringing, the way they incorporate these values into the look and feel of their shops, and how employees educate customers about the business's values through the stories behind the products. This final interview guide can be found in **Appendix A**. Overall, going back to the original interview guide helped refine the data collection and added more depth to the next three interviews.

The interviews lasted on average 1 hour, with the shortest lasting 45 minutes and the longest lasting 2 hours and 45 minutes. The full duration of the interviews is shown in **Appendix B**. The interviews took place in person in various spots within the shops, usually on a piece of furniture, in a backroom, or behind the front counter, depending on whether the owner had

employees working and could leave the shop or if they were working alone. Before each interview began, I provided the participant with the consent form and briefly explained the study's context (referred to loosely as “Atmospherics Study” to avoid revealing any bias). I also told the participants that their responses would remain anonymous and that they could withdraw their consent at any time before, during, or after the interview. I used the Voice Memos app on my iPhone to record these interviews in person, and the Zoom “record” feature for the one that was conducted online. Regardless, all the audio files were securely stored in a Dropbox folder shared only with my supervisor. After I transcribed the recordings using Happy Scribe, I cleaned up the transcripts by fixing any spelling errors before beginning to code the documents.

4.1.c Fieldwork

Field note sessions were a crucial part of this study for three main reasons. First, being in the shop and taking notes truly allowed me to familiarize myself with the product selection. Second, I got to experience the atmospheric elements firsthand, engaging my five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch). Most importantly, it gave me the opportunity to observe interactions between customers and the owners or employees, which provided me with more insights into customers’ shopping experiences, beliefs, buying habits, perceptions of the shop, and their reasons for purchasing items from these shops.

Field note sessions in Montreal were typically conducted on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, or Sunday afternoons, when the shops were busier. However, I took the shop owners’ preferences into account, as some preferred not to have me around on weekends due to high traffic. These sessions were carried out during November and December 2024, a less busy period compared to the summertime, with slight increase in activity during the holiday season. When

taking notes in the shop, I usually positioned myself discreetly, either sitting on a pouf in a hidden corner, on a piece of furniture in the shop, or on a stool behind the front counter. During these sessions, customers often mistook me for an employee and would ask me questions. Whenever this happened, I clarified that I did not work there but was happy to direct them to an employee who could help. Above all, my aim was to observe discreetly, like a fly on the wall, without disrupting any interactions unless a customer initiated a conversation with me. In those rare instances, I maintained an objective stance, generally agreeing with their comments. At times, I asked follow-up questions or probes, similar to how I would when conducting a regular interview. Regardless, being able to document my own sensory experience of the shop all while observing customers allowed the shop to truly come to life. It also provided a comparison of how my experience aligned (or didn't) with theirs, highlighting whether they noticed the same elements as me or if they had a completely different experience.

My fieldwork sessions lasted 2-4 hours each, and I visited each shop 2-4 times, attempting to vary the days of my visits to observe whether the shop was busier or to encounter a different crowd. In total, my fieldwork sessions amounted to approximately 25 hours, resulting in 54 pages of notes. For the first half of the sessions, I took handwritten notes, as I found it easier to manage a notebook on my lap than a laptop. I would then transcribe these notes into a more detailed document. However, realizing that this process was too time-consuming, I switched to typing directly onto my IPad for the second half of the sessions. I tried to write my notes as formally as the setting and seating arrangement would allow, but I always reviewed and formalized them shortly after the session when the experience was still fresh in my mind. During these visits, I also made sure to stand up and walk around the shop when there were no customers around. I did "walkarounds" in order to mimic a customer's shopping experience in

the space and to capture specific products in detail. I would also do this when a customer interaction was happening further away in the shop. If I wanted to learn more about what they were talking about, I would get closer and pretend to be another customer, all while actually listening in. Sometimes, employees engaged in vulnerable conversations with customers about their travels to certain countries, their spiritual or religious beliefs, the significance of deity figurines, and even their plans to renovate their own homes. These discussions sometimes unveiled personal aspects of customer's lives and identities, which revealed information that would have not been possible to uncover using any other methods. In the face of these moments, I relied on my ethical agreement to guide my actions and omitted any information deemed too personal from my notes.

I added to my notes by taking photos, for which shop owners or employees provided consent through a separate consent form for fieldwork. These photos were taken to capture the product offerings, including masterpieces and rare items, and the atmosphere and layout of the shops. No customers, owners, or employees were included in the photos to ensure anonymity. These photos were saved on Dropbox, in the same folders as the notes for each shop, but in a separate subfolder. In total, I took 205 photos at the shops that gave me consent to take pictures.

During the first few fieldwork visits, I took notes by hand in my notebook and then expanded on them after returning home— while the experience was still fresh on my mind. Typically, I did the first visit to each shop's when it was less busy, so that I could focus more on the layout of the shop and the product selection. While doing this, I also noted when customers entered the shop. When observing customers, I noted down brief descriptions of their physical appearance, their skin color, the language they were speaking, what products they were looking for, the questions they asked, and any comments they made to people they were shopping with.

Sitting behind the counter also gave me the chance to gain insights from employees or the owners, including information about new items they had received, how the shop was performing, the types of customers coming in, as well as what they were buying. Whether I used a notebook or an iPad, both made it appear as though I worked there. While typing, I tried not to stare at customers, observing them from the periphery of my vision to avoid making them feel watched. I never explicitly stated that I worked there, but I certainly used the assumption that I did as a way to blend in. By taking on this stance, I never disrupted consumers' shopping experiences, nor did I ever lie about my role as a researcher— continuously aligning with the ethical guidelines that structured my research. Whenever customers had a question and asked me assuming that I worked there, I was transparent about being a researcher and would direct them to the owner or staff members who could help answer their question.

As someone who pays particular attention to details, I found writing by hand in my notebook to be a somewhat frustrating experience. These shops are packed with items on every surface, making it overwhelming to capture everything. At first, I felt like I could write a whole book about each item—everything is so rich in texture, colors, patterns, and meaning. I wanted to document every detail, but with only 2 to 4 hours at a time to take fieldnotes, it was impossible to capture it all on the spot. Thus, I practiced memorizing some of the details and used my notes as quick reminders to elaborate on later. An example of the refinement process, from handwritten notes to finalized fieldnotes, is shown in the following table.

In-Store Notes	Excerpt from Fieldnotes
bags shoved onto hook leather and crochet colourful	To my right, there are purses hung up on the wall— or should I say "shoved" onto the wall. The hooks for these bags are overloaded, some bags trapped behind others. The materials offer an array of sensations; from leather and suede to crochet and linen. Every colour combination you can practically imagine.
man long dreads camo sweater and pants tam-tams	A white man with long brown dreadlocks walks into the shop. He is wearing a camouflage-patterned sweater and pants. "I'm passionate about music, but those might be a little noisy for the apartment," says the customer while looking directly at the tam-tams lined up on the ground in front of Vincent's counter.

Table 4 - Transition from Handwritten to Refined Fieldnotes

Switching to writing directly on the iPad made things slightly easier, allowing me to organize my notes directly into a Google Doc as I wrote them. If the shop owner or an employee was talking to me, however, I would simply jot down quick points to expand on later. Whether I was using my notebook or the iPad, though, I always made sure to refine my notes afterwards— some definitely requiring more attention than others. As I continued my fieldwork visits, I found a happy medium between being detailed and remaining efficient with my time.

4.2 Secondary Data

4.2.a Google Reviews

As mentioned earlier, it was often challenging to engage in conversations with customers in the shop without disrupting their shopping experience. While I managed to have a few memorable conversations with customers and overheard comments they made while shopping, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of the shop as well as their shopping experience.

Luckily, some customers leave reviews on Google Maps about their visits. These reviews often include a star rating (1 to 5), written feedback, and sometimes images. To gather this data, I used a third-party platform called Outscraper, which offers a Google Maps review scraper tool that downloads reviews into an Excel sheet. Initially, the dataset contained 383 total reviews, including those with only star ratings. I excluded these, along with reviews written by the shops themselves (to boost their ratings) and any photo attachments. Ultimately, I kept only the written reviews, as my main intention was to gain a deeper understanding customers' thoughts about their shopping experiences, whether positive or negative. These reviews usually touched on the following topics:

- What customers purchased.
- Impressions of the shop's product selection and atmosphere.
- Interactions with staff.
- Reasons for their purchases.
- How often they visit the shop.
- Recommendations for other customers considering a visit.

4.3 Data Analysis

To interpret the data, I uploaded the interview transcripts to qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. Prior to this, my supervisor and I discussed the major themes and contrasting views that were apparent from interview to interview, and within the fieldnotes themselves. Bearing these themes in mind, I open-coded each document and exported the results into an Excel sheet. Here, the codes were analyzed in terms of frequency and significance to determine the data sets' overarching patterns (Spiggle, 1994). Second, I merged similar codes together in order to refine

these similarities to a minimum. These open codes were then abstracted into axial codes reflecting relevant theories in today's marketing literature while leaving room for my own theoretical contributions. Once I merged the codes, I then identified the major overarching themes that, together, would guide the theoretical framework of this study. Afterwards, I filled these umbrella themes in with sub-codes to generate the complete outline for the findings section of this thesis. Through my analysis, I uncovered the overarching narrative that spanned across all of my data.

4.4 Ethics

Before interviewing any participants, I compiled and submitted my ethics application to Concordia University's Research Ethics unit, which was approved in July 2024. This approval set the ethical framework that guided every step of the study. During this process, I identified the ethical risks that would be at play in my research and familiarized myself with them to keep them front and center while I navigated my research. To avoid making these shops identifiable and to safeguard professional reputations, I employed pseudonyms for the shops themselves, the owners, and staff members. In addition, the owners' pseudonyms and those of the shops are not correlated to avoid them being traceable. Knowing that certain discussions could touch on personal aspects of one's identity, I also made sure to listen and to learn rather to ever impose any of my own beliefs.

5. FINDINGS

The findings uncovered in this study reveal a multi-layered process that heritage shop owners undergo to craft their narratives of authenticity vis-à-vis Montreal's mainstream clientele—typically, white individuals with a particular fascination for India, its culture, and its spirituality. As illustrated below, heritage shop owners are complexified by their *rooting (heritage*), honouring their values and ancestry through every aspect of their business. To *source* products, heritage shop owners use methods that align with their belief system acquired through their heritage. They will then *infuse* this belief system into their shop through the selection of the products themselves, the crafting of a sensorial shopping experience, and knowledge-sharing practices. These heritage shops, popular between 1985 and 2020, are vital elements that make up the city's commercial history and culture as it is today, hence the term *rooting (city)*. The rooting of the city also feeds back into these personas, as owners tend to leverage their authenticity by claiming lived experiences with iconic Montreal symbols, such as the Mont-Royal Tam-Tams, St-Viateur Bagel, and Expo 67. This bidirectional process, from the owners to the city, forms the zeitgeist of Montreal between 1985 and 2020.

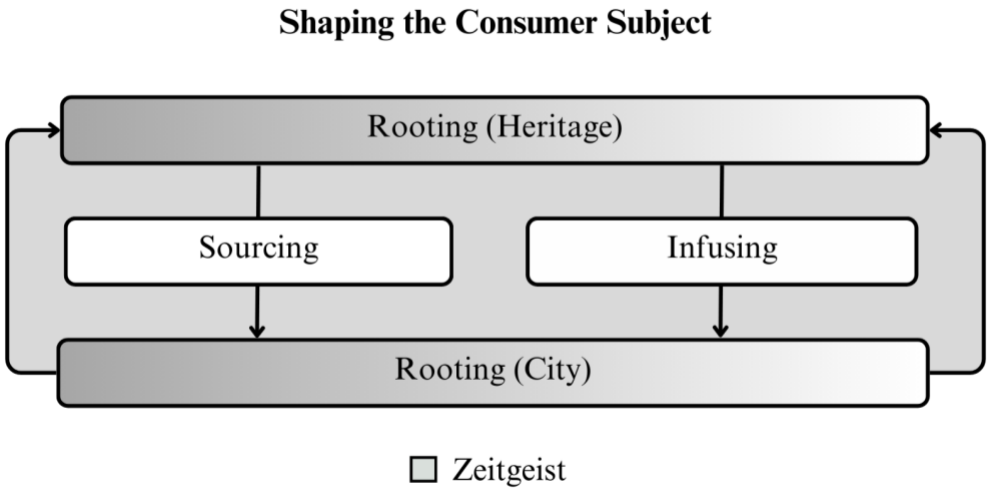

Figure 5 – Illustration of Shaping the Consumer Subject Model

The findings will be divided into four parts, transcending through each layer of the model: 5.1 Shaping the Consumer Subject, 5.2 Rooting (Heritage), 5.3 Sourcing and Infusing, and 5.4 Rooting (City).

5.1 Shaping the Consumer Subject

As briefly mentioned, the shaping of the consumer subject is a process that occurs ongoingly as owners progress through each layer of the model. Owners shape this heritage shop consumer subject using two methods: through the selection of the products themselves and the crafting of a sensorial and educational shopping experience. Furthermore, the practice of infusing is accomplished through knowledge-sharing practices employed by the owners and staff members (regarding how they sourced their products, and which values guided them in that process) and also through the infusion of the five senses. When owners share knowledge about their heritage, consumers will evaluate whether the derived values and belief systems align with their own. If so, there they have it, they have acquired a new customer. Through these two types of diffusion, the owners accomplish their aim of transmitting their values and belief systems to their clientele, which ultimately forms the consumer subject and guides their future consumption principles. It is worth noting, however, that there likely must be an initial curiosity or willingness for these consumers to enter these shops and to want to learn about the meaning behind it in the first place. Thus, this section will be divided into three parts: how the owners describe their clientele, what I observed about the clientele in my fieldwork, and ultimately how the consumers view and describe themselves in the Google reviews. The aim is to showcase that the type of consumer who typically seeks knowledge about owners' authenticity—and who have curiosities about these shops in general— are typically white individuals with a fascination for India, its culture,

and its spirituality. This is important to understand as owners may have to adjust or simplify their culture for it to be understood by others.

Depending on the owner, and how long they have had their shop open, they may be able to tell how the clientele has changed over the years. Harish, who started his business in 2003 in Montreal, provided some insight into how the consumer demographic has changed. As mentioned, a specific type of clientele was more likely to enter these types of shops in the first place, as explained by Harish in his interview:

> Hippie chic is like, I'm talking 2005, '06, '07 to 2012, '15. This was like open-minded and more spiritual people. […] These are the people who were coming to shop in my store at the beginning. Spiritual means for me, they know Indian philosophy. Philosophy means they believe in Hinduism, God, and the multicultural countries in India. They love this type of spirit, like yoga, Indian music, Indian movies, Indian food, and meditation. These are the kinds of people who were attracted to my business.

He adds that the demographic itself has changed in the following way: "It changed a lot. Before it was 90% locals, more Quebecers. Now, it has changed for students. 50% of my clientele is made up of students who stay one or two years. They come to shop a lot. It gets reduced from local buyers, but there's been a lot more students." He explains that this shift is, in part, due to a change in style trends from hippie chic to bohemian. Here, it is worth noting that "hippie chic" is an emic term employed by Harish, but I am using the terminology 'heritage shop consumers' to refer to this type of clientele. He says that the "hippie chic" trend dropped right before the COVID-19 pandemic. After that, he catered more to the bohemian style, which he describes as follows: "Every woman wants to look pretty and different. And this merchandise I'm carrying it. […] All these girls want to look different, and they want to have a Bohemian style. They want to wear cool stuff, dresses, jewellery. This is how I describe Bohemian style." Although the demographic of the clientele has changed in itself, their desire to be different and to connect to Indian culture remains.

Mr. Devi has run his shop at the very same location for almost 40 years. In his interview, he describes the shift in the clientele as follows:

> There are all sorts of customers, but typically they will buy incense, singing bowls, and some clothing. But we sell to everybody. Customers find what they need when they come here, that they can't find in other stores. In the 70s and 80s, it was the hippie era – the time when our kind of products and clothing were popular. Now, since the times have changed, we limit our products more to those that are essential, like incense. In the summer season, more tourists visit the shop.

Figure 6 - Pyramid of Incense Full on All Four Sides

Between Harish and Mr. Devi, who are just about a 20-minute walk apart, it is clear that the clientele back in the day was more hippies, and now it has turned over to students and tourists. Because their shops aren't all that far apart, they may share the same clientele. Today, this is the consensus for the other shops as well, apart from Under the Sun that is considered more of a "high-end store." Typically, Under the Sun sells most to "work professionals between 30 and 60," but the owner also makes a conscious effort to try to be inclusive:

> What I love about the store, and which was very important for me, is that it's a store for everybody. As long as the value values resonate with you, it doesn't matter if you have $5 or $50,000 to spend. There will be something here that you can leave with. There are little trinkets and little things, but everything comes with the same values. Every little bracelet that we have, we know who is making the bracelets. We know where the stones are coming from. It's not just another bracelet from a massive factory somewhere that nobody can really track and trace. (Interview)

Figure 7 - Jewelry Table

Once again, she guides her answer using the values of her business. It does not matter who the demographic is, so long as their values connect with those of the business. Next, I will go on to point out this finding in my fieldwork by focusing on the customer descriptions and interactions I noted down while observing inside the shops. One interaction I had with a customer at The Teacher was particularly memorable. This individual was a white woman, approximately in her 40s, with dark squared glasses and a brunette pixie cut. She came into the shop looking for a lounge cushion and was recounting to the employee that she just came back from visiting the Southern part of India to go to an ashram. At one point, the employee left the shop to check the inventory at Good Fortune, the owner's other shop just a few steps away. "You said that you just came back from India?" This question alone triggered a very interesting conversation. Right away, the woman told me that I "have to visit India someday" and that

“India is an elite culture, everything from the intricacies of the clothing to the spirituality itself.” This excerpt from my fieldnotes explains the rest of this interaction:

> While the employee was still away, the woman pulled out her phone and started showing me photos from her trip to India. She had taken photos of Indian women wearing bright colourful Saris. She made it a point to show the contrast between these Indian women and the Pakistani women covered in black from head to toe (wearing burkas). She was right, the difference was quite striking. She also specified that women wore such intricate and beautiful Saris while men wore regular Western clothing. The customer also showed me photos of her daughter, who was wearing a turquoise Sari herself. She also had a dashing jewelry headpiece that dropped down onto her forehead. She quite literally looked like a while Princess Jasmine in the photo. She specified that her daughter was quite tall compared to the Indian women there. She also showed me a photo of her and her daughter eating at a restaurant.

This woman was so passionate about her belief in India that she invited me into it, showcasing photos on her phone of the travels she took with her daughter. If anything, this excerpt goes to show just how accurately the owner describes his clientele in the previous section. In each of the four other shops, I jotted down physical descriptions of customers in my fieldnotes, which included the following:

> Another customer walks in. It’s a young white man, wearing a black aviator hat and a light pink sweater.

> The first customer walks in. It is an old and short white Quebecois woman wearing a long white coat, a black beanie, and black rectangular glasses. Her voice is raspy. She comes in asking for a salt lamp.

> The front right wheel of his chair bumps gently into the large lion statue resting in the main entrance. Sitting in this wheelchair is an older white man. In French, he says: “It's good, it's accessible.” He gives the employee a thumbs up as he continues to roll in.

> She has a beanie on, and a gold septum piercing. She is white from what I can tell. She takes a moment to look at the singing bowls. Out of the two customers I have seen, they have both gone towards the singing bowls.

Figure 8 - Walls of Singing Bowls

Although I did not conduct fieldwork in Nucifera or Full Moon, both owners spoke about their clientele nonetheless. In sum, the owner of Full Moon described the Plateau's market to be of all walks of life, but with a majority of students. In the Toronto shop, however, the owner describes her clientele as anywhere from kids saving up their pocket money to people coming in for Reiki. She specifies women are "more likely to turn to alternative sources of healing" than are men.

While reading the Google reviews, the two patterns that merged most were being transported to a new place through the atmosphere and also the interactions people had with the owner of staff members. This Google review, written for one of the shops, represents the whole of these findings: "Charming place that transports us to Asia with impeccable customer service." At the beginning of this section, I explained that the consumer subject is formed not only by the atmospheric elements but also through knowledge-sharing practices. The customer segment that we identified shapes the product offering in these shops, but also vice-versa. Certain shops adjust to the trends and styles visible through their current clientele.

5.2 Rooting (Heritage)

This section of the findings is divided into three parts that reflect the sub-roots hidden behind this code: *5.2.a Heritage Roots 5.2.b Travel Roots and 5.2.c Career Roots*. First, heritage roots reflect heritage shop owners' deep desire to honour their heritage through every facet of their business(es). In sum, these various markers are intended to portray authenticity. Second, this section illustrates certain owners' travel adventures and how these experiences of being exposed to other cultures allow them to develop an acquired taste that they will eventually infuse into their shops. Third, I will look at how owners' career roots have led them to the heritage industry.

5.2.a Heritage Roots

At the start of each interview, I prompted each participant by asking them: "Are you originally from Montreal?" Two participants out of six responded yes, but in that moment, reverted to explaining their parents' origins. The following excerpt is pulled from Maria's interview, showcasing this occurrence:

> I'm born here in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. […] My mom is born in Egypt, Cairo, where her mom is Syrian, and my grandfather, her father is Italian from Livorno, and my dad is Italian from Campobasso, more in the South of Italy. They met here. Really, I went to school here.

The other participant born and raised in Montreal, Vincent, responds similarly in his interview:

> I was born here in Montreal, but I've spent a lot of time in the United States. I lived in Florida for a number of years. My father had sailboats that he would charter out to different islands, and I lived on the island of Bimini, just by coincidence where the movie *The Silence of the Lambs* ends. […] My mother's Hungarian, and my stepfather was Hungarian, and he traveled.

Among the two owners born and raised in Montreal, each one of them reverts to talking about their lineage or the other countries in which they once lived. It is as though being born and raised in Montreal is not a sufficient answer in and of itself. Why might this be? Not only is it a

way for these owners to personally honour their culture and lineage, but Ger (1999) also explains that “exploring one’s exoticism, or one’s heritage, commercially is a strategy promoted by different institutional actors” (as cited in Zanette et al., 2021, p.142). By transforming themselves into an exoticized “other,” these owners create “distinctions between the colonizing, mainstream Canadian “us” and the colonized, minority Canadian “other”” (Veresiu and Giesler, 2018, p. 560). By positioning themselves in this way, they infer that they are on the side of their immigrant counterparts, the majority of people who run these types of businesses in Montreal.

Conversely, owners who were immigrants responded in a manner that emphasized their heritage, where they originally are from, the impact their home countries have had on their identity and how these factors would eventually shape their business(es). For instance, Varsha responded as follows in her interview:

> I mentioned to you I was from Finland, but it's a bigger story than that. I'm half Indian, half Finnish. Grew up my youth in India for a good chunk of time for about 10 years. I still go to India regularly once or twice a year, of course, because of business to source things, but also for personal reasons. And those years that I lived in India impacted me as a person very deeply, and of course, my Indian roots and my heritage from that side. But when I moved here and wanted to do a business like this, it was important for me to have a connection to India and also to portray all the beauty that country has to offer.

This quote suggests that Varsha’s identity, as she defines it today, has been heavily shaped by her upbringing in India. Her heritage and her roots have stuck with her. Her desire to integrate this childhood vision of India—and its incomparable beauty— into her Montreal shop is all-consuming. She holds on to that idyllic perception of her youth in India and aims to integrate that feeling into her shop for others to someday experience.

Figure 9 - Large White Marble Buddha and Colourful Terracotta Pots

In connection to Vincent and Maria, Varsha also makes a later reference to her parents. Here, referencing her parents is meaningful to her heritage as her family has been in the business generation after generation, as explained in the following excerpt from her interview:

> This goes way beyond my life as well, not just for the past 10 years, but also to my roots. My parents, back in the day, 30-40 years ago, were in a similar business. A lot of the artisans, the suppliers, and craftsmen that I work with nowadays, used to work with my parents way back when. I work with their children, obviously, in the second generation, and third generations.

This quote challenges the traditional perception of heritage as "the locations that lies at the heart of a brand's identity and history" (Dion and Borraz, 2015, p.77). In this context, heritage does not only contain cultural origins or bloodline but also includes the generations of families whom Varsha and her parents have worked hand-in-hand with for decades. One could argue that heritage also includes the market actors in these countries of origin who play a part in bringing these businesses to life. Furthermore, a parallel can be drawn to Veresiu and Giesler's

(2018) work, focusing on the marketplace sphere and the notion of 'equipping.' Although it may seem that the owners alone are equipping these market offerings, there is nonetheless a chain of producers helping craft these products before they are imported into the actual shop. Lastly, this quote also unveils an interesting dynamic at play between Varsha's youthful vision of India and the foundation of the industry modelled by her parents.

Harish, on the other hand, views heritage as the history that lies behind this hometown. Harish provides more insight into his definition of heritage by sharing about his place of birth:

> I opened a store in India, the first one, in my town called Khajuraho, which is in Central India. We have a lot of tourists coming from abroad. And this town is famous for Kamasutra temples. There are Kama Sutra arts inside the temple, which was built in the 800 and 900 centuries. So, there are a lot of Buddhist temples, like Buddhist and Kama Sutra, and Hinduism. There were a lot of Japanese and Korean tourists coming, and they often brought Buddhas. The idea comes from there, to sell Buddhas to make more clients come into the store. Plus, nobody had this, because in India, Buddhism is not very popular. It's still there, but not popular. So, it was a unique name, The Teacher. Now, believing in Buddhism is the top. A lot of people follow Buddhism.

Harish contextualizes his hometown by referring to Kama Sutra temples. In the third century CE, the ancient Indian philosopher Vatsyayana composed a text entitled Kama Sutra. In sum, Kama Sutra is a Sanskrit term that translates to "Principles of Love." The text itself is "about the art of living— about finding a partner, maintaining power in a marriage, committing adultery, living as or with a courtesan, using drugs and also about the positions in sexual intercourse" (Doniger, 2003, p. 20). Nowadays, it has been transformed into the type of gift that "westernized yuppie types" will give someone for their wedding (Doniger, 2003, p. 19). In other words, "Americans and Europeans today think that the Kamasutra is just about sexual positions, the erotic counterpart to the ascetic asanas of yoga" (Doniger, 2003, p. 19; Coskuner-Balli and Ertimur, 2017). This is also evident within the quote itself, where Harish decides to sell Buddhas because that is the preference of the clientele—Japanese and Korean tourists in this case— in

Khajuraho. In India, Harish adjusted his product offerings to the mainstream clientele of tourists although Buddhism is not popular there. When immigrating to Canada, Harish would continue to cater to this mainstream 'Buddha-loving' clientele that exists in Montreal.

Although Ayda does mention her parents and their religious beliefs in her interview, I will mainly touch on it when discussing her immigration to Canada in the following section. For now, I would like to gear my focus on the following quotation from Ayda's interview, which describes her take on heritage and ancestry:

> As someone with a South Asian background, I wanted to be able to honour my ancestors and bring that feeling and that vibe and that chemistry to honour my heritage here in North America. […] And so, the ancestors around my spirit ancestors, not necessarily my heritage ancestors. Without eliminating anyone, because I think that we are all one. We just have different meat suits. […] So, our capsules, our meat capsules, our bodies. When I say meat suits or our meat capsules, I simply mean our physical structures. Although, in my understanding of people that I've talked to and learned with, is that sometimes we come across the same people. They just play different roles in our lives. I believe in reincarnation. When I say reincarnation, I mean, our spirit continues to progress and continues to evolve until we have fulfilled our purpose.

Similar to what Varsha hints at, heritage is not always a question of being blood related. Here, Ayda not only connects her ancestry to the region she comes from (South Asia) but also to the place in which she lives currently (North America). Her ancestry is not dictated by what is traditionally regarded as heritage, but rather through her spirit ancestors— which ultimately includes everyone since she believes that we are all one at the end of the day.

Overall, it is clear to see that heritage is perceived and leveraged differently by all six interviewees. For Vincent and Maria, their heritage is in part defined by their parent's lineage. For Vincent, heritage is also about the places you have visited and lived in. Varsha's view of heritage, on the other hand, is dictated by her upbringing in India and her parents being in the same industry for decades beforehand. Those generations are children whom she is designing with is a crucial element of what makes up her heritage. Finally, Harish is connected with the

ancient Kama Sutra symbols originating from his hometown yet adjusts by selling Buddha statues— a popular product not only for tourists there but also for the mainstream clientele in Montreal.

5.2.b Travel Roots

As mentioned, this section will focus mainly on our participant with the most travel experience: Vincent. Yet, I will also delve into some of Harish's travel adventures to diversify and support these findings. Overall, this section provides a clear understanding of the process from first acquiring these experiences to eventually leveraging them as sales strategies. First, Vincent begins sharing the extensive list of countries that he has travelled to up until now:

> I've been in this business since 1986. I started for 10 years travelling to Mexico in an old truck from Montreal all the way to the border of Guatemala, and then that's from 86 to 96. In the interim, I started going to Asia, mainly meaning Thailand, Indonesia, India and Nepal. Later on, I went to Africa and also did parts of Kowloon and Hong Kong to buy things in night markets such as jade and so on to bring back to Montreal to sell.

Figure 10 - Wall of African Masks and Incense

Hence, this quote reveals the primary motive behind Vincent's travels, namely, to buy handicrafts to be able to sell them in Montreal. It also reveals the general geographical area where these shops typically source of import from: South Asia. From my personal experience conducting this study, Mexico, Africa, Kowloon, and Hong Kong are rare locations for owners to import from. This gives Vincent a bit of a competitive advantage against his counterparts in the industry. I was curious to understand where this urge to travel and collect handicrafts arose in the first place. Hence, I asked Vincent: Where does your passion for travelling originate from?

> It probably started in the beginning because of my parents. […] We travelled from P.E.I. one summer, and another summer we went all the way to B.C. by car. We saw all the provinces. […] And my father brought me to Jamaica when I was 16. So I was, like, already scuba diving there at 16 and with rays and all kinds of stuff. So, I like travelling.
>
> When it came to the idea of travelling and buying handicrafts, it was for fun and because my father was doing it. We bought wholesale watches. What's popular today are these big chunky men's watches. Then, they had the same popularity because they were divers watches. […] We would go up to a stand of carvers making mahogany statues, and we would adjust the time and date on each watch and then put them on. Then, we would go to the carvers, who are smoking giant joints. We'd say, look, we don't have money." We traded these watches because we knew the Jamaican could sell the watch to another Jamaican, but he couldn't sell the statue to another Jamaican. I piled up my bags with a lot of statues that I gave to my relatives when I came back. Then, I got a feel for it.

An insightful connection can be made to Varsha's story; Vincent's career was somewhat handed down to him through his parents who enjoyed travelling, similar to how Varsha's parents led her to continue in the same business that her parents worked in. Vincent's father is what first exposed him to this business altogether. Yet, this was not all sunshine and rainbows. It came with a particular range of challenges, from health to safety concerns. Vincent emphasized this message at many points throughout his interview:

> In this type of business, you sometimes encounter danger. For example, when I went to Mali, Africa, I was buying cowrie shells and different masks and so on. I went into a market, and I took some pictures of a market that had zebra skins, you know, not lion, but wild cat skins, and all types of animals and bones that they use for superstitious

> rituals. I took pictures of that, and two big guys came up to me, grabbed me and just took my camera. I said, “Listen, I'm not a journalist. I'm not here, you know, showing what the Africans are doing that's bad or good.” I said, “I'm just a guy from Canada and I want to buy a kilo of your Cowrie shells. How much are you selling them for?” I have to switch it right away, right? Some guys in Africa ended up saying, “Okay, you're there for that.” They sold me the shells. And another young guy came and said, “Oh, no, they're not bad guys. They're just here buying stuff.” If you don't know what to do in a situation like that and say the wrong thing, there are no police, there's no one to help you.

There is always a positive and negative side to everything and these travel adventures that Vincent shared depicted all these highs and lows. It is the game that importers, like Vincent, have to play. They must be prepared at all times, ready the say or do the right thing to keep themselves safe. It is not a simple shopping spree like it would be at the mall. Additionally, this quotation speaks to the character of this adventurous type of owner: risk-taking, daring, brave, resourceful, and self-sufficient.

Additionally, Vincent must also be extremely culturally sensitive wherever he goes. Vincent provided some insight into how he prepares for adventures in foreign countries, where he may not be aware of the cultural or societal norms beforehand. Speaking on this topic, he says: “While I was travelling, I would take advantage of the historical sites or ruins from ancient civilizations. While I was bay, I got a little more into the culture of the country. And also, before I went, I read a lot about the culture, so I know the dos and don’ts.” Through experiencing and reading up on countries’ history and culture, Vincent becomes more culturally sensitive in a way that may not be possible just by living in Montreal. His travel lifestyle is what complexifies him into a culturally educated individual; the knowledge he acquires firsthand through these experiences is the knowledge that he can eventually pass on to his customers as they purchase these imported products from various places in the world. As I conducted fieldwork at Around the World, this is something I tried paying particular attention to when he interacted with

customers. Each item comes from another country and tells a story. Every one of the stories that Vincent acquires throughout his travel experiences becomes a selling point:

> "Am I wrong or are these just 26$?" asks the customer while pointing at the wind chimes. Vincent responds: "They are 26$, minus 25% off. They are from India. They are wind chimes with Ganesh on them." "And, just roughly speaking, how much are these?" she points to the lantern hanging down from the ceiling. Vincent tells her that they are lanterns made in India. "Other shops on St Laurent have these but they're expensive, I have to say your prices are fair!" She is also looking for two jade-beaded bracelets, but Vincent says that he does not have any— only one but it is priced at 100$. She nods her head in an understanding manner. She points at two bracelets hung up knot the wall behind Vincent and asks to see those. He tells her that the bracelets are made of jasper and amethyst. Vincent has the bracelets in his hands, feeling bead by bead to identify the stone. "Great selection," she says. "These are leftovers from all my adventures," replies Vincent. (Fieldnote)

After this customer exited the shop, I could not help but ask Vincent: Why do you inform the customer about the origins of the products? The following excerpt from my fieldnotes is what I transcribed from his answer:

> Men typically like to know how things are made, or if they are carved by hand for example. He goes on to say that "the story sells the piece." Vincent explains that he's gone great distances to retrieve these items, and he yearns to share those stories. He specifically told me that, in Indonesia, he encountered a tribe that would pick up items with their feet. These people living in the village had teeth like horses, but they looked like gorillas. This is an example of a story that he can tell—the story of the people in Indonesia, their carvings and exotic woods. He explains that this way, he has something to say about the piece; not just that they bought at Walmart. "These pieces can represent death, fertility … They hold cultural meaning," insisted Vincent.

Figure 11 - Hand-Carved Wooden Buddha

A significant code that emerged was called “added value,” which reflected consumers’ desires not only to purchase handmade or imported items but also to acquire the stories or the healing properties behind the items. This way, customers feel as though they are getting more for their money. Oftentimes, the products are one of a kind and come from faraway lands, which also enhances the value proposition for customers. This is exactly what Vincent points out here. Their cultural meaning is what makes them interesting; these little items represent something much bigger, like messages about death or fertility. This finding also reveals information about the consumers— that they must have a willingness to view these items not simply as they are but also through their intangible properties.

To support the findings uncovered through Vincent's travelling lifestyle, I will touch on Harish's travels to South Asia and the impact it ultimately had on him and his businesses. First, Harish opens up the floor by telling me about his first time travelling to Thailand and Indonesia:

> We went in 2010, me and my friend. […] We went to Thailand, Indonesia, and Nepal just travelling. I went to Nepal before coming to Canada a few times; Thailand and Indonesia, it was my first experience. While being there, I discovered so many things. But it was not a business trip, so we did not bring cash to buy anything. Then, we planned to go a few months later, and then we started to shop and make things there.

This quote illustrates how Harish's travelling experiences eventually led him to design products for his shops. Here, travelling and uncovering the power of design through travel are two components that construct Harish's lifestyle. Through this, he was able to pinpoint his unique value proposition. Like Vincent, who used his travelling stories to leverage his sales, Harish would design items that no one else was selling in Montreal beforehand. Harish tells us more about his growing interest in design in the following excerpts:

> I started to make harem pants; nobody else was selling these at the time. I began by making one kind. After a few months and a few years, I had made almost 50 kinds. From one kind to 50 kinds, which helped make my shop unique. I made harem pants in India, Thailand, Nepal, and Indonesia. I made a big variety of harem pants, which helped me become more popular and more unique because these kinds of pants did not exist here before.

For Harish, the secret to being unique was in designing his products— a process he discovered through travelling. From Vincent to Harish, it is clear that adopting a travel lifestyle has allowed them both to acquire sales strategies that differentiate them from their competitors. Vincent tells customers about the lengths he went through to acquire these products, and Harish can confidently say that he's been to these countries and designed his products in the process.

5.2.c Career Roots

This subsection will focus on heritage shop owners' previous careers and showcase three emerging themes from the data: shop owners are oftentimes initiated into the industry at a young age; they encounter an impactful individual that will plant a seed in their mind to start a business later in life; and, in the interim, they take on a more a traditional career path that requires similar skills needed to work in the heritage business. In the end, they all turn towards the heritage industry. These themes were reflected by the code "fate," which appeared several times throughout the interviews.

As a high school student, Vincent was exposed to the heritage industry at a young age and felt an instant draw to it. He explains this work experience in further detail as follows:

> One of the major influences on me starting this type of business was I worked for a man. He was from Lebanon and went to Mexico to be trained as an interior designer. He eventually went to New York and continued the training there. Then, he came to Canada, and he opened up a wild store with handicrafts of stuff from everywhere. […] I was a high school student. I would run from Dawson College and work from 1 to 5 and so on. When I had off days, I'd work for him. He had a lot of things from Mexico. I'd never seen these things. I fell in love with these things. (Interview)

Telling from this quote, Vincent and Maria encounter several similarities in their young lives. For Maria, her grandmother is the person to redirect her path by teaching her about the lesson of time. This message from her grandmother would ultimately direct her toward another field until she was called to start her own business when the time was right. Maria's fate as a medium was influenced by her grandmother when she was young. She elaborates further on this moment here:

> Since I was very small, I've spoken to spirits. I was very much connected, then disconnected because I got scared at a time. I did tea readings and coffee readings at the age of 11-12 years old. At the age of 13, my grandmother was the one who asked me. I was in the kitchen, and I was giving a friend of mine a reading. She goes, "You come

> here." She goes, "I want to see what you're saying." I gave her the teacup, and she said, "You are the one who has the gift to be doing this." She says, "What you've been saying is accurate." But she told me, "Maria, everything has its timing, and you're too young to be doing this at the moment. Everything is going to come with time." (Interview)

Vincent and Maria both innately gravitate towards these industries and encounter impactful individuals who redirect their life paths. Vincent opened up about his past career, where he was "working in the United States for about six years [and] had an apartment in Chicago." Surely, his experience as a salesman would be useful for navigating negotiation in the countries he would buy from, but also to sell his products once in Montreal. The "fate" moment that happened in Vincent's career happened quite early on when he was a student. This is precisely what happened to Ayda as well. The person to redirect Ayda's life path, in this case, was her work supervisor:

> Sometimes the universe does things that don't make sense. As a result of being kicked out of my [university] program, I started working... It's a work/school program where you go to school and then you then you can work and pay. I was in the psych department. The prof, who was my supervisor, was in the psych department. He said to me, "Ayda, you ever consider doing psych? You're really good at this." I was just doing simple data entry and asking him questions about things, and he's like, "This really resonates with you." And so, what happened was I switched majors.

If he hadn't told her where her talents lie, she may not have considered following this interest. This individual has had a large impact on redirecting Ayda's path. Similarly, Vincent goes on to explain just how much of an impact the man he worked for has had on his career:

> The influence for me to start the handicrafts business was working for this guy. I was unpacking, pricing, and selling the things that he brought from Mexico and different parts of the world that I found very interesting. He influenced me with the idea of selling something different that people liked, and it gave them joy. That's the biggest influence besides going on trips to Jamaica and different countries. That's where it all started. I was a semi-manager of a store as a kid, and I loved what I was doing. And here, you know, 60 years or 50 years later, it's a byproduct of that.

In this first work experience in the heritage industry, Vincent began learning the skills that would serve him when he opened his own business later in life. This is similar to Maria, whose career in the creative scene as a fashion stylist in Montreal would provide her with the knowledge of how to help people. Maria elaborates on this as follows:

> I came really from a family of artists, and I worked as a fashion stylist for 30 years. For me, it was important to make people look good on the exterior, but after some time, we need to work on the interior. I decided after 30 years to open my crystal and spiritual shop, where I wanted to bring a new age feeling. Today, I help people work on the inside. I'm a medium. I work in the incarnation, meaning what's your purpose? Are you on your life path? I do a lot of spiritual life coaching and various stuff. It's really working on the inside. I think my first career, which I loved, was bringing me to this. When we talk about the spiritual side of what I do, it's always been there. (Interview)

Like Varsha and Vincent, Maria also had family members working in the same industry as her. One of her sisters worked in fashion marketing and the other in the music industry. The lifestyle all three sisters gravitated towards is likely no coincidence— a potential influence from the parents. Nonetheless, a clear link is established between Maria's past and current career, namely moving from working on people's outside appearance to helping people feel better within. Like Ayda's work in the healing modality, Maria is drawn to spirituality but also to the metaphysical, which she defines as the following:

> Well, metaphysical is everything. It's a combination of things, products that are used for spiritual work, and reconnection with yourself, bettering yourself. For me, metaphysical is everything intangible. Someone could come here and say, "You know what?" She's a yoga teacher and could come in here to get a crystal because it's great for meditation and maybe use an essential oil— very more Zen. She has that approach. Then you could get a little witchy girl here coming into the store who's going to need certain candles for rituals. She's going to probably need a pendulum because she has something to ask, and maybe on her way, she's going to grab a tarot card. You get that type of clientele. For me, the metaphysical is all that is the spiritual world.

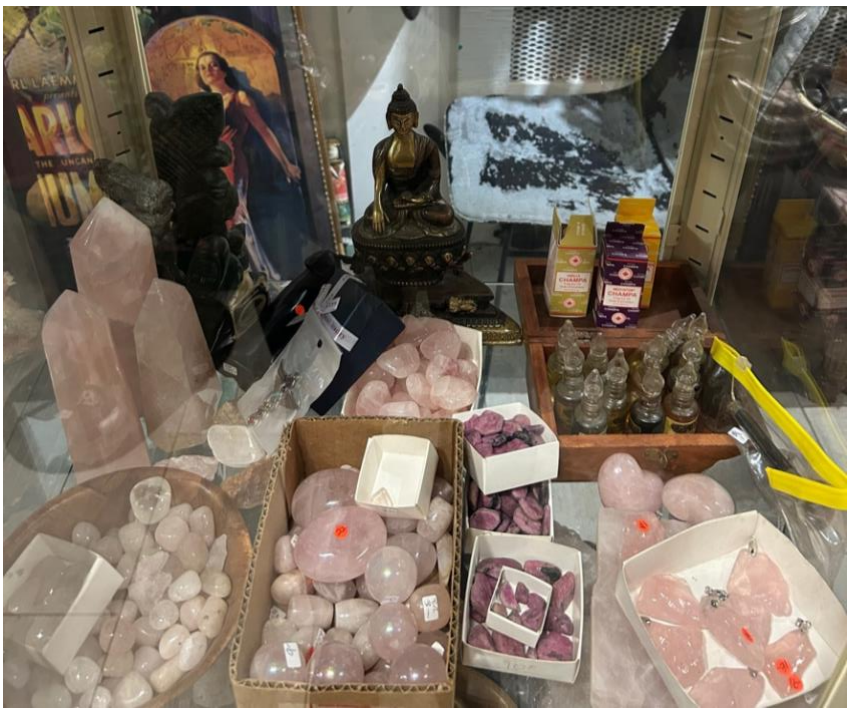

Figure 12 - Crystals and Stones in a Glass Display

Ayda draws a comparison between spirituality and religion, whereas Maria interconnects the spiritual with the metaphysical. This goes to show that spirituality cannot have a set definition, as it varies depending on individuals' life experiences and points of comparison unique to their reference points. In other words, heritage owners believe in and portray these notions through their lived experiences and inner gifts. This type of occurrence also happened to Ayda, as she explains in the following excerpt:

> The universe just kept changing my trajectory. That's how I got to where I was. I went to university, have a BA in psych, went to George Brown College, and have a human services diploma. Then I worked in the social service sector for 30 years, and now I'm an intuitive holistic Reiki master.

Throughout every one of these academic and work experiences, she has been called to help others. Curious to know more about this passion for helping people, I asked Ayda: "You said that you have always had a desire to help people. Where do you think that stems from? Or do you think it's intuitive?" She responded gracefully by phrasing it in the following way: "You

know how some people, they're like lighthouses to people in trouble?" Here, Ayda's career is centered around the desire to help others. This is similar to Maria's career, where she worked in the fashion industry styling people but later followed her intuitive calling as a medium when the time was right—as advised by her grandmother. Vincent also knew his calling early on from working with the interior designer, inspiring him to join the industry once and for all.

5.3 Sourcing and Infusing

As displayed in the figure, this section will cover two layers of the model: sourcing and infusing. Sourcing refers to the various ways in which heritage shop owners source their products, either by travelling directly to the source themselves, importing by various modes of transportation (plane or boat), or through suppliers. Regardless of the sourcing methods that owners use, one pattern emerged throughout the data. That is, owners will source their products according to the set of beliefs and values they acquired through their heritage, travel, or career roots. Once heritage shop owners have gathered their products, they then infuse these products— gathered in a way that respects their values and belief system— into their shops. This way, their values and beliefs are transmitted through the selection of products in their shops. These messages are also transmitted by the owners and staff through knowledge-sharing practices. To complement these teachings, heritage owners infuse an atmosphere by implementing various sensory elements, through taste, hearing, sight, smell, and touch. Overall, heritage shop owners infuse their identity, values, and beliefs into the items they sell, the stories they tell, and the sensory experiences they provide to consumers during their shopping experience. Here, one section will be dedicated to the shaping of the consumer subject. Purchasing from these shops is how consumers, in part, form their values, belief systems, and consumption practices.

5.3.a Sourcing Origins, Values, and Processes

Every shop owner has their way of sourcing their products, but they all share a common goal through this practice: to be unique. To distinguish themselves from their competitors, they use their distinct sourcing method as a story to leverage their authenticity. All shop owners incorporated this idea into their narrative, which was reflected in my data by the code "unique." However, two points of contrast appeared regarding sourcing practices: shop owners who travel tend to adopt an acquired taste for certain countries' cultures and will source more from those places— ultimately influencing how they will infuse their shop; and some shop owners have established values and ethics (aligned with their heritage) when sourcing products while others do not.

As mentioned, the strive to be unique was apparent across all interviews, but particularly clear in Varsha's interview as well as in Harish's. Last we knew, Harish was designing his own harem pants while travelling to India, Thailand, Nepal, and Indonesia. It seemed that Harish worked with a supplier but also coupled this method with designing his own products. He had a very specific motive behind designing his products, which he touches on in his interview:

> I was making 70% of my own things when I travelled. My supplier had a lot of ready-made things, which I know people will be able to find in most places. I was making similar things but with my own print, my own fabric, and my own design. This made me much more unique. Customers kept coming to this side, which was a dead area at the time.

Harish is open to working with a supplier but uses design as a way to differentiate himself from his competitors in Montreal by becoming the first shop owner to sell harem pants. Thanks to his unique designs, it seems customers were going out of their way to visit Harish's shop at the time. Harish and Varsha leverage the fact that they design their own products to attract a clientele that desires to be one-of-a-kind themselves. This presents an interesting

contrast to some of the other shop owners who do not necessarily place any emphasis on promoting their sourcing methods. Typically, these are owners who work strictly with suppliers.

Vincent's way of sourcing is also unique to him, as he goes to every country himself, picks out each item, interacts with some of the artisans, and experiences adventures to acquire his products. A clear example of this is demonstrated in this excerpt: "I remember one woman wanted to sell me a piece and she ran out with the piece still wet from the paint. She didn't have any more purple paint, so she finished it in red. I said, okay, that looks cool." He even went as far as driving in his truck across the country to import. Now that he is at the tail end of his career, he tells me about the products he has left in his shop and where they are from:

> Right now, most of what I have is from India in the sense of handicrafts, a little bit from Indonesia, and in the minerals, they come mainly from Brazil, China, India, and some from various other countries. But that would be the majority of the stones are imported from those parts of the world. And we have also, you know, jewelry from another number of countries, but those are still the same countries. My main goal was Indonesia and India in the last years of my career. Before, I used to do a lot in Thailand and Indonesia, but Thailand is very commercial. Everything sort of looks the same after a while. Nepal is more complicated because you get sick when you go there. (Interview)

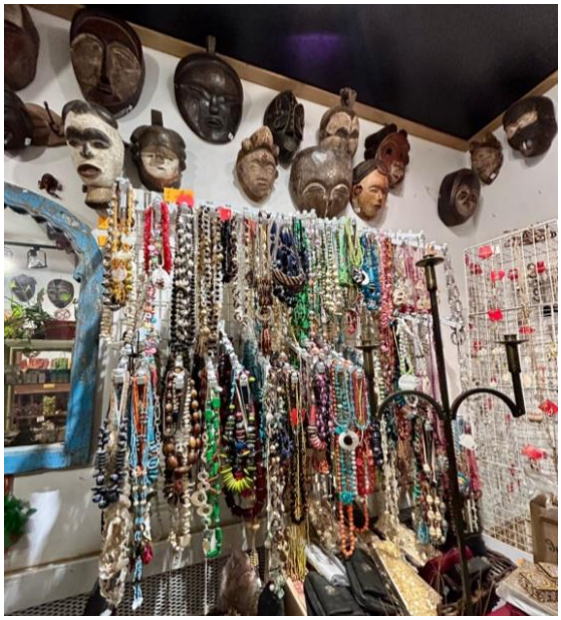

Figure 13 - Necklaces Hung Up on the Wall

While travelling to these places, he valued learning about the cultures. By travelling to certain countries, he would get a sense of the cultures he felt most connected to and would mainly import from those. Here, he explains which countries he likes best importing from:

> I really love Mexico the best, okay? Because the people, the food, everything about it. […] Like India, because often their culture is in their art, whether it's God figures or the colours they use. I find the two countries that really incorporate colours beautifully, the main ones would be Mexico and India. Their clothing, their sarees, for example. The colours are amazing, the colours they use, you know. […] It's very beautiful to look at. Those are the two favourites, I think, for colours. But mainly, in the end, I just was importing from Indonesia and India. (Interview)

Varsha and Harish, for example, would import from India— the countries they are from. In this case, since Vincent is from Montreal, he takes a different approach by importing from the countries he feels most connected to through experiencing their cultures and their art. These are the values that guide Vincent's sourcing practices: his love for certain cultures and the power of their art all while going to the countries directly and interacting with the artisans themselves.

Varsha shares similar values as Vincent but has a more strictly established set of ethics since she works closely with the craftsmen in India to design her products. How she treats the artisans she collaborates with directly reflects the values and ethics of her business. The difference between Varsha and Vincent is that Varsha has an ethical responsibility to treat these artisans fairly, as described in the following interview excerpt:

> One of the core values here is sourcing products that are sustainable. By sustainable, I mean the whole process from beginning to end. Everything should be black and white for our customers. We know from where we source each piece. We know who made it. We know that there's no child labour used. We know that everybody working to put these pieces together is paid a fair wage, and they're working in safe conditions. There's been a lot of controversy, especially in the past decades, about fast fashion and sustainability. There clearly is a shift towards people valuing and appreciating the things that are ethically sourced so that everybody along the way has had their fair share and worked in good conditions. That was very, very important for me.

Since Varsha designs her products, she can protect the artisans and craftsmen she works with. Since she knows and has interacted with every person that helps her bring her design visions to life. Thus, she must cultivate these relationships by ensuring these workers are satisfied. How does she do this? Clearly, by employing a sustainable approach in her work: ensuring that there is no child labour, that everyone is paid fairly, and that they work in a safe environment. These values are truly the foundation of her business—the source that allows her business to be. Varsha also speaks on another value that shapes her business, but once again ties it into the relationship she has with the artisans:

> But also portraying Indian culture through my eyes in the way that I see it and the beauty of the craftsmanship and really the artisans that work there. I spend endless time working with them, talking with them, visiting their families, getting to know them, and appreciating them. And it's become a nice connection. (Interview)

Through this quote, Varsha infers that it is not only important for her to instill these values but also to portray Indian culture in the way that she perceives it. Why might this be important? Although this question will be delved into further in the formation of the consumer section, it is worth hinting at now that these values are instilled to create a version of India that she pictures—the youthful vision of India she wishes for her customers to envision when entering her shop. This will be important to remember when we delve into the next section when I talk more about the notion of infusing. Nonetheless, Varsha's type of sourcing is unique in the following way:

> I design them myself, meaning I would source old doors and old window frames, then together with the artisans in India, convert them into cabinets, bookshelves, mirror frames, or something else. […] But keep in mind that every piece is always unique here. There are no two pieces. There's no production anywhere. It's really all handwork, artisanal, one piece of each item. Once it's gone, it's gone.

Oftentimes, Varsha does not even know what she will be receiving in her next shipment. She knows what she needs, like dining tables or coffee tables for example, but will not know exactly what has been created of her design until she unpacks the shipment in the warehouse. This is a vastly different method from a supplier who mass-produces their products. Here, they would just be getting so many of the same products. Knowing that each piece is different and guided by the businesses' core values, is an added value proposition for the consumer.

Figure 14 - Buddha Statues Resting on Wooden Stands

As for Ayda, Maria, and Mr. Devi, they all source through suppliers. Ayda says that she has a couple of suppliers whom she deals with. She has one for her stones imported from Brazil and another for incense and essential oils imported from India. Maria has a supplier for her crystals located in Napierville, Quebec, Canada. During the sourcing process, Maria says that, when she makes her selection of a crystal or a stone, two criteria are important: that they are real,

as well as the feeling, vibration, or energy they evoke. Finally, Mr. Devi imports all of his products from India, where he is from. He imports by boat, which supposedly takes 10 weeks to deliver instead of 10 days— yet it is much cheaper. All and all, it is clear that see that owners have different ways of importing and do so based on their values, belief systems, and what is most familiar to them.

5.3.b Crafting a Sensorial Shopping Experience

These shops are identifiable through a distinct sensorial atmosphere, which engages consumers' five senses: taste, hearing, sight, smell, and touch. To showcase this argument, I will illustrate a side-by-side comparison between what the owners said in the interview versus what I observed in my field notes to explore how and why owners consciously (or subconsciously) integrate these sensory elements into the atmospheres of their shops. Finally, I will use Google reviews to support these findings and provide an inside look into how customers felt about their sensorial shopping experience. Ultimately, the argument I am making is that shop owners integrate these sensory elements to recreate their idealistic vision of their home countries, travel experiences, and/or belief systems.

This section will display one sense experienced in each of these shops to demonstrate the theme that ties all of these shops' distinct atmospheres together. As a disclaimer, I am not doing so to group them into the same box; each of these shops' atmosphere is distinct in its own way. This is also not to say that these shops only focus on one sensory element over another; I simply want to showcase that this phenomenon appears as a pattern across all six cases.

i. Taste

Starting with taste, some shops will choose to serve tea. Yet, what we learn from these excerpts is that tea symbolizes much more than simply just a stimulus to one's senses.

Interview	Fieldnotes
We serve an herbal Bengali tea, which is like chai spices. It goes well with everything that you see here and has that flavour and taste of the East. That allows another sense to feel what we want people to feel here. […] By noon, we usually have our tea set up ready. People walk in, they're offered a cup of tea while they do their tour. They're welcome to take some to go as well. I like that feeling in Indian culture, in Middle Eastern culture, and in Turkish culture. Tea is an important part of welcoming someone. It's also that feeling that you want to share with people.	I take the chance to get up and get a small cup of tea from the thermos sitting on the table at the front of the shop. As I take a sip, I recognize the tea. It is a Bengal tea; it is my favourite, and I have it at home. It has the taste of sweet spices with an air of cinnamon.

Table 5 - Intention Versus Outcome (Taste)

The thermos of tea is not just a kind gesture, but as Varsha hints at, a representative symbol. Tea, in this case, not only adds to the consumer's sensory experience but also displays a cultural meaning. Here, tea is a literal metaphor for representing the culture's warmth.

Figure 15 - Fresh Chai Served in a Ceramic Cup

In itself, serving tea is a gesture that indicates collectivism and hospitality, providing Montrealer's with insight into India's culture— both through visual appeal and how it makes the consumer feel. A Google review that supports this finding is the following: "Staff were very friendly and welcoming. Offered us tea. Neat store." Here, the consumer connects the offering of tea with the notion that the staff was friendly and welcoming— the exact message that Varsha was aiming to infuse.

ii. Sound

Next, I will explore the sense of sound as highlighted in Harish's shop:

Interview	Fieldnotes
We don't only play Indian music because we have employees from different countries. We also play Latina and Arab music. We play what my employees want to listen to. It's different from day to day, but a lot of the time we play Indian music. Customers like that kind of music, actually. As I said, people love Indian culture a lot. […] There aren't any restrictions, but I don't like hip hop to be played. My employees play music according to the store style also. They're not into hip-hop or popular music. We play more classical and more smooth music.	Suddenly, I heard a song that spoke to me. I did not know the song, so I wrote down some of the lyrics: "Wake up in the morning, and I levitate...My heart is open." This song sounded like daily affirmations and mantras put against a rap beat. Upon googling these lyrics, the song is titled "Morning Asana" by Londrelle. As this song plays, the Guatemalan employee lights up sage and blows on it. The effects of the sage feel warm, and it smells delicious. Between the beat of the song, the scent of the sage, and the new flow of customers coming in, the shop comes to life.

Table 6 - Intention Versus Outcome (Sound)

The song I heard in the shop was written by a modern Black underground artist, not necessarily anything classic but it was smooth. The excerpt from my fieldnotes aligns with the guidelines that were given by Harish, although this time it wasn't Indian music playing. The songs played depended on the culture of the worker as well as their vibe. The Guatemalan employee that I got to know during my fieldwork was a meditation coach. The song "Morning Asana" certainly matched her profession. Although music specifically was not mentioned in the

Google reviews, it certainly was an element I paid attention to. When music wasn't playing, the atmosphere was not as prominent. Music and sounds are crucial to crafting a lively atmosphere, which was certainly an element noted in this Google review: "So many beautiful pieces here. It is so hard to decide. Lovely atmosphere. Friendly staff. Very fair prices." Here, the atmosphere of the shop is described as "lovely" and is a culmination of many elements.

iii. Sight

As for the sense of sight, Vincent integrates this element in a few days. The following excerpts from my fieldwork and my interview with Vincent provide more insight into this:

Interview	Fieldnotes
There's a lot of glitzes with the crystals because they're sparkly and shiny. The variety of things that I have here, and the tightness of the store, make it sort of like not a rummage place to go through. Everywhere you look, you're going to see something. If you look a little harder, you'll see something else.	A white woman with green hair comes into the shop. She is looking to buy a gift for her friend. She is willing to spend 50 dollars. Vincent says the shop is not organized, and that there is a little bit of everything. She answers that this "messy-ness" speaks to the part of her brain that likes hunting. […] The necklace she ends up buying is from Indonesia. "There are so many things to look at, it's so shiny everywhere," says the girl.

Table 7 - Intention Versus Outcome (Sight)

Vincent's shop is a tighter space filled with items on every surface. There is something everywhere you look. I observed a clear comparison between Vincent's tight shop and his recounting of when he used to load up with truck with imported products on his travel adventures. It is as though his shop today imitates the time and place when he filled his truck with items to bring back to Montreal. In the Google reviews, one customer also picked up on the tightness of the space and framed it in a positive light by speaking on the energy the shop emanates: "I have never seen such an incredible and unique variety of merchandise anywhere

else, despite all of my travels and searches for the paranormal and the metaphysical. [The shop] has such great energy that you have to walk in and browse every inch of the store." All of these elements, from the overwhelming number of products to the tightness of the shop, create a unique atmosphere encapsulating Vincent's travel adventures.

Figure 16 - Walkway Inside the Shop

iv. Scent

This brings us to the sensory element of smell, and how it is incorporated into a shop. Overall, in my experience as the researcher, every shop burned either incense or sage. This was reflected in the data as follows:

Interview	Fieldnotes
We burn the incense, different kinds of incense. People love the smell of incense, too. We try to put some incense outside, like near the door. So, people, whoever passes, they feel good, and they want to come inside. It always makes people feel happy when they come inside the store too.	Right outside of the shop, two incense sticks are lit and poked into the wall right next to the cigarette holder. Their warm smoke meets the cold air as Montrealers walk by.

Table 8 - Intention Versus Outcome (Scent)

For Harish, burning incense is not only a matter of having a pleasant scent in the shop but also about making the customer feel good. Furthermore, burning incense offers a comparable symbolism to the practice of serving tea; it further represents the hospitality, warmth, and welcoming nature that lies behind India's culture.

Figure 17 - Burnt Incense Sticks Resting on Top of a Glass Cabinet

The Google reviews for this shop mentioned incense many times, like in the following entry: "Lovely place, good service, artsy decorations, meditation cushions, incense, everything you need in one place." In the heritage world, incense is a must. It's typically people's go-to purchase. Most consumers seemed to enjoy it, other than this one person who gracefully

reviewed the shop as follows: “Terrible smells.” Although incense is a popular item, it may not be everyone’s cup of tea!

v. Touch

Finally, I will highlight touch as exemplified in the data gathered at Soundscape:

Interview	Fieldnotes
I ask him if the shop is busier on weekends. He says that they have a small clientele. He also says that everyone is buying on Amazon these days, but that it is killing local businesses. I insist that certain items are always better to purchase in person. He laughs and says, “Like fruits and vegetables, you want to feel and smell them before buying.”	The harem pants range in texture and colour. Some are stiffer, some are softer like the feel of yarn, and others are silky. They are earth colours, such as green, blue, red, orange, and brown. There are other more vibrant colours like purple, sky blue, and turquoise. As I look at the harem pants, the cat comes running up to me and meows. It is so cute; she rubs her back on the bottom of the harem pants. Some have patches of different colours on them, others have patterns and prints of flowers and peace signs, and others are stripped and or have swirls on them.

Table 9 - Intention Versus Outcome (Touch)

Figure 18 - Racks of Colourful Harem Pants

The feel of the garments, decorative cushions, and tapestries offered a variety of sensations. The following Google review, translated from French, connects these observations: "Soundscape offers a wide selection of reasonably priced handicrafts to add an exotic touch to your home or wardrobe." Not only do these items offer an array of textures, but they quite literally add an exotic 'touch.' A lot of Indian garments and harem pants, for example, have a recognizable fabric with stitches woven into the material. It is quite literally the touch of the East.

5.4 Rooting (City)

This brings us to the last section of the findings, where we will discuss the notion of rooting (city). Here, we will delve into the history of Montreal and its iconic symbols as mentioned by some of the owners during their interviews. This section ties everything together because these shops are the byproducts of these owners' heritage, which thrived in Montreal between the years 1985 and 2020. These shops were most popular at the time because they appealed to hippies, and now since the times and places have changed, owners must re-think their approach to appeal to current-day clientele—hence why the arrows in the figure at rooting (city) also feed back into the owners. Thus, this section will discuss several iconic Montreal symbols to exemplify how the consumer subject has changed between when these historical Montreal symbols were most popular and now that they are just a fond memory. In this section, I also want to highlight the specific streets and areas that were booming at the time.

5.4.a Immigrating to Canada and Getting to Know the City

Three participants openly shared their immigration stories with me. These experiences, both drastically different yet share some sort of similarity, give us more insight into what it is like for these owners to arrive in a new country and to open a business very shortly after their arrival. They may not know the city very well, but that sure does not stop them, and they learn more about the city as they undertake their entrepreneurial journey in Canada for the first time. A popular code that kept arising throughout these passages was "humble beginnings," reflecting the challenges these owners faced in trying to start a business in a completely new environment. Overall, this sub-section on immigration slowly starts merging the owner's heritage with the city.

Since Ayda immigrated from Kenya to Canada at a young age, she had the chance to familiarize herself with the area long before starting a business. She went on to share about her upbringing in Toronto, and ties this experience to her relationship with her family:

> I grew up in rural Southwestern, I'm 56, so I've almost been in Canada 50 years. I'll be 57 in April. And growing up in rural Southwestern, Ontario with nontraditional Muslim parents, I had an older brother and a young brother, so I never quite fit into my family. My parents did the best they could with the skills that they had. (Interview)

Ayda goes on the explain that being a non-traditional Muslim means being "more open to the way that the world works." She remained "faith-abiding" until she experienced the loss of her brother and a hurtful experience in a bereavement group. Thereafter, she would "continue to believe that there is a source" and turn to the "healing modality." At this point, she establishes her take on the distinction between religion and spirituality:

> Spiritual is the fundamental part of religion. I think that we are all spiritual because a lot of us believe that there is a source. Even an atheist believes something: that there's nothing. It doesn't matter what it is. It doesn't matter if they believe that we were created due to X or Y, or if they believe there is no source … they believe in something. The distinction is that spirituality is the foundation that every religion is built on. Whether

> it's Catholicism, whether it's Judaism, whether it's Islam, Buddhism, whatever religion, there is a spirituality. There is the do unto others as you want done unto you. There's charity for those less fortunate. There are those basic principles of meditation ... All of those are basic principles of every religion. If you look at religions, if you take them apart, they all have that basic spirituality. (Interview)

All of this is to say that Ayda immigrated from one country to another, but so did her belief system as a potential result of this migration. This change in belief also led her closer to her calling to work in the "healing modality" as she refers to it. Theoretically, Ayda's views also tackle the longstanding debate between religion and spirituality (Zinnbauer et al., 2015).

In this upcoming part, I will come back to the pattern that was originally established at the beginning of this section, namely of owners coming to Montreal trying to navigate their way through these unknown streets all while trying to get into the local business. To connect these dots, let's first turn over to Varsha's story about when she first moved to Montreal:

> I moved from Finland to Canada about 10 years ago. […] In all honesty, when I opened my first store, I didn't know Montreal much at all. I was in Montreal for personal reasons, and my husband is from here. I was still exploring the city myself and trying to talk to different people to see what would be a good neighbourhood for doing something like this. (Interview)

It's one challenge to open up a business, but it's another to move to a whole new city and try to figure out the area in which you want to *root* your shop. Varsha's experience goes to show that you cannot always have it right the first time around and that it is a learning process. Every step of the way, she gets to familiarize herself with each area of Montreal, including their marketability or clear drawbacks:

> The first storefront that we had was in Griffintown. At the time, 10 years ago, Griffintown was still very under development. There were tons of construction, and it had a bright future ahead of it, and big plans for that part of town. And we opened our first store there, and it was a good trial. It was a small store. But I soon realized that, okay, this is not developed enough yet, this area. There's construction everywhere. There's not really a path where people are walking. Everybody's trying to avoid coming there because it's chaos. So, yeah, we reach to clients that had already moved into their

> new condos there and so forth. But also, because I was bringing in a lot of these bigger pieces and very unique things, I quickly understood that Griffintown is small apartments, not really enough room for this. (Interview)

Not only was this area inaccessible and had low foot traffic due to construction, but the target market was not right since she typically sells heavy—and sometimes large—pieces or sets of furniture. However, Griffintown is typically made up of young professionals living in smaller modern condos. Varsha, looking back, had been able to make this connection. Yet, it is that transition period moving from your home country to the city that is potentially disorienting for the inner entrepreneur. The market does not have the same reference points as it does in their home countries, similar to what Harish faced when immigrating to Montreal. Before delving into that, Harish first explains his immigration story in his interview:

> My family's condition was not good. There were a lot of money problems. I dropped my studies and started working when I was 13. I opened a small store. There weren't any difficulties in opening because there were stores there [in India]. […] I began in 1993, and I stayed in that business until 2003 before coming here. I found out some information about where I can sell at the start, how to start to sell, where the flea market was, where you don't need to pay much money or a deposit or anything. So, this is how I began in Canada, in 2003. I stayed there for 14 months at that shopping center. I did not want to stay there, but I didn't have the choice to build my credit or to have a bank account. When I arrived, I opened my bank account, and I started to build my credit. And in December 2024, I rented a store on Mont-Royal and Henri-Julien.

Harish faced similar challenges as Varsha as he did not know how the market functioned here and had to do some research before his arrival. However, Harish's case is particular because he faced serious financial hardship in his young life, which gave him no choice but to leave school as a teenager and start working in the business. For Harish, working in the industry may not have been an initial choice for him, but as he got to Montreal, made a conscious decision to pursue it— although the financial aspect was still extremely pertinent. Similar to Varsha, this first location was not ideal in terms of its location and market:

> The flea market means it's not the best people. People who come there don't have much money. And that way, my merchandise and the price are not fully supported by the people who come there. They don't have money at the flea market. I want to be somewhere where I can be open seven days. At the flea market, it was only four days. It was like 9:00 to 6:00 or 9:00 to 5:00, those kinds of hours. And it was very the end of the city, like in the East, there was a lot of traffic. So, I was not able to support myself with this kind of sale. (Interview)

Not only does this excerpt speak on Harish's ambitious character, but also the consequences of targeting the wrong consumer. Without targeting the right genre of consumer first, it will not be possible to develop that relationship any further— let alone educate them about your culture. If they do not have the money, the relationship kind of falls flat right then and there. Moving locations is ultimately what, for both Varsha and Harish, will make their business work. This way, they can also target consumers who are receptive to being shaped and influenced by this relationship. We can draw ties between these three immigrant owners. All of them have drastically different experiences, but all face some sort of obstacle, whether it be not knowing the city and choosing the wrong area for their shop, redefining their beliefs, or overcoming financial hardship. All three of these owners ended up in Canada and eventually found their niche.

5.4.b The Zeitgeist of Montreal Between 1985 and 2020

Growing up in Montreal, Vincent had the opportunity to attend Montreal's World Expo '67. Expo '67 was an exposition hosted on Saint Helen's Island to celebrate Canada's centennial, bringing in nearly fifty-three million visitors (Anderson and Gosselin, 2008). The theme of the exposition was "Man and his World" (Anderson and Gosselin, 2008, p.4), pretty ironic considering Vincent's extensive travel experiences. He is the only participant to have touched on this Montreal symbol:

> At Montreal World Expo 67, I was 10 years old. They gave everybody a passport. You could go to the African passport or the Russian passport, and they would stamp your passport. So, it gave me the idea of seeing all things and handicrafts made from different countries. That sort of gave me the taste for handmade items. (Interview)

Figure 19 - 1967 Montreal World's Fair EXPO 67 Postcard "Great Britain Pavilion" (eBay)

In a way, this historic Montreal exposition displaying other cultures is what gave Vincent the taste to get into handicrafts, even just at the age of 10 years old. The historical marker of the city fed into this passion. When he would eventually open a shop in Montreal later in life, he would try different areas of Montreal. He explains more about the areas he's opened shops in:

> '86 is when I started in St. Denis. Ten years later, I opened up on the Gay Village, Baudrillard and St. Catherine. And then after that, in between, I had a store in St. Laurent, too. And I tried two different stores on St. Laurent, but I ended up closing both of those and in the end, keeping the Gay Village store until 2020, just before the pandemic. I also had stores on Mount Royal. I had a store also on the cusp of the Westmount area, NDG. It was in Vendome, which is a different crowd— more English. (Interview)

Vincent made his way around the city. Yet, it is worth noting that he first started on St Denis in 1986. He also opened shops a shop on St Laurent and one in the Gay Village. Vincent was directly within the parameters of the Plateau, which was the "trendiest" neighbourhood in Montreal back in the day (Ley 1996; Rose 1996). During his time in the Gay Village, he

mentioned a second Montreal tradition that still lives on today, the summer fireworks on the Jacques Cartier Bridge:

> I used to do the sidewalk sale in the Gay Village while they were doing the fireworks. And, on those days, I think the fireworks started at 10 and ended at about 11. Then you got people walking off the bridge towards the Gay Village. It would be bottlenecking with people. I would stay up until 1 and 2 in the morning selling. (Interview)

From Expo 67 to the summer fireworks, Montreal's culture was marked by bringing people together to enjoy these large attractions. While they still do so in the summertime here, it is not like how it used to be. Mr. Devi, who opened his shop almost 40 years ago now, explains how things used to be on St Denis compared to how it is now:

> St Denis used to be a busy street for festivals. There used to be the Just for Laughs Festival and the Jazz Festival … This is when we bought the building and opened the store back in 1989. Now, it is not going well for the street because we lost these festivals. (Interview)

Figure 20 - St Denis Street in 1987 (@mtlretro)

Just for Laughs debuted at Theatre St Denis in 1983 and has since become one of the world's most famous comedy festivals (*About us*, n.d.). Just recently, in March 2024, the company cancelled their annual festival to avoid having to file for bankruptcy (*Just for Laughs*,

2024). The success of Mr. Devi's shop is partly dependent on these festivals and the high traffic they bring in, similar to what Vincent experienced during the fireworks. Without these events bringing in thousands of Montrealers and tourists, it is difficult for these shops to be successful.

Harish, on the other hand, opened his shop on Mont-Royal and Henri-Julien, which he considered to be a riskier place to open a shop as compared to St Denis and Papineau:

> It was very different from Saint-Denis going to the West, like all the way down St-Laurent. When I rented the store, this was a dead area. There was not any of this. All the stores you see now, the bakeries, the McDonald's, the restaurants, Chinese stores, they all came much later. Hardly 50% of the shops were rented, and 50% were empty and broken buildings. This side was kind of hippie chic. People who were coming to this side were more so hippies. St-Denis to Papineau side, more people would shop there. It was risky to rent a store on this side. It was hard for many years. (Interview)

It is interesting to hear this perspective because nowadays Mont Royal is booming with all different types of businesses. Harish goes on to say that what saved his business back in the day, was another iconic Montreal symbol: the Tam-Tams festival happening every weekend at the foot of the mountain. He goes more in-depth about this point in the following excerpt:

> I found that location on Mont-Royal and Henri-Julien. It was, believe me, much easier for me to be there than if I were there on Saint-Denis Street. What happened is that, in Mont-Royal, people would walk to the mountain every weekend for the Tam-Tam Festival. It was a lot of more open-minded and hippie-chic people. I had the location leading up to the mountain. I was displaying all of my clothing in the window and outside on the door. Each weekend, all these hippie chic people were the best buyers for me. They wanted to be different, and I was making clothing that was different. (Interview)

Figure 21 - Tam-Tams in 1989 (@mtlretro)

Yet again, Harish ties the success of his business to the Tam-Tams, an iconic Montreal symbol. For those who are unfamiliar, the Montreal Tam-Tams is an event that was started by amateur drummers in the 1960s (Tousignant, n.d.). Every Sunday, people will gather at the base of Mont Royal, "in the stretch of Parc Avenue between Pine Avenue and Mont-Royal called Fletcher's Field" (Tousignant, n.d.). It can be thought of as a "communal garden party," where people play the tam-tams, dance, vibe with their friends, and soak up the summer sun (Tousignant, n.d.).

In the early 2000s, Harish said that there used to be a lot more shops like his. "Now, there are a lot less stores like this, honestly. A lot less. There used to be many between Saint-Denis, Mont-Royal, and St-Laurent. During a 10 to 15-minute walk, there were like 20 stores," added Harish. To my knowledge, the Tam-Tam festival is still ongoing during the Montreal summers. During this time of time, Montreal will typically make Mont-Royal Street and St Denis streets

fully walkable, but Harish confirmed that having people walk in the street does not necessarily help his business as people are further away from the window displays and the shop's front door.

Maria mentions a Montreal symbol: St Viateur Bagels. St Viateur is a notorious bagel shop founded in the Mile End by Holocaust survivor Myer Lewkowicz in 1957 (*Our Story*, n.d.).

Figure 22 - St Viateur Bagel 1985 (Official Website)

Maria contextualizes this staple in relation to the success of her business:

> You have Saint Viateur bagel here. Everybody was coming down for the same thing, bagels on Mont-Royal. When you start opening many different spots … Which they did, they opened one in DDO, they opened one in Laval, they opened one in East End. There's one here, there's one there, there's a little bit everywhere. So, the clientele now doesn't come anymore. It's not that, "Oh, it's so exciting. Let's go to the Plateau and get our bagels." Now, everybody is staying in their own sections. (Interview)

In this passage, it is as though Maria is implying that the business has lost a sense of their authenticity by opening multiple locations. It is not as unique as there is no longer one location, people are not as excited about it. Nonetheless, she ties this iconic Montreal symbol to bringing higher foot traffic to the plateau. Without these staples, the district does not seem to do as well—a clear pattern emerging throughout all of the previous interviews that have been mentioned. In Varsha's interview, however, she does not mention these Montreal symbols but does not touch

on preserving Montreal's heritage in another part of town. She has one shop open on St Laurent and another in the Old Port of Montreal. Here, she is planning on opening another extension to the business but has come face to face with the Cultural Heritage Act ("Properties of heritage interest," 2021). She explains this further in the following excerpt of her interview:

> Things are slowly but surely starting to come together. We are facing lots of challenges in our timeline, mainly because it's located in Old Montreal. We're dealing with the "Patrimoine," with the heritage. There are certain procedures that apply specifically to heritage properties that don't apply to properties outside of these heritage areas. That's always causing delays. And we need permits. It's on a provincial level, a municipal level, and a heritage level for each little thing that we want to do. The timeline is taking way longer than I ever expected, but at the same time, it's an interesting learning process and looking forward to being open in the next couple of years.

Though different than the other cases, Varsha is reminded to preserve the history of the city in every legal step she takes toward planning her new business. To extend these findings, we look at this finding extends to Ayda's shop in Toronto:

> It's known as Little India because Girard Street, historically, there were a lot of South Asians settled because it was a less expensive neighbourhood. And then they set up... In every city, there's a strip that's South Asian. So, this is known as Little India. Gentrification has been killing it over the past 10 years. I'm at the one end of it, which is the less South Asian end of it, just by circumstance. (Interview)

Here, Ayda honours the area's history while acknowledging the rising issue of gentrification. Regardless of where these shops are located, a pattern is clear. Heritage shops thrive off the history and cultures of their cities. As implied in the model, it is a bidirectional relationship; the owners fuel the commercial history of these cities, and the cities must preserve their history to pay these shops forward and to help them succeed in today's day and age.

6. DISCUSSION

Investigating how shop owners craft narratives of authenticity through their heritage, their subsequent sourcing practices, and the ways in which they infuse these lived experiences and principles into the atmospheres of their shops, extends the literature on authenticity and the shaping of the consumer subject. In turn, this study can serve as a guide for existing and forthcoming shop owners to familiarize themselves with the process of opening a shop or filling in any gaps if applicable. This way, shop owners can craft their shop in a way that is truest to themselves, their heritage, and the history of the sites on which they are located.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the marketing literature on authenticity by joining all three definitions identified by Lehman et al. (2019): alignment between an entity's internal values and outward expressions, adherence to social category standards, and connections to people, places, or time (p.5). Rather than treating these attributes as separate, this research combines them into one through shop owners' diverse perspectives, ultimately conveying an all-encompassing notion of authenticity in the marketing context. By studying how shop owners perceive and infuse authenticity into their very own spaces, it turns these definitions into something tangible. In other words, this study uncovers that authenticity is perceivable through all five human senses.

Additionally, this study contributes to the marketing literature on authenticity by applying the term to a new commercial niche and geographical context: the gentrified neighbourhood of Le Plateau Mont-Royal in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. In this context, it also adds to the literature on ethnic markets by examining how heritage shop owners tailor their strategies toward a mainstream clientele, which may not necessarily be ethnic. Furthermore, it highlights the often-

overlooked role of ethnic entrepreneurs in shaping marketing systems aimed at ethnic communities (Pires & Stanton, 2018, p. 6).

Furthermore, this study contributes as an extension of Veresiu and Giesler's (2018) neoliberal ideology of multiculturalism model by extending to the marketplace sphere. How are retailers providing suitable market offerings? They are sourcing according to their own belief systems. Who are these supposed retailers? In this case, we focus on those who are closely involved in the sourcing and infusion process—as opposed to mainstream retailers who mass-produce. What do suitable marketing offerings even mean for consumers in this context? Here, suitable means they fit the belief system of the shop they are purchasing from. If the values match those of the consumer, it is deemed suitable and satisfactory to them.

Finally, my study also adds to the literature on market work in a few different ways. First, this study focuses on heritage shop owners specifically, a type of market actor given little to no attention in the marketing literature. I also shed light on how 'cultural omnivores' (heritage shop consumer subjects, in this case) are shaped by these specific market actors and their reflective spaces. Additionally, my study transposes the research on coffee explorations in Europe (Pomiès and Arsel, 2023; Karababa and Ger, 2011) to a new commercial niche and geographical context.

6.2 Practical Implications

> When you start a business, you don't know everything it's going to entail, where the journey is going to take you, what you'll learn from that journey, what you'll win, what you'll lose (Vincent).

While interviewing Vincent, he expressed that there is no magical step-by-step guide that tells you how to build a business, and that you learn as you go. This research can serve as a beginner's guide for opening a business that employs the construct of authenticity using two methods: targeting the five human senses and creating an educational shopping experience.

If anything, up-and-coming shop owners can rest assured that they are in fact ahead of the curve simply by having experienced their own heritage that has guided them to this pivotal moment in their careers. According to the findings in this study, heritage is what guides these new shop owners in sourcing their products in a way that aligns with their beliefs, values, morality, and ethics. From this point on, they can gain a better understanding of what it takes to transpose these elements of self into their commercial spaces. Furthermore, they can recognize that infusing does not only occur through bringing these sourced items into their shops, but that they can also infuse through the crafting of sensorial (taste, hearing, sight, smell, and touch) and educational shopping experiences for their customers— by sharing stories about the product's origins and materials, their symbolism, and the sourcing process for example. In other words, managers can choose to elevate these sensorial elements in order to display meanings about their heritage and culture. Furthermore, this study highlights the power of storytelling in generating sales and creating an educational shopping experience for customers. Lastly, this study brings to light just how important an area's culture and history may feed into a shop owner's narrative of authenticity and ultimately how they fit into the overall aesthetic of the neighbourhood.

For the shop owners whom I have interviewed—and that have already been around for quite some time— this study can serve as a guide to fill in any missing gaps of authenticity. Like Vincent's quote infers, owning a business is a continuous learning experience, and this study is yet another opportunity to reflect on the markers of authenticity that can be implemented into your shop(s) in the name of being true to who you are.

7. CONCLUSION

Like any other research, this study faced its fair share of limitations. First, the sample pool was very small to begin with, seeing as how I was targeting entrepreneurs of a very particular subset of shops located in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Targeting this niche of participants made it challenging to recruit participants. There was only one shop owner per shop, some of them relying on their staff to run their shop(s) whilst only making limited appearances themselves. Other shop owners were out of the country or unreachable for other unknown reasons. All of this to say, future research should also consider gaining additional insights from staff members and consumers to enlarge the pool of participants and diversify the perspectives included in the data set. Additionally, to recruit consumers, future studies are needed.

Another possibility would be to extend this study to other geographical contexts, either in North America or going directly to Asian countries like India, Indonesia, Bali, Nepal, and Turkey— countries where these local shops typically import from. Extending this study to other geographic contexts is important to further test the boundary conditions of this study and to reaffirm that shop owners shape their consumer subjects wherever they may be in the world.

Another limitation that this study encountered was the time period in which the fieldwork was collected, namely between October and February, which is a quieter time of year for these shops. Typically, these shops perform better between May and September. Conducting fieldwork during the summer months would be ideal for future research to collect more diversified data about the consumers and their visits in the shops— not to mention how much easier it would be to notice customers' personal styles while not having to hide behind a winter coat. Consumer's fashion styles are important to observe as it gives us more information on today's trends as well as consumers' purchasing habits and preferences.

Certain owners' narratives revealed a process of adjusting their cultures for it to be more easily understood by others. Can this simplification process towards a mainstream clientele be considered a form of cultural appropriation? I argue that the line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation is drawn through a consumer's purchasing decision, whether they purchase a product from a mainstream retailer who mass-produces or if they visit heritage shops and learn firsthand through the owner's sourcing practices and knowledge. Though I believe this illustrates the difference, future research is required to investigate this dynamic at play.

All six shop owners whom I've interacted with also raised additional challenges that their shops have faced after the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research could conduct a comparative analysis on the performance of these shop before and after the COVID-19 pandemic and investigate further into the reasons why this might be.

Finally, this research aspired to examine how shops infuse through their own websites and social media pages— through their product selection, the images they select, the word choices they employ, and the narratives they craft. Thus, I strongly encourage future researchers to investigate how the infusing in certain shops may also translate through their online presence.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Guide

1. Background

a. How are you?
b. How is your day going?
c. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself (outside of running the business)?
    i. Can you share about your upbringing, including where you grew up, what life was like, and the culture you were raised in
    ii. Are you originally from Montreal? If not, what brings you to Montreal?
    iii. What do you like to do in your free time?

2. Shop Classification and Professional Overview

a. What do you do for a living?
b. When did you first open your shop?
c. Why did you first open your shop?
d. Why did you choose the name for your shop, and what does it signify?
e. How do you classify your store?
    i. (Spiritual shop, metaphysical supply store, or something else?)
    ii. Why do you categorize it that way?
    iii. If shop owner/employee refer to it as spiritual, ask: What defines a shop as "spiritual," and what criteria contribute to this classification?
f. What types of products do you typically carry?
    i. How did/do you source your products? Walk me through this process.
    ii. What aesthetics do you search for when selecting your product offerings? (Handmade, for example.)
    iii. If you were to choose between two lamps, what criteria would you use to make your decision?
    iv. Are there any products that you regret selling?
g. Can you tell me more about your role in the shop?
h. Who runs this store? Tell me about the staff.

3. Store Vision and Atmospherics

a. How would you describe the atmosphere in your store?
b. What was your vision for the atmosphere of your store? How did you bring that atmosphere to life?
    i. How have you adjusted your store design over time to implement improvements?
c. What intentions shape the design of your store, (particularly concerning your personal understanding of spirituality)?

i. Definition: “The interrelated practices and processes engaged in when consuming market offerings (products, services, places) that yield 'spiritual utility'” (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019).
ii. What kind of shopping experience do you aim to provide for your customers when they visit your store?
iii. How do you instruct your employees to interact with customers?
    1. How did you hire them?
    2. How do you train them?
iv. How are employees trained to work at the store? Do they need to learn about the culture

4. Engaging the Five Human Senses

a. **Visual:** How do you determine the overall look and feel of your shop, including aspects like lighting, color choices, and product organization, to create a visually engaging atmosphere for customers? Walk me through this process.
b. **Auditory:** Do you use music or ambient sounds to enhance the shopping experience? If so, how do you choose what to play?
c. **Olfactory:** Is scent an important part of your store's atmosphere? If so, how do you decide what fragrances to use?
d. **Tactile:** How important is the ability for customers to touch or handle products in your shop? If so, why is it important?
e. **Gustatory:** Do you offer any samples of edible items, like tea or herbs, to engage customers' sense of taste? From your perspective, how does this impact the customer experience?
f. **Overall:** How do all the sensory elements in your shop come together to create a cohesive experience for your customers?

5. Location, History, and Customer Demographics

a. What led you to choose neighborhood as the location for your shop?
b. What do you think sets this shop apart from others in the area?
c. Are there other locations for your store, or is this your sole location?
d. How do you feel about being situated here? What makes you feel that way?
e. What advantages or disadvantages come with being located here in [neighborhood]?
f. What is the typical commercial landscape like in this area? What types of shops are prevalent here?
    i. If the owner is aware of the cluster of spiritual stores, ask: Why do you think there's a concentration of stores like yours in this vicinity?
    ii. Are you acquainted with other store owners in the area? Have they had similar experiences with customers as you?
g. What is the typical customer profile of this area that frequents your shops here?
    i. Do you have regulars that come into the store? Or is it always new faces? Please elaborate.
    ii. What customers did you envision selling your products to?
    iii. Who actually purchases from your store? Describe them.

h. What brings customers into your store?
    i. What do you think customer appreciate most about shopping here?
    ii. Do they typically have something specific in mind, or do they prefer to browse?
    iii. How does the store cater to the needs or interests of its customers?
    iv. Have you had any particularly meaningful interactions with customers? If so, can you share a recent one?

6. Broader Significance and Future Evolution

a. What do you think makes this community of shops special?
b. How do you stay informed about the new trends or products in the spiritual market?
c. How do these types of shops influence the look and feel of the neighborhood and its community?
    i. How does this type of marketplace fit into the neighborhood?
d. What unique offerings do you bring to the market that distinguish you from other merchants?
e. How do you think these kinds of shops will change in the future?
    i. Will there be more of them, or will this community become smaller? What leads you to that conclusion?

Appendix B – Interview Length

Pseudonym	Industry Experience (Years)	Heritage	Audio Length
Varsha (W)	11	Finnish and Indian	1:01:15
Harish (M)	21	Indian	1:15:12
Vincent (M)	39	Canadian; Hungarian Parents	2:43:34
Mr. Devi (M)	37	Indian	Not Recorded *
Maria (W)	10	Canadian; Italian, Syrian and Egyptian Parents	1:06:20
Ayda (W)	10	Kenyan	1:12:20

*Mr. Devi did not consent to a recorded interview, but we sat down and conversated for approximately 45 minutes while I took notes by hand.

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