

*Quali***Quanti**

**FROM
TO BRAND CONTENT
CULTURE**

The Keys to Building Content Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

Analyzing the Effectiveness of Brand Content

Brand content is presently the main focus for advertisers, thereby warranting the examination of its effectiveness. In studying brand content, it is tempting to use only advertising instruments, however its full understanding requires so much more than simply measuring impact on image or sales.

Editorial performance, cultural integration, articulation with other brand expressions, authenticity in procedure, critical mass of content, visibility... There are a multitude of parameters, and brand content effectiveness can be measured over time. It is necessary to accept a fair amount of uncertainty in this progressive development where everything cannot be controlled. In accepting this uncertainty, brand content can produce the effects of powerful drivers.

The critical issue is to make brand content an integral part of brand strategy.

Hoping you will enjoy the read.

Daniel Bô, CEO, QualiQuanti

BRAND CONTENT: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The Effectiveness of Brand Content

Defining brand content

Brand content designates the fact that a brand creates or publishes content, be it informative, cultural, practical, fun or entertaining.

Brand content provides value (service, information, and entertainment): it is interesting in and of itself, independent of a product purchase, presents itself as a special power addressing people; it extends beyond a commercial function to involving individuals in an enriching experience.

Conventional advertising is governed by a completely different rationale: focusing on a single element of the product or brand, typically addressing buyers, made up of short messages to be memorized and repeated.

Are there different types of brand content?

In France, the designation brand content came to cover all forms of brand content.

Internationally one observes the following:

- **an informative and serious dimension**, including *content marketing*, *brand journalism* or editorial communication
- **an entertainment dimension**, including *branded entertainment*, "Madison+Vine" or *advertainment*

These dimensions have a tendency to converge. The global French approach has the advantage of bringing together all stakeholders.

Why should brands develop content?

The strength of brand content resides primarily in the expression “**Content is king**”.

As such, brands must do the following:

- **develop a rich and interactive relation with consumers through content,**
- **generate and retain an interested audience,**
- **create a content library,** able to be featured in brands' contact points: stores, exhibitions, social networks, private media, etc.
- **establish a cultural universe,** with which customers identify and are on board.

Through content, brands can take on benefits generally reserved for media: influence, reach, develop an audience or following, drive a community, long-term subscribership and partnerships with other stakeholders.

Brand content plays other roles as well: asserts expertise, generates *leads*, drives communities, becomes « trading currency »...

If a brand has true value, it can become valued, having its own *business model*.

Why is brand content on the upswing?

This phenomenon can be explained by the need to achieve consistency in a splintered media environment. Dissemination channels are increasing, including new spaces, digital billboards, tablets, connected TV, etc.

Advertising is parasitic by definition, borrowing the life system of another to subsist, whilst attaching onto another for content to be noticed. In the digital era, this model leaves space for the expression of a brand that is both sought out and desired. On the Web, communication is no longer secondary content - It is competing with editorial content.

In today's context of distrust, consumers are sensitive to relevant editorial content.

Consumers appreciate sound modes of communication that « *sound true...* », « *sound right* », « *sound authentic* » which appeal to their intelligence and provide them with a sense of recognition.

Brands and their ad agencies have caught on to this phenomenon. The following forerunners in the field are actively developing content: Red Bull, Coca-Cola, IBM, Amex, Louis Vuitton and Hermès.

What should a brand be doing?

Firstly have editorial ambition and sincere involvement in content.

Contrary to the media whose obligation is to produce en masse to fill line-ups or columns, brands must give precedence to originality, and even institute experimental procedures.

- **Advertising has trained us to be brief:** avoid diluting budgets in average quality programs. One option would be to produce short films or mini-films from 1:30 to 5 minutes – easy to promote and disseminate.
- **Brands are a spawning force:** Brands are expected to pave new inways by exploring new practices, fields and talents. Being a leader in one's cultural field is achieved through innovation outside of the box.

How to measure the effectiveness of brand content?

Through four criteria: editorial performance, association with brand, visibility and being part of a cultural strategy.

Content is considered a gift, and giving wilted flowers would be unacceptable! Content's quality gives it legitimacy. In competition with other editors for an over-stimulated audience's attention, brands must offer the best « value for money » and adapt to demands, just like editorial publishing, offering the following:

- **informative content:** credibility and expertise.
- **useful and practical content:** value in usage.
- **fun and entertaining content:** creativity and emotion.

Conditions to ensure successful content association with brand

Firstly, audiences must experience a direct connection with the brand, which is often achieved through codes and content itself. The entire system must also be connected with other expressions by the brand, and be consistent with the brand.

Sincerity and long-term commitment build legitimacy and promote connection with brand. Good editorial strategies give rise to a *library* with critical content mass. Brand content must be generative, increase in number and roll out at all points of contact.

However, brands must avoid « one shots » and isolated events which tend provide little to no benefit to brands.

How to ensure brand content visibility?

In the digital world, this is easy to assess. There are many instruments : natural listings, listening/viewing time, number of downloads or forwards, tweets, re-tweets, number of pages read, target coverage, number of hits, voters, fans, key words, media fallout. All these media planning and analytic tools are useful in tracking brand content visibility.

Content creation is a dynamic and organic process. An initiative is launched, gives rise to a community, generates an event or produces a film or publication. The issue is to accompany this flow by accepting the uncertainty of how far success will take the brand. Social media allows for tracking reactions and stimulating exchanges based on content.

To promote visibility, brands should use the power of existing media to facilitate access to content.

Which instruments should be used for evaluation?

First and foremost, the editorial landscape must be studied based on an international benchmark of the sector and related sectors.

A second important point: anticipate public interest and identify an accessible territory with the potential for defining an editorial strategy. This is achieved through intimate understanding of the brand and its history and cultural potential. **Third important point: generate internal team buy-in**, which is also a way to verify content's fit with company values.

However, « letting go » is important when facing unforeseen results generated by the « content » adventure. Standing still, doing nothing is not an option : one must continuously experiment, track audience interest (pre-tests, analytics, commentaries,...), ensure that content amazes, interests, stimulates, then one must adapt and adjust appropriately.

The best indicator of effectiveness is enthusiasm / excitement.

Using read-seen and audience measurements, the media is in a position to know content is studied on a daily basis. The same holds true for brand content, which must

keep its finger on its audience's pulse, and regularly study the perceived quality of their experiences.

How does brand content contribute to cultural strategy?

Producing editorial content is a special way to build a culture, express one's view on the world and to fulfil one's role as a cultural agent.

More than just an energy drink, Red Bull expresses super-performance. Nike is a particular expression of boldness. Consumers need to identify with brands they feel close to and relate to their symbols, ideologies, practices, social and psychological recommendations.

Luxury and brand content

Why luxury goods are so inherently linked to brand content and where does the strategic interest lie?

Consumers identify luxury brands through three characteristics:

1. **legendary know-how;**
2. **Invitation to escape and dreams**, made concrete through access to a wondrous world;
3. **A preferred relationship with them**, that is established and respectful.

Content creation reinforces and extends these perceptions. It is the ideal way to expound on legendary know-how (craftsmen's work, product history, etc.), creating a fairy-tale world, where brands hold a special place.

Top 5 luxury brands in brand content

The most innovative brands include Hermès (Hermès Horse Jumping), Burberry (Burberry Acoustic), Chanel (Chanel News blog, Here come The Beauty Pack), Dior (Dior Homme Men's short film with Jude Law), Ralph Lauren (*L'art de l'automobile – Art of Automobiles Exhibition*, TV, magazines), LVMH Group (Nowness, city guides), etc.

Which types of content are most widely used?

Content type is dependent on the industry. For instance, perfumes use short films, whereas automobile manufacturers tend to use *consumer magazines* (print or iPad), fiction, music and museums.

Luxury brands must remain cautious when approaching communities – they must preserve their aura and maintain a certain distance from the general public. This said, *love brands* must reach out to social networks by issuing content to drive the relationship with their fans (fashion shows, behind-the-scenes, muses, exclusive news scoops, new product information, etc.).

Luxury brands produce magazines which can be purchased at newsstands (*Crystallized* by Swarovsky), are available through subscription (*Cartier Art Magazine*) or in stores

(*consumer magazine* Lancel). They publish books and organize exhibitions to showcase their heritage and assets (*Bulgari* at the Grand Palais, *Inspiration Dior* at the Pushkin Museum)...

During a *shopping tour* in London, I toured the *Bourdon House* by Dunhill ([see The Barber](#)) and the *Comme des garçons flagship store*, where changing room clothes racks were made by artists. A Selfridges' display window was running the excellent Chanel film: *Here comes The Beauty Pack*, with the screen flanked by life-like statues of the film's characters.

Why are luxury brands expected to be paragons of generosity?

More than just commercial enterprises, luxury brands are perceived as figures of wealth and generosity, kindness and magnanimity.

As such they are endowed with social responsibility: They are considered charitable and are expected to invest in humanitarian and environmental causes, taking inspiration from the great royal patrons of the Renaissance. They are expected to support artistic initiatives by buying and/or financing artworks and promoting young artists.

Considered as a gift, content goes beyond a simple commercial relationship.

What changes have you observed?

Completed at end 2011, our international study shows that experts and consumers alike stress the increase in communication by luxury brands in their countries. Less frontal than conventional publicity, they are also more innovative and subtle. Also competition has heated up between luxury brands in content.

Second observation: brand content production is international, despite not unanimously naming things....

Third comment: an interest in using muses in a more sophisticated way, beyond simply leveraging their famous presence.

Finally, *shopping culture* is on the upswing in luxury brand stores. These places are occasions to convey the brand's cultural realm as well as to regale with surprises. There are endless possibilities to enrich the *shopper's* experience using history, nature, art...

With the spread of luxury e-commerce, sales outlets have never played a greater role as the « temple » where consumers can be a part of a brand's cultural realm.

Luxury brands are closely associated with the senses, pleasure and the physical world through their products and distribution centers they operate: Bulgari Hotels, the Perrier-Jouët Bar at Harvey Nichols, the chocolate bar at Mauboussin, the Ralph Lauren restaurant, the Guerlain spa, etc.

What is necessary in content creation?

Seeking preferred status and consideration, the public wants to be included. Brands should give priority to content which showcases their competencies and essence. The public also wants luxury brands to grant them access behind the scenes, through content which reveals the complexities involved in designing and producing luxury products.

To see more, check out: <http://www.lesmainsdhermes.com/>

Luxury brands should take exceptional initiatives, capable of amazing and initiating consumers to unique aesthetic and cultural experiences.

[*http://veillebrandcontent.fr/tag/luxe/](http://veillebrandcontent.fr/tag/luxe/)

Brand Content and social networks

How do brand communities work?

Brand communities have been around for a long time (Harley Owners Group, Weight Watchers, etc.) in the physical world, with the need to meet at specific times in specific places. The digital era has eliminated these constraints. Virtual communities continuously bring people together no matter what their geographical location, in two different ways:

- **A vertical relation**, such as on networks like Facebook, enables brands to exchange with their fans, followers and members.

The brand provides the majority of content, to which consumers react.

- **A horizontal relation**, which promotes relations between consumers through information exchanges and developing common practices: photography contests, walking/hiking tours, aid/assistance, challenges, sharing, co-creation.

What motivates consumers to contribute to brands' websites?



In her book *Le travail du consommateur* (loosely translated as « *The Customer's Job* »), Marie-Anne Dujarier states the following: « *Consumers consider expressing their opinion and sharing their experience as useful and validating. Producing jointly with others is a pleasant, learning experience. Consumers get satisfaction out of doing something « important » or worthwhile, through the benefits enjoyed from their relationship with others (making single or multiple connections, establishing networks, gaining social recognition). Coproduction often allows*

for approaching the real, working world. Amateurs can « play at being professionals, » even being a bit « cocky. » Producing something that will be scrutinized by others compels one to strive for quality. »

What types of content are produced by consumers at the brands' behest?

There are various ways to compel the public to participate:

- **idea boxes and chat forums:** enabled by the digital web to mobilize collective intelligence. Consumers can contribute, consult, exchange and improve on ideas put forward. They can also vote for what they consider to be the best ideas.
- **word-of-mouth testimonials:** consumers are mobilized to discuss their experiences. Nicorette, for instance, began its [WebTV Smober up](#), program, featuring former smokers' testimonials.
- **tips and advice:** Philadelphia cream cheese launched a [filmed recipe contest](#), featuring cream cheese. Champomy, with its website [astuces-de-maman.fr](#) collects and shares mothers' tips for organizing children's birthdays and outings.
- **collective creations:** [Street Art View by Redbull](#) lists graffiti from across the world. Each piece of artwork is photographed and indexed on Google Map by the public.
- **creative contests:** **artists'** energy can be channelled by brands in a Request for Projects. [Art of can by Red Bull](#) exhibits amazing sculptures made out of Red Bull cans. Each year, Hugo Boss launches a contest for the new design of his perfume bottle on [Hugocreate.com](#), (2010's theme was surrealism). Benetton was the precursor back in 1994, with its international design school, [Fabrica](#), which brought under 25 year-old talents to Treviso from around the world.

How do consumers' contributions become brand content?

Content from consumers becomes brand content if produced at the brand's behest and disseminated under the brand's control.

Benefits:

- **developing closeness with** consumers who feel they are being listened to and recognized,
- **uses crowd-sourcing** to generate critical mass content, useful in emerging on the Web,
 - **being enriched by neutral contributions by the public.**

Can using UGC (User Generated Content) be risky for a brand?

User Generated Content can be of poor quality, uninteresting and damaging. To avoid backlash, usage must be professional.

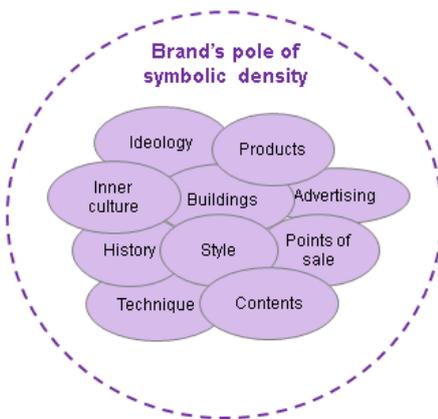
Recipes sent in by consumers need to be filmed by a professional film-maker. For creative content, brands need to call on semi-professionals (Pro-Am), or artists if necessary.

Brand culture and performativity

Many concepts covered in this section are from conversations with Raphaël Lellouche, semiologist.

To what is brand's strength attributed?

A brand is composed of heteroclitic elements (name, logo, products, patents, buildings, objects, colors, actions, machines, practices, collaborators, founders, ideologies, history, background, etc.).



However it still manages to comprise a consistent and coherent realm. It is a pole of symbolic density, ever the stronger in that expressions include a high degree of overlapping in the signs: a recurring visual code which associates the product with advertising ...

A strong brand is characterized by a communication arsenal made up of mutually-reinforcing, significant elements. A weak brand produces a more diluted mass, made up of more common signs.

Why should brands have an overall approach?

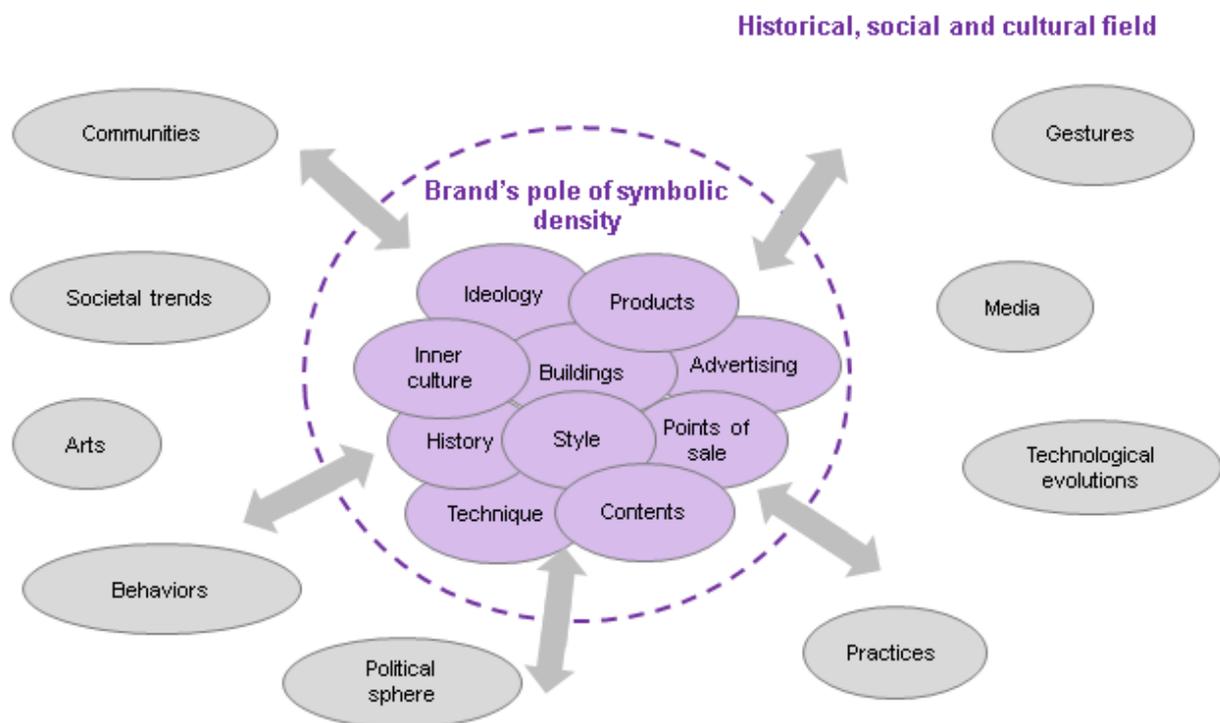
Brands are not considered separately as commercial, corporate or internal, but rather as a whole. When someone uses a product, their allegiance or buy-in stem from feelings associated with the brand, as well as those associated with the salesperson, advertising, store, company, etc.

How is the concept of brand DNA overly limiting?

Guarantor of its identity, DNA is the foundation behind the coherence and continuity of a brand's expression.

Nevertheless, DNA is not enough to explain brand in its entirety: Interaction with its environment is also considered to contribute to its identity construction.

Determined by its historical and geographical context, a brand is also permeable to outside influences and to the actions of its competitors as well as to the reactions of its customers.



Why do brands need to have a wealth of meaning?

Consumers are symbolic animals: They want ideas and values as much as they want products and services.

Christopher Bailey, Managing Director of creative design at Burberry's, states in the French daily *Libération*: « Today, a brand is so much more than a product. What matters is the context, the experience one has when purchasing and wearing an item. You can have the best looking coat in the world, but without any special meaning, it won't matter at all ». To ensure coherence and consistency, a brand's « overall guru » today is in charge

of everything: designing all new collections and products, communication, the corporate artistic department, architectural design, multimedia content and brand image.

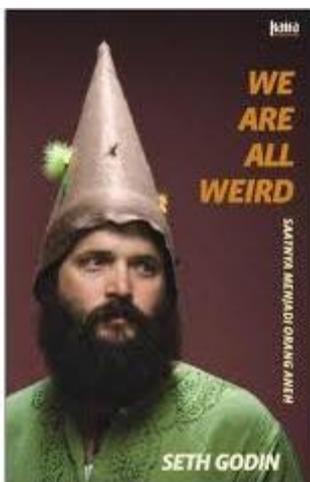
In creating meaning, authenticity and sincerity are required; the cynicism of the past which gave marketing such a negative image is no longer accepted.

What does it mean for a brand to “perform”?

Brands have become symbolic resources which contribute to defining peoples’ identity: consumer buying is a playing field where people express their singularity or uniqueness.

Far from being purely material, consumer buying is significant and culture-based by consumers identifying with brands which become identity models just like gender, age, nationality, profession or religious affiliation.

To answer the question “Who am I?” and be recognized socially, people must become aware of the models to which they belong. The choice itself is a type of asserting one’s individuality: whether consciously or not, preferring one brand over another is « performing » the brand as a cultural model.



In his book “We Are All Weird!” published by Diatenio, Seth Godin shows that singularity (uniqueness) is the new norm. With the increase of wealth and the diversity of ways to communicate, people have become incredibly demanding. They are no longer satisfied with « average », or being « like everyone else » (same rice, same car color), they are striving to express themselves through their choices. And in our capitalist society, these choices are primarily purchases.

The concept of performativity is complex. Conceived by the philosopher Austin, author of *Saying is Doing*, used by Searle, and later Butler, this was transposed into the brand performativity theory by Raphaël Lellouche: each individual plays a role and “performs” social models, with which they wish to be identified. “Performing” is an act which is constantly repeated, like all acts of social performativity (being a man, being French, working in advertising, etc.). The performativity model explains the dynamic relationship

between brand and consumers. Performing a brand is practicing, living, trailing and testing that brand, and taking on its actions, attitudes and world visions. *For more, go to: <http://testconso.typepad.com/brandcontent/performativite/>*

How do consumers “perform” a brand?

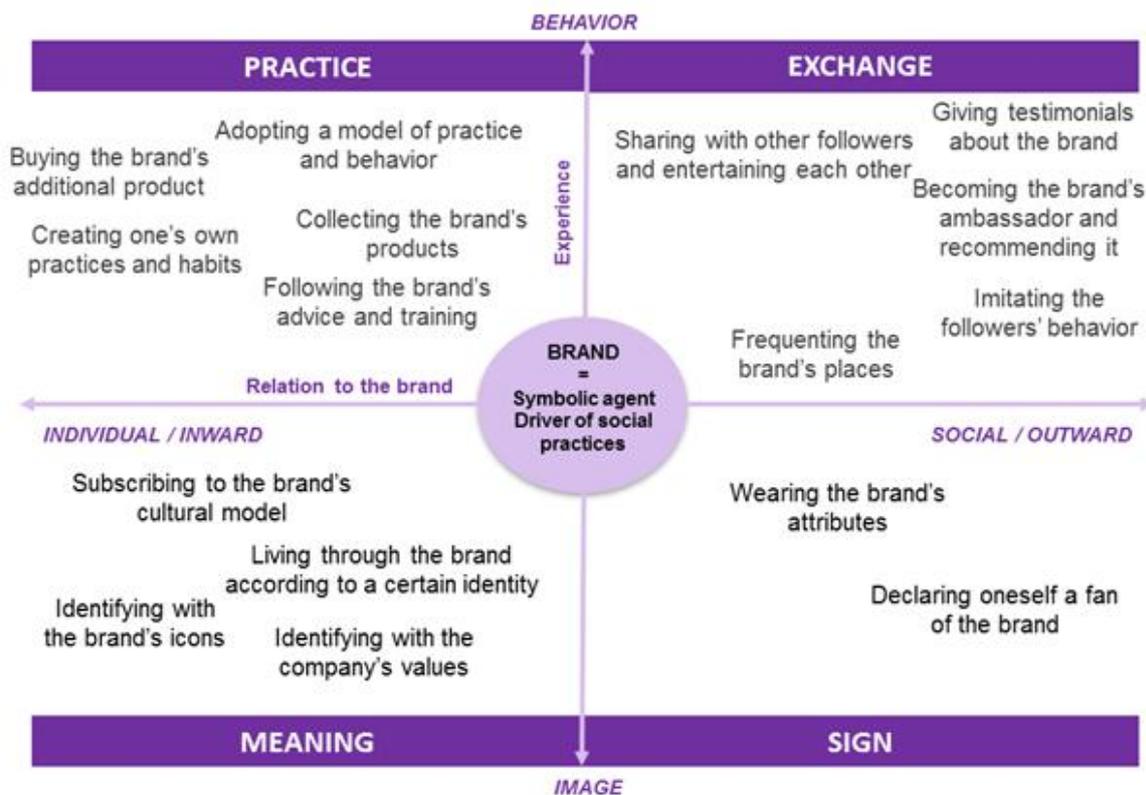
In a multi-faceted personality (social, professional, religious, national, etc.), everyone plays at « being, » and simultaneously becomes from the playing. Judith Butler expresses this in her essay *Gender Trouble*, where she qualifies gender identity as “performative”.

A personal example illustrates this... I “perform” Smart, despite it not being a car suited for my family with three kids. I became a “Smarter” because I identify with its smart way of occupying urban space. Driving a Smart car is a way of not taking yourself seriously, always knowing you’ll find a parking space, and ultimately, fostering your own good mood. One day, my daughter said to me: « *Daddy, we’re always lucky with the Smart* ». Like many Smart car owners, I park on street corners and in little half-spaces no-one else can fit into.

Concretely, “performativity” has multiple expressions : wearing a brand’s colors, identifying with a brand’s muse, buying into a brand’s philosophy, living in sync with a brand’s values, being a brand’s ambassador, reinventing ways to use a brand to suit your own personality, etc. All these are ways to buy into a brand and make it an integral part of one’s overall cultural world. **“Performativity” applies to all brands, including those that are not conspicuously displayed.**

To encourage this symbiosis, brands have a strategic role to play: supplying “performativity” opportunities that are flexible enough to allow everyone to have a unique and authentic experience. To foster performativity, brands must act as cultural agents, endowing themselves with a universe rich in symbols, associated practices and identification media.

4 big performance modes of the brand by the individual



Ultimately, how is brand culture actually defined?

Brand culture is the brand's way of acting as a cultural agent in a two-way interaction:

- **it draws from its cultural environment in the broadest sense** (historical, geographical, artistic, societal, etc.) to form the foundations of an identity that is both consistent and in perpetual adaptation ;
- **through its innovations, it produces cultural effects on its own**, changing life styles and inventing the trends of tomorrow.

What is the role of cultural strategy in managing a company today?

Cultural strategy is of paramount importance: definitely not to be neglected, but is side-by-side with marketing strategy. It is THE strategy to manage brands.

Grant McCracken advocates creating a CCO position (Chief Cultural Officer or Vice President of Culture) in all companies. Tim Leberecht suggests a Chief Meaning Officer.

<http://www.slideshare.net/frogdesign/next09-the-seven-rules-of-the-chief-meaning-officer>

What is the connection to brand content?

Brand content is one of brand culture's channels of expression, amongst the many other brand manifestations: products, publicity, sales outlets... The ultimate goal of a content policy is developing a cultural strategy. Content is essential to build a dense brand and to convey this culture.

What is shopping culture?

Shopping culture is the concretization of brand culture at the sales outlet, the primordial instrument for disseminating a brand's universe.

Stores, and more generally the areas developed by brands, are essential for consumers' perception as the time and space represent fundamental points of reference and determine people's mental and physical experience.

This experience is the most powerful entry key to create a connection with the brand: Through immersion and feeling, consumers will find intellectual, emotional and intuitive meaning, which will make them want to "perform".

In this case, brands must distinguish themselves amongst the masses of stereotypical places to recreate an element of interest that goes beyond the product's functional aspect. Amazing and enchanting customers by creating surprise and emotion, turning a hum-drum experience into an outstanding event, a full-fledged experience.

After brand content and brand culture, the birth of brand spirit?

Yes, since content serves brand culture, and culture vehicles a brand's spirit.

As Patrick Mathieu stated during a joint conference: « *The spirit is the relationship with the world: It is suggested and not displayed. It is difficult to define a brand's spirit, as spirit is in the realm of rituals and initiation (highly developed in Asia)* ».

According to the semiologist Odilon Cabat, « *Designers endow brands with a transfer of conscience – that is the spirit.* »

CONCLUSION: BRAND CONTENT BY QUALIQUANTI

This White Book was developed by QualiQuanti, the research institute. These findings are the result of market intelligence, consumer testing, readings, semiological analyses, expert interviews and conferences. We would like to thank all of our contributors, especially Pernod-Ricard, Atlantic, P&G, L'Oréal, Nespresso, TF1, Newcast, Havas Media and Aegis. Special thanks to Jean-Noël Kapferer, Nicolas Bordas and Pascal Somarriba for their support and their intellectual contributions.

The future of communication lies in content. QualiQuanti makes this information available for the profession, and we practice our own advice.

For nearly 5 years, we have been conducting studies, providing consulting and training in brand content. Progress has been substantial, yet there are many pitfalls to be avoided. Presently, we wish to make this support the focal point of our business development in France and abroad.

In addition to our role as expert, QualiQuanti creates content. By definition, a research institute produces content. Beyond publishing surveys, our job is to observe, analyze and enable consumers to express themselves through creative workshops, forums, interviews, etc. Research can generate an abundance of high quality content, useful in becoming the reference in the field.

Expanding our reach to women's marketing issues and specific *marketing to women*, we launched Womenology in early 2011. We develop general public content strategies, working with companies like Atlantic and 3M. Our 20 years' experience conducting media studies and our extensive relations with producers, journalists and agencies, enable us to provide expertise on all types of content.

Our motto: **editorial ambition with strategic relevance.**

Daniel Bô, CEO, QualiQuanti