

## CHAPTER 7

# PERFORMATIVITY OR IDENTITY IN ACTION

There is ample justification for building strong and authentic brand culture, including reinforcing brand identity, innovation potential and especially, appeal and attachment in all cultures. The performance of a strong, dynamic culture, creates meaningful experiences, draws in various audiences and consumers who can then engage with a brand.

### **Consumers are symbolic animals**

By nature, humans are symbolic animals, seeking meaning in all they do and all that surrounds them, expressing themselves through their choices. And in today's capitalistic societies, these daily choices tend to be commercial: asserting social identity, expressing differences, partially through consumption. In his recent book: *We Are All Weird: The Myth of Mass and The End of Compliance!* Seth Godin demonstrates that today, uniqueness is the norm, with the vast array of modes of creation and communication making people much more demanding. People will no longer settle for « average », or « like everyone else » (same type of rice, same color car, etc). In this context, brands must find a way to contribute to consumers « inventing themselves »...

### **The concept of performativity**

The complex concept of performativity proves useful in understanding how brands contribute to people's identity and societal construction. As part of his three fields of brand theory (*self-binding*, performativity and mediality) Raphaël Lellouche developed the concept providing more in-depth analysis of consumer behavior and likely to replace simplistic notions such as « consumption » or « belief » in products/brands. Each individual in society plays a role and performs the social models with which he or she wishes to be identified.

Performativity was first discussed by linguists John Austin and John Searle, and was picked up by Judith Butler and applied to gender and sexual identity, which is a part of social identity. Judith Butler posits that we are not man or woman, but that we perform our gender, that we ultimately play "men" and "women." Raphaël Lellouche considers that our entire social identity is a play in performativity relative to brands as well. Before addressing the theory of performativity and its concrete application to brand-consumer relations, he has outlined the concept's three developmental stages.

## **AND NOW FOR A LITTLE OF THEORY**

### **John Austin, the origin of performative communication**

The term is taken from works by philosopher of language John Austin in one of his best known works *How to Do Things with Words*, published in 1955. Austin posits that language not only serves to describe our reality, but it also creates a certain social reality. When a judge declares « ...*Court is now in session...*» or a priest declares: « *I now pronounce you husband and wife...* », they bring this reality into being. By their pronouncements, the judge opens the court session, and the priest makes the marriage a new state of social affairs. By speaking, these people accomplish certain types of actions: naming, baptizing, bequeathing, etc. This holds for baptisms, weddings, contracts and all promises that « create » social realities. These actions require people holding certain functions (judge, priest/pastor, mayor, notary, etc.), an appropriate context (solemn, such as a courtroom, city hall, church, etc.) and an audience (attentive, listening and understanding the language). Austin calls these types of declarations *performative utterances* in opposition to constative utterances.

American philosopher of language, John Searle, in *The Construction of Social Reality*, published in 1995, asserts generally that speech acts produce social realities that are distinct from natural realities (physical, etc.), and those on which institutions (religious, civil, etc.) and conventions (games) are based.

## **AND NOW FOR A LITTLE OF THEORY**

### **John Searle, the performativity of social acts**

For John Searle, performative is only a linguistic front for something deeper: the construction of social realities. Everything that exists as institutions, at all levels of social life, are constructions that are achieved through fundamental performative activities. Speech allows one to perform creations and to give them true social functions. A bank note exists because we say and believe that money exists. Similarly a political leader or university professor are only able to fulfill their functions by the collective oral recognition of their status. All social realities are based on performative acts and « shared beliefs».

Finally, American philosopher and feminist Judith Butler goes further than Searle (who stopped at major civil, religious, social and family institutions) to take on people's gender and sexual identity.

## AND NOW FOR A LITTLE OF THEORY

### Judith Butler, gender performativity

In *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990, Judith Butler takes the concept of performativity further. Butler adopts an extreme position, asserting that sexual identity is a performative construction. She posits that beyond natural biological differences, gender identity (male or female) is a social construction, achieved by performativity, for the purpose of social recognition. She uses the example of drag queens to support her arguments. She asserts that drag queens pretend to be a gender that is different from their biological gender, this means that people of « natural » gender, perform this gender without knowing it. This radical theory based on a marginal case, informs the norm to expose subconscious practices.

Butler's performativity goes beyond language: it includes how language is expressed in addition to behavior, attitude and gestures through which a gender is performed (male or female) and conforms to the « female» or « male » model constructed by society. These models appear at very young ages: The « game » is created by education, constraints, identification. I become « boy » (independent of my biological gender) as soon as I start acting like a boy, playing like a boy, I fight, become a brat, a tough guy, I play with trucks, avoid all things pink. The rest of his life, the boy only repeats these gestures, postures and words of the male gender. According to the theory of role play, what makes one a boy, or the performance, is the fact of «playing» boy and the iteration or constant repetition until it becomes subconscious and spontaneous.

Butler's theories are based on the original performativity concepts by Austin and Searle. In open sessions, there is no being, but a speaker who is the being; the session is not something that is, but becomes it when the speaker says it. Butler generalizes the idea in asserting that the same holds for gender: She considers there are no men or women, only male, female and transgender performances.

Could identity be only theatrical roles? For Judith Butler, performing is not only «pretending to be». When a role is performed, one becomes what the role entails. It affects our being, our reality in the dual meaning of « *playing a role, acting* » on stage and « *accomplishing* ». This means that it is not enough to dress up like a boy to be a boy; one must completely produce the social identity of a boy, and truly buy into it over the long term.

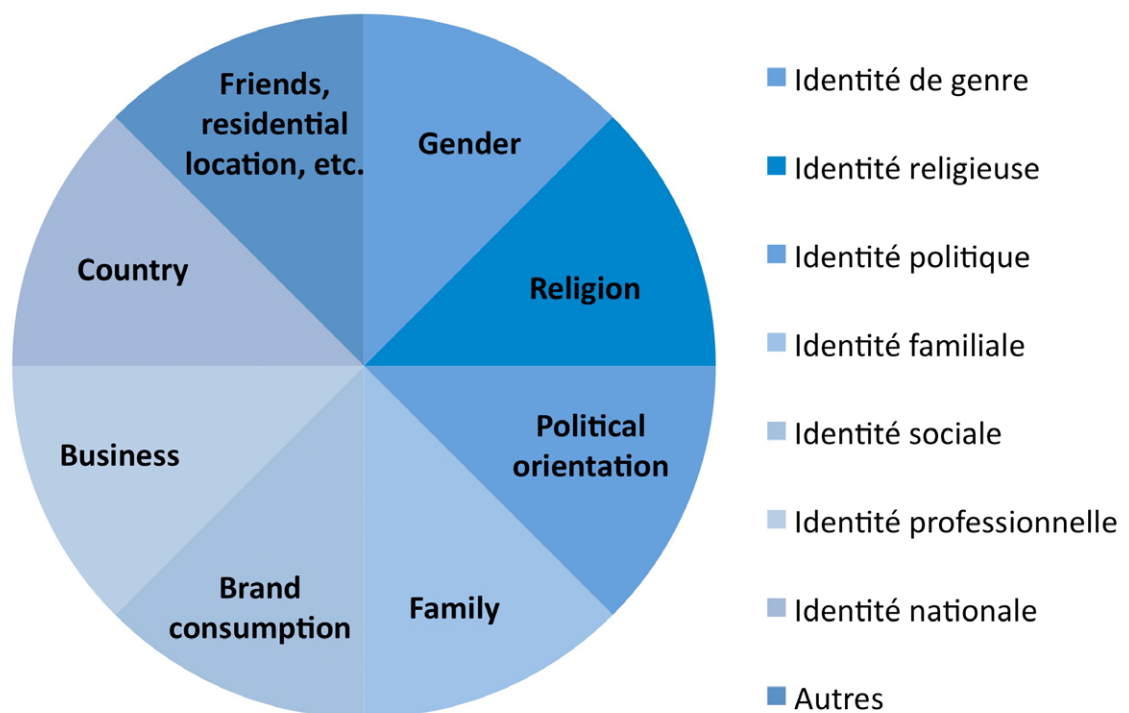
Raphaël Lellouche asserts that Searle’s concepts of « *social construction* » and Butler’s « *performance* » enable us to go beyond brand theories expressed to date and build a general theory on commercial brands to gain deeper understanding of this cultural essence. People’s full cultural identity is constructed by performativity: Each individual in society plays a role and performs these identities in « responding » to social suggestions and that with which he/she would like to be identified. In this way, performativity is the fundamental cultural act of « consumers ». Therefore « consumption » of a product is the fiduciary or monetary relation to brands which are a part of this basic cultural act. The same goes for business and family, etc. People’s social identity is cultural, and as such, constructed by performativity.

Brands therefore have a strategic role to play, and can only be strong if they offer people performative models. Brands must enable people to buy into, take ownership of and perform a brand experience and culture (including gestures, attitudes, world visions, behaviors, technical and material objects, ideological positions, etc.).

### Consumption is a playing field for our identity

Individual identities are the fruit of a vast array of diverse elements. Our identities are multiple and made up of history and randomness. We are characterized by some of the following identity poles: birthplace, location, gender, age group, social setting, education, business field, leisure activities, religion, the brands we buy and use, etc. We « are » Mac or PC, Peugeot or Fiat, Nike or Adidas.

Figure 7.1: Multiple dimensions of identity



To answer the question « Who am I? », each individual must become aware of the identities he/she performs. These identities are simultaneously a situation we experience passively and part of a deliberate project. As free individuals, we transcend situations and construct our identity. This identity is multiple, so we can play at being different people. We can decide to change our age group by appearing younger or older; «change » our social origins by over-playing or under-playing, etc. In all of our facets (social, professional, religious, national, etc.), we are what we play, and as we continue to play, we eventually become that role.

Consumption (furniture, clothing, food, cars, etc.) is one of the fields or backdrops on which we construct our identity. Consumption is not purely material, but culturalized by identification with brands. Brands are the crystallization of ideas that offer cultural models just like all other cultural models (femininity, age group, etc.). Consciously or subconsciously preferring one brand over another is performing the brand in the same way one performs other cultural models, including consumption elements in the construction of self in the social world. Buying and using products means being involved and identifying with and buying into a strategy of cultural distinction (as posited by Bourdieu) not temporarily, but over the long term.

Choosing to buy or use a particular shirt, telephone or moisturizer is adhering to a certain identity. A man wearing sweats with the Nike RF insignia displays his masculine elegance in the style of Rodolphe Federer. A BB bag by Lancel enables a 45 year-old woman to express glamour (pink, the BB insignia looks like two hearts) whilst demonstrating a certain form of liberation (identification with Brigitte Bardot, the bag is rather heavy, requiring one to assert oneself). Brands are essential means to express how one is « man » or « woman».

## **AND NOW FOR A LITTLE OF THEORY**

### **Performativity in sports**

Observing European vacationers playing tennis illustrates performativity on the sports field. The initial observation is that brands are a way of asserting one's nationality. Germans readily sport Adidas outfits, Italians, Fila. Nike has succeeded in becoming a universal brand, spreading American values that go beyond its geographical origin. There is no brand able to put forward its "Frenchness." Lacoste does however represent a certain French « panache » though less than in the eighties.

Tennis outfits reveal a game style. The fiercest players wear brands that express power such as Nike or Puma. Fans of Asics, which literally means « a *healthy mind in a healthy body* », have great appreciation for comfort and ergonomomy.

Identification and internalization of brands' models can be explained as performativity in the integrated brand design model. This is not a matter of brand « loyalty » similar to religious faith. There is also the unclear concept of brand preference. Performing a brand

means including brands more generally in the relationship between people and identity models: one does not perform only brands, but all sorts of identities, including brands.

### Expressing social identification models

People's multiple facets are in constant movement and always being performed. Therefore brands have a strategic role to play in proposing performance models to reach their audience. Consumers choose products or brands that stimulate one of the facets of their identity in a given context, or that validate their sense of economy or savings, intelligence, originality, etc. What is important is that consumers find meaning, authenticity and coherence in what transpires. All brands are susceptible to being performed, including discount and B to B brands. It could be said that brands are *agents of empowerment*, enabling individuals to thrive, go beyond their limits, assert, express or invent and reinvent themselves, etc.

These models' are firstly expressed through advertising and communication. Beyond *lifestyle* and experience, brands express a full culture (including gestures, attitudes, world visions, behaviors, technical and material objects, ideological positions, etc.) which people buy into and can reproduce or perform. As previously stated, advertising, editorial content and sales outlets are preferred means to offer product use and behavior models to convey cultural elements and social models which inspire consumers to perform.

### Building a strong relation with consumers

By reaching a person's identity constitution, brands establish strong connections and build essential, more authentic relations, moving from "having" to "being." Brands must not cheat, but offer a model they adhere to themselves. In so doing, brands elicit consumers' attachment, which becomes a constituent of brand loyalty.

Beyond loyalty, when consumers implement behaviors associated with brands, they extend and become ambassadors for them – knowingly or not. One can consider that brands are constantly recreated by consumers through performativity. In this way, brands gain in size and stature, extending their social influence. They go beyond the material sphere to become the reference or cultural icon for tightly-knit communities. Practices generated by brands anchor them in reality.

The power of identity relationships between consumers and brands becomes obvious through fan testimonials below:

## TESTIMONIALS

- **Smart car fan:** « When I'm in my Smart car, I identify with Smarters, a certain way of parking, being smarter than big SUVs and able to drive in and enjoy the city. I'm this driver who darts in and out of traffic, making the most of my time. I love it when another car can't fit into a small space, but I can! And I love that there are spaces so tiny that only Smart cars can fit into them (on the street and in parking garages). Smart drivers often park in half spaces on street corners, nearly touching other parked cars to keep from encroaching on crosswalks, also even perpendicular to sidewalks! Driving a Smart also means being free of time constraints because you won't have to drive around forever to find a parking space. And since there is no back seat, children are allowed to ride in the Smart car's front seat, contrary to other cars. They really love this privilege, which is another sign of distinction. »

- **Sonia Rykiel fan:** « It all starts with her display window, featuring some of my favorite books and endowing the clothes with a certain spirit. The black Sonia Rykiel V-neck sweater, with its overstitching, rhinestones and pearls makes you more attractive than all the mini-skirts and evening gowns. Where there is soul, there is style. It's a very simple item, yet a signature as well of a profoundly free woman, daughter of an affluent family, wife with character, loving mother, poetic lover, friend of Régine Desforbes, as well, who risked prison for founding a publishing company for erotic books – back when women were supposed to know and stay in their place. Sonia Rykiel, so different with her flowing, fiery red mane, would become the face of an era, as recognized by Andy Warhol, who did her portrait as well. Even today, when I slip on one of her high-waist skirts, it is a very light, yet manifest event. The simplicity of style, distinguishable among thousands, makes your uniqueness stand out. She represents the Paris Left Bank female intellectual with a lust for life. She asks her models to smile during the catwalk shows. And she imbues her clothes with her way of thinking and her way of experiencing society...her clothes bear the unique style of the woman who makes them. »

- **Lancel fan:** « When I carry my Lancel bag, I really feel all woman – chic, sexy, trendy and attractive. My bag is deep and heavy, and it makes me stand up straight. When I don't have it, I have less self-confidence, as if I were a little girl again. When I have my Lancel, I feel grown up and like a real woman who gets things done! It's really become a part of me ».

In this context, where brand is everything, performativity extends to every dimension of the business: in buying a brand, consumers buy into manufacturing processes, production locations, company philosophy and environmental policies, company leaders' ethics, the company history and the other consumers' images, etc.

## CHAPTER 8

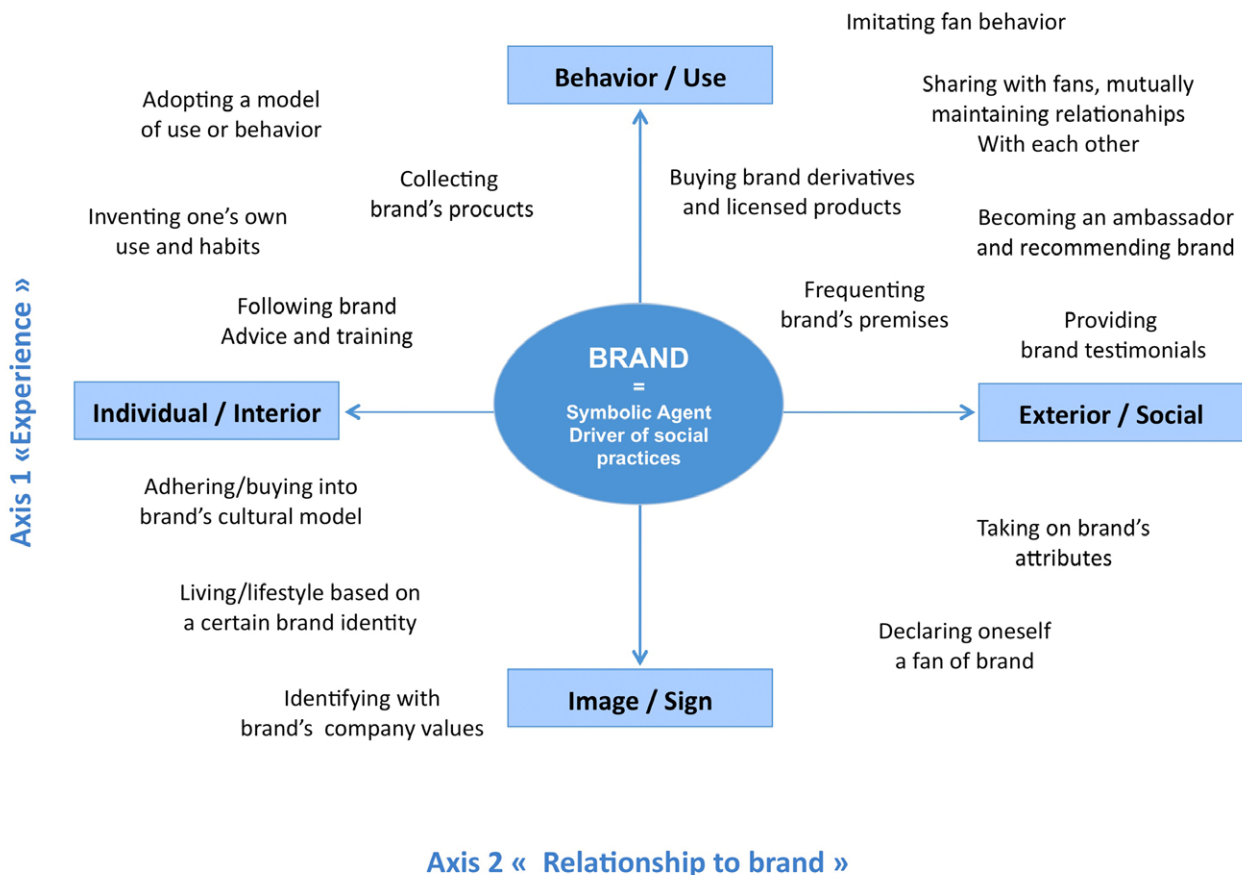
# HOW CONSUMERS PERFORM BRANDS

Raphaël Lellouche’s performative brand theory has the advantage of seniority. It combines product experience and brand intuition, individual experience along with collective and social experiences. It foregoes the trend to dissociate the different channels, but allows for an integrated, overall approach. People have multiple ways to perform a brand, through its cultural, technical or material universe, through the practices expressed by the brand, or through the brands’ distinctive signs, spokespeople, places and events. These will be examined below.

Brands can be performed based on the following two axes:

- Horizontal: from individual brand experience to outward social sphere;
- Vertical: behaviors and use to image.

Figure 8.1: Relationship to brands



## **Enable everyone to invent his or her own brand practice**

Below are various types of brand practice, behaviors and suggestions for behavior inventions.

### *Adopting behavior and practice models*

The most obvious way to perform a brand is by appropriating all its prescribed practices, following recipes and advice, adopting the new techniques, etc.

For example, a taxi driver behind the wheel of his Toyota hybrid, explains how the specific engine technology has changed his driving, becoming an integral part of his professional identity and his favorite topic of conversation with his passengers. Using his screen, he shows how his electric engine keeps him aware of the 50 km/h speed limit, optimizing energy consumption. When he compares it to diesel, he points out how noisy the diesel engine is, causing unpleasant vibrations, whereas the hybrid allows for gentle driving. He explains how careful he needs to be when encountering pedestrians, oblivious to his totally silent car. Similarly Mac, iPod and iPhone users totally perform the Apple technology model. These devices induce intuitive and fluid ways of using computers, which completely govern the relationship between users and information technology. One need only see the expression of joy on an Apple fan's face in demonstrating a new function. These consumers don't only use Mac or iPhone, they *are* Mac or Apple.

By inspiring new practices, brands generate more loyalty and establish concrete relations/actions. This is not simple mental projection, but concrete anchoring in an authentic and emotional relationship.

### *Following brands' advice and training*

Practices supported by brand expertise are powerful drivers. The more brands induce habits and practices of its products and services (training consumers for instance) the greater their « hold » on consumers who will ricochet the various suggested performance behaviors. When Hermès started their website « I love my scarf », the brand suggests many ways to sport their famous scarves. Knorr publishes a series of recipes with Knorr ingredients with the goal to initiate new habits to reinforce connection to the brand. A Weston customer who participates in a training session on the art of shining shoes, will end up more Weston than ever. Make Up For Ever opens Make Up School to assist estheticians in performing the brand by practicing make-up. Brands must develop and encourage material culture related to habits and uses.

## Product customization and personalization

Personalization on the brand axis is performance. With their line of accessories, Harley Davidson enables motorcycle customization based on a profound bike culture and built on the technical machine “everyone can build to his/her liking.” Converse enables customers to choose their color combinations and build their own shoes. Coca-Cola invents bottles to be labeled with customers’ names.

## Inventing habits and use

Customers get a thrill by diverting a product’s purpose and inventing their own recipe or using a product in an unusual way. Consumers won’t simply copycat the uses suggested by brands, but will invent their own codes based on their own personalities and creativity. Brands are not uniforms or molds, but they grow from their performers’ specificities.

Post-its are products that lend themselves to innovation through use. There are thousands of ways to use Post-its, for example to indicate a wine-seller’s price and info stuck on the bottles before storing them in his wine cellar, so he remembers years later. Or more recently, company employees decorated their premises with the famous little colored papers. Smart-phones also lend themselves to multiple uses *via* apps: camera becomes a scan, flash becomes a flashlight, etc.

### **EXPERT VIEWPOINT**

#### **Invention is the mother of performativity, according to Raphaël Lellouche, semiologist**

The very essence of performative behavior is that it’s « invented » and a game of freedom. For Butler, who referenced a short text by Derrida, *Signature, Event, Context*, individuals do not define themselves as the passive result of structures and institutions. Identity construction is the fruit of these initiatives and one’s own inventiveness. She demonstrates this in her book on insults. The insult by definition is a destructive performative act. When an individual is insulted, there is always a way to return the insult, by creatively turning it around and turning it into one’s own glory. Avant-garde artistic movements such as Fauvism or Cubism, took their names from the initial, condescending names used by their critics. The key point is that the subject maintains the ability to act or take control.

Applying this idea to brands shows that consumers’ behavior is not only determined by brands’ cultural construction, but that consumers maintain their own inventive latitude. The brand « performer » would not be culturally effective where its symbolic authority is only « delegated» (similar to institutions according to

Bourdieu), but encouraged by brand propositions. Actually the inflection, or transformation is progressive, and occurs in the iteration. Performance repetition is the free space that the subject maintains.

### Collecting brand expressions

Ralph Lauren and Play Mobil fans enjoy buying all product variations and testing and trying these different versions.

To increase the opportunities to be performed and extend their universe, brands must recommend timeless experiences to use products and spread their spirit coherently beyond product in all of its embodiments, speaking engagements, POS advertising, etc.

*Collector* objects represent the first level. Coca-Cola invited artists, including Mika, to design special-event aluminum bottles called the *Happiness Bottle*. Consumers keep the bottles, refill them and reuse them. Keeping and reusing this symbolic packaging is a way of celebrating and performing the brand.

Derivative products are another example of extension beyond product. You can't eat M&Ms all the time, but you can wear an M&Ms tee-shirt or drink from an M&Ms mug, etc. For people who can't afford a Ferrari, a cap or keychain represent substitutes. For Triumph or Harley lovers, a range of accessories has been developed (clothes, purses, etc.) to perform the brand on and off road. Further removed from product, Vuitton city-guides are key elements in the coherent universe as they compile a list of city spots that are « approved » by the brand. Traveling with a Vuitton guide is a way of living the Vuitton lifestyle.

### **Performing a cultural model**

Brands cannot only offer products with original functions, even though they may be symbolic. They must be part of a cultural universe, a world vision, an ideological position, values, esthetics, etc. to which customers can adhere.

### Adhering to a brand universe

Brands offer a universe to which people are more or less sensitive. Buying brands means adhering to a universe, particularly regarding clothes. Dressing in a given brand is adopting a culture or *lifestyle*, a certain way to be a man or woman, it's adhering to a uni-

verse that the designer expresses in his collections, discourse and history. These cultural resources must allow people to live their lives *via* the brand according to a certain identity.

As such the association of Red Bull with extreme sports and *street art* allows the brand to be much more than a simple energy drink. Drinking Red Bull is like jumping from the first floor of the Eiffel Tower in roller blades with Taig Khris, flying a plane, participating in a stunt competition. This back-drop makes drinking Red Bull a cultural act.

### Identifying with company values

Consumers are increasingly informed on the behavior of companies from which they buy products. Depending on context, corporate values can become an important criterion for consumers. In India, the Artyzan brand makes products by underprivileged populations, and some sales outlets are located near plants, bearing the signature « *Shopping for a cause* ». These products feature the tag indicating the *mini-price* (cost price direct from plant) and the *maxi-price* (recommended retail price), leaving it up to customers to express their support at the time of payment. In this example, production conditions become a key element in purchasing.

### Identifying with brand icons

Being a fan of Steve Jobs, Ralph Lauren, Paul Smith, Brigitte Bardot, Jude Law or Roger Federer is a way of performing the brands they represent.

## **AND NOW FOR A LITTLE OF THEORY**

### **Spokespeople as performance media**

Performing is acting in a particular role. Sports lovers identify with their heroes, worship them, wear their colors, buy and use their equipment. When consumers perform a brand, it means they identify with and play the brands' game, internalizing their models. Consumers sometimes perform brands by identifying with the celebrities brands endorse. If a brand operates in an athlete's universe, fans can perform the brand by identifying with the athlete. By identifying with one's hero, a fan performs the brand and the brand's *role models*.

Brands cannot settle for promoting products exclusively through stars and their fame. They must develop content that features their spokespeople. Vuitton features Keith Richards with his monogrammed luggage in a typical life situation. Nike dresses both Federer and Nadal, offering an array of choices and different ways to identify with Nike.

Finally, to provide the maximum value with celebrity partnerships, one must leverage the star's original star power. For instance, regarding actors, brands must

re-appropriate the density, universe and personality created over time through all the roles played, as is the case of Jude Law's gentleman character in the *Dior Homme* commercial.

## **Performance as self-affirmation in the social field**

After detailing the axes of individual performativity, the social dimension will be examined. There are multiple ways to perform sociably.

### *Frequenting brands' premises*

Visiting brands' locations and participating in events is a way of performing.

## **AND NOW FOR A LITTLE OF THEORY**

### **Brand events, celebratory occasions and collective performance**

« Brand events » are specifically organized by brands (and not only sponsored). This category consists of a vast diversity of operations from shows, to rallies and gala events (Orangina Gliss & Mix) to sports contests (Hermès Jump) festivals, fashion shows and exhibitions. Events are generally held in highly symbolic locations which add a social and community dimension to the performance.

The event is not simple brand representation for the public to attend a show and be amazed, it is also a celebration where special guests can get up close to the brand's « sacred » numinous substance or DNA. This brand celebration is critical as it federates a community of « fans » who mutually maintain relationships with each other in brand performance by getting together for events in the physical world and communicating through the brands' community websites.

### *Being involved in a community of fans*

Conventional communities (clubs 2CV, Tupperware groups, Weight Watchers, etc.) are completed by multiple social networks growing *online*: Nike Plus chip users, Beneteau owners, Marmaramis (Marmara Travel Friends), members of Pampers Village, etc. Members sign on and perform on these websites as they get additional enjoyment in sharing

and exchanging on their consumer experience. Nike +, presented as the largest running club in the world, enables runners to compare their performance, challenge each other and share motivating music.

Communities can take on the role of brands by becoming prescribers. A female customer tells of buying a black Harley, then deciding that blue is prettier, simply because it seemed easier to get into the biker circuits. This example illustrates society's impact on performance.

### Becoming a brand ambassador

Brand proselytism is clearly a way of performing. People are performing brands when they post positive comments on Facebook, wear brand colors, tout benefits to friends and family, photograph or film brand events then post them on social networks. Some even cultivate knowledge more extensive than actual brand sales associates.

Performers will act as ambassadors when given the means to display their preferences and commitments. As such, the shopping bag at time of purchase is a good performance support. A brand like The Kooples gets it right with their fabric, reusable shopping bags.

Facebook *likes*, virtual tattooing, even actual tattoos of logos by Nintendo, Google or Apple, are extreme forms of fans appropriating brands and making them means for expressing their tastes and world vision, ultimately becoming a facet of their being.

Handing down across generations is a time-resistant and interesting performativity driver, as illustrated by the following testimonial: « *A few year and a few Rolex watches later, my appreciation grows for this discreet luxury watchmaker who makes beautiful watches tough enough to be worn every day. I will be able to leave watches to my sons and perpetuate the Rolex legend and emotional attachment.* »

#### **AND NOW FOR A LITTLE OF THEORY**

##### **Various degrees of performance: from simple amateurs to devotees or « evangelists »**

Brands' premises must not solely provide a place for experience enrichment, but become the place where brand « faithful » or fans come to perform the brand in the way one performs one's religious devotion. Stepping into a brand's « temple » means visitors are a part of brand spirit. Just as there are several degrees of performance in Christianity (from the devout to tourists), there are several degrees of brand performance from the die-hard fans who attend all brand events, visit all symbolic brand locations and even mimic all the gestures and actions characterizing the brand community to the simple amateurs who settle for a few brand appearances. The difference lies in the degree of initiation. The more customers are « familiar » with and knowledgeable about a brand, the more naturally they

merge their behavior with the brand's codes and style. There are also consumers who perform brands they do not purchase or use (Ferrari amateurs who wear jackets or shoes, etc.). Some consumers perform brands to the extreme, even caricaturizing by excessive use, whilst others discreetly include brands in their personal universe.

### Counter-performance

*A contrario*, in some situations, consumers counter-perform brands. These attitudes can arise from a bad product experience, be it direct (a dysfunctional product, disappointment or convinced of being taken for a ride, or a bad experience with a brand representative, etc.) or indirect (through negative testimonials or damaging rumors about a company, brand or product). This can also occur in social contexts where a consumer isn't able to carry off his/her love of a brand, or the brand is disparaged by his/her friends or family. Finally, counter-performing can occur due to poor brand choices, association with negative profiles or a cultural universe considered phony, incoherent or inconsistent.

This clearly indicates the extreme importance for brands to watch over every aspect of their events to avoid giving consumers any reason to counter-perform or spread negative publicity.

### Evaluating performativity

Consumers don't only « believe » or appreciate brands, they perform brands in an active identification relation. Conventional brand analysis tends to focus on the concept of preference or brand image. This is misleading as it « over-intellectualizes » brands by underestimating physical practices, and their « operational » nature and interaction with the public. To evaluate a brands' strength, one can study its performativity potential with its customers, through a vast array of indicators and considering all brand dimensions. This procedure provides the advantage of considering the interactive dynamics that connect brands to their customers.

Four criteria of a performative brand

To evaluate a brand's performativity, there are 4 criteria:

- **Use:** To what extent have consumers adopted the use model of the brand's products and services and developed personal and long-term practices?
- **Acceptance and buy-in of cultural universe:** Do consumers accept and buy into

the brand's values, symbols, styles, icons, universe, etc.? And does the brand enable brand experience according to a certain identity?

- **Exchanging with others:** Do consumers interact with other fans, and do they consider themselves brand ambassadors?
- **Sign value:** Are consumers motivated to display brand characteristics (colors, symbols, etc.)?