

Three 2015 cultural themes and their effect on brands

From its research, strategic marketing consultancy, Added Value, is describing 2015 as 'The Year of Enrichment' and details how three of the six cultural themes have led to this description and how they influence brands.



Decoding the signs and symbols present in culture to identify the key cultural codes at play can provide marketers and brand builders with additional insights that can keep their brands fresh and make their communication more relevant.

By delving into the things that people do, watch, read, eat, wear, and buy, the consultancy can identify the shifts that should spark new thinking around brands, their positioning and innovation.

This allows it:

- To stretch thinking and provide a visionary perspective on where culture and communications may be leading us
- To provide cultural understanding to aid in the development of new insight-led innovation/positioning territories
- To understand the most motivating and emergent meanings of a particular theme or concept e.g. indulgence, across different markets
- To provide guidance on the most appropriate communications language for your brand - verbal, visual, design cues etc.

People are craving enrichment from all aspects of life. Going forward, they will seek to get the very best from themselves, and the most from their lives, while trying to rid themselves of negativity and looking to be better people.

As a result, they will demand more from themselves and the world around them, with expectations that the spaces they spend time in will adapt to their needs with slick flexibility. No hiding, just authenticity and standing up for things they believe in, while following their impulses and throwing caution to the wind to seize the day.

This is manifest in six cultural themes - flourishing curiosity, seamless flexibility, frank reality, gleeful spontaneity, speaking up and inspiring innovation.

Flourishing curiosity

People are hungrier than ever for knowledge and discovery. They are craving mental stimulation and enlightenment, and knowledge is valued for its ability to enrich and define their character through skills and ideas.

This theme is being fuelled by the fact that people are seeking more depth and meaning from social interactions, as well as the fact that populations worldwide are increasingly well educated.

We are seeing this expressed in culture around the globe. For example: Guerrilla Science are committed to connecting people with science in new ways, such as producing live experiences for festivals, museums and galleries; MassMutual launched Society Of Grown Ups, a 'masters programme for adulthood.' The organisation teaches financial literacy in a fresh, exciting way; The How To Academy runs courses on wearable technology, writing your family history, and even how to rebuild after the apocalypse; The Lost Lectures are a Europe-wide series of underground lectures that push the boundaries of knowledge; Serial is a new podcast that tells a complex, intellectual stimulating story. It has become the most popular podcast ever, and sparked ongoing debate; and a spate of blockbuster films are celebrating intellectual topics. *The Theory of Everything* brings to life the story scientist Stephen Hawking

Moreover, some brands are beginning to play here.

- Hendricks Gin hosted a Carnival of Knowledge that featured experts sharing their knowledge, insights and ideas;
- online ticket space Eventbrite created pop up workshop in Old St, holding classes in anything from being a radio DJ, to growing your own business;
- publishers Random House launched their Shelf Help campaign - with a list of books aimed at improving mental health and prowess;
- Heineken Open Your City lets anyone explore new sides to their city with recommendations from those with similar tastes

What does this mean for your brand?

- Make learning enjoyable - The boundaries between learning and fun will continue to blur, and you should create opportunities to teach people something in an engaging and stimulating way. Being boring is not an option.
- Treat people like connoisseurs - Connoisseurship is gaining traction in all fields. People want to learn fascinating stories, facts and techniques. Enable this learning process and do not patronise people. Expect them to be eager and capable.
- Create communities of intelligent, hungry learners - Curate events and places where people can feed their desire for knowledge and the life of the mind.

Seamless flexibility

Work and leisure time are blurring, the distinctions between different spaces, places and modes of being are fading, and people are eager to be less restricted by boundaries. Flexibility has become smart, slick and inspiring.

This is being fuelled by several factors - boundaries between different aspects of life beginning to blur into our hectic lives; fluidity is becoming essential to lives where nothing is compartmentalised any longer; and technology is beginning to allow new realms of flexibility.

Cultural expressions around the world are many:

- being able to party all night without leaving the comfort of your living room by streaming live gigs and DJ sets into your home with Boiler Room TV
- using the life-hacking tool If This Then That to set up conditional 'recipes' that automate functions in your online life
- frequenting Dada, a venue that lives one life as a hip-hop and electronic music night club, whilst also doubling as a cinema
- looking at Brooklyn Boulders co-working space, which takes the notion of shared work environments to the next level, combining community, fitness, extreme sporting and culture

The brands that recognise this shift include:

- the Philips Hue Led bulb that lets people change the colour and mood of the insides of their homes in an instant;
- Doddle, which launched its new parcel delivery service at train stations across the UK just in time for Christmas, thereby allowing everyone to fit online shopping into their commute;
- the IKEA PS Collection focuses on the young urban residents that have ever-fluctuating living situations, whether it's where they live or with whom they share a space.

To benefit from this trend, your brand could:

- Understand complexity - Know that people's lives are intricate and blurred, and that they need things that can adapt and flex to fit them.
- Be available - Make sure that you do not live by the old paradigms, but are increasingly accessible in different places, times and modes.
- Be adaptable - Make it possible to change atmosphere and mood swiftly and easily. Be suitable for more than one rigid occasion.

Frank reality

People are beginning to crave interactions that are authentic and open. The imperfection and honesty of reality is embraced and the intensity of genuineness desired. In fact, in a world of glossy perfection and immaculately curated online selves, genuine candour will be valued more than ever

Driving this trend is a reaction against the glossy with the 'gritty' becoming aspirational. Celebrities and public figures who bare their souls are encouraging all of us to be more ourselves and to hide less.

This can be witnessed in

- Lena Dunham - from HBO's *Girls* - has written a candid and revealing memoir so others can learn from her mistakes;
- artist Lu Yang put on Kimo Kawa Cancer Babys to face the taboos around cancer straight on, in an honest, open and quirky way;
- the Whisper app allows people to tell their most real and candid secrets with complete anonymity;
- India Knight's *In Your Prime* is a frank, candid account of getting older and how to do so joyfully

Brand activity in this space includes:

- Chevrolet: when execs described the car's advancements as 'technology and stuff,' the brand capitalised on the endearing real-life awkwardness in social media;
- Converse adverts that celebrate how their shoes become part of people's real lives, and have the scuffs to show it;
- Levi's adverts celebrate the fact that real, honest lives are lived in them - not a perfect fiction;
- Häagen-Dazs adverts, which focus on wonderful, true, real-life emotions

So, what does this mean for your brand?

- Be open and honest - Do not hide behind glossy images, let people in to see the real and the unique.
- Celebrate reality - Enjoy the fact your products are used by real people in their real, wonderfully flawed lives.
- Do not be dull - do not mistake the real for the mundane, this is about capturing the raw and beautifully personal.

The three other themes defining 2015 as 'The Year of Enrichment' are 'gleeful spontaneity', 'speaking up' and 'inspiring collaboration'. To learn more, visit www.culturalthemes.com/index.html.