

# Culture Matters

The Science Behind Why Cultural Fluency  
is Critical to Business Success

*a brandarchy quickpaper*



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# AGENDA

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# WHAT IS THE BRANDARCHIST: STRATEGY AS A SERVICE

We are a strategic agency + consultancy that focuses on marketing strategy + design in a distinctive, brand-first way—because it serves business best.

Yes, our expertise is in marketing strategy. Yet our success in that arena is due to understand the implicit needs and behaviors of human beings.

Accordingly, we create marketing strategy on a foundation built from **insight, impact, intentionality, proper branding, cultural fluency**, and positioning the **consumer as the hero**.

**YOUR QUICKPAPER  
EDITOR TODAY**



**Gary J. Nix**

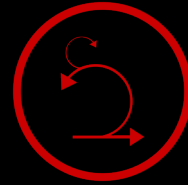
**Founder + Chief Strategist**



# THE 7 MODALITIES OF BRANDARCHY



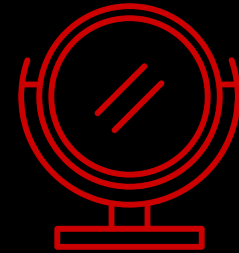
the 13 elements of brandarchy



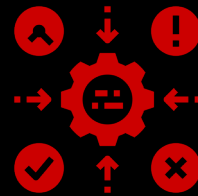
agility + design thinking



narrative design



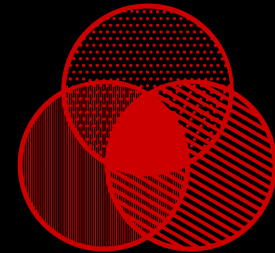
mirror: society + culture



thick description



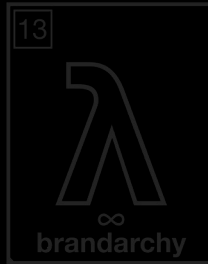
change management



the nexus of success



# MODALITIES USED IN QUICKPAPER



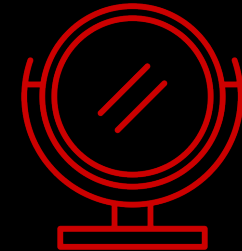
the 13 elements  
of brandarchy



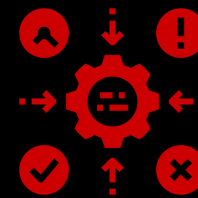
agility  
+ design thinking



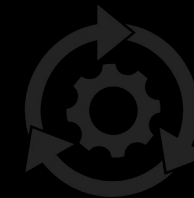
narrative  
design



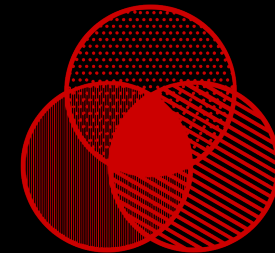
mirror:  
society + culture



thick  
description



change  
management



the nexus  
of success



# Table stakes.

Economic uncertainty, marketing fragmentation, and general fear of the unknown; these represent a short list of worries surrounding the marketing, advertising, media, and public relations industry. Furthermore, these types of fears often lead to rushed or less thoughtful, thus unsatisfactory execution. However, opportunities to persevere or grow become abundant in disruptive moments such as these. The solution to accomplishing success during these times (and all others) is nestled in marketing fundamentals—elements that are often not prioritized or forgotten altogether.

It has been proven for a while now that **building and maintaining strong brands—ones that customers recognize and trust—remains one of the best ways to reduce business risk<sup>1</sup>.**

In addition, recent history has informed us that **brands with high cultural relevance reap a whole host of benefits<sup>2</sup>.**

With that being the case, our experience has taught us that **correctly integrating culture as a connector forms a path toward sustained success for businesses with little to no problem selling their products or services.**

In this **brandarchy quickpaper**, we will take the next step in our conviction regarding the importance of cultural fluency to your business by connecting how we've witnessed influential culture(s) lead consumer activity with the science behind trendsetting and scale.

<sup>1</sup> *How to Market in a Downturn* by John Quelch and Katherine E. Jocz, *Harvard Business Review*, April 2009

<sup>2</sup> *The Impact of Culture: What it Means for Brands Today* IPG Media Lab, MAGNA Global & Twitter, May 2019



# What is culture?

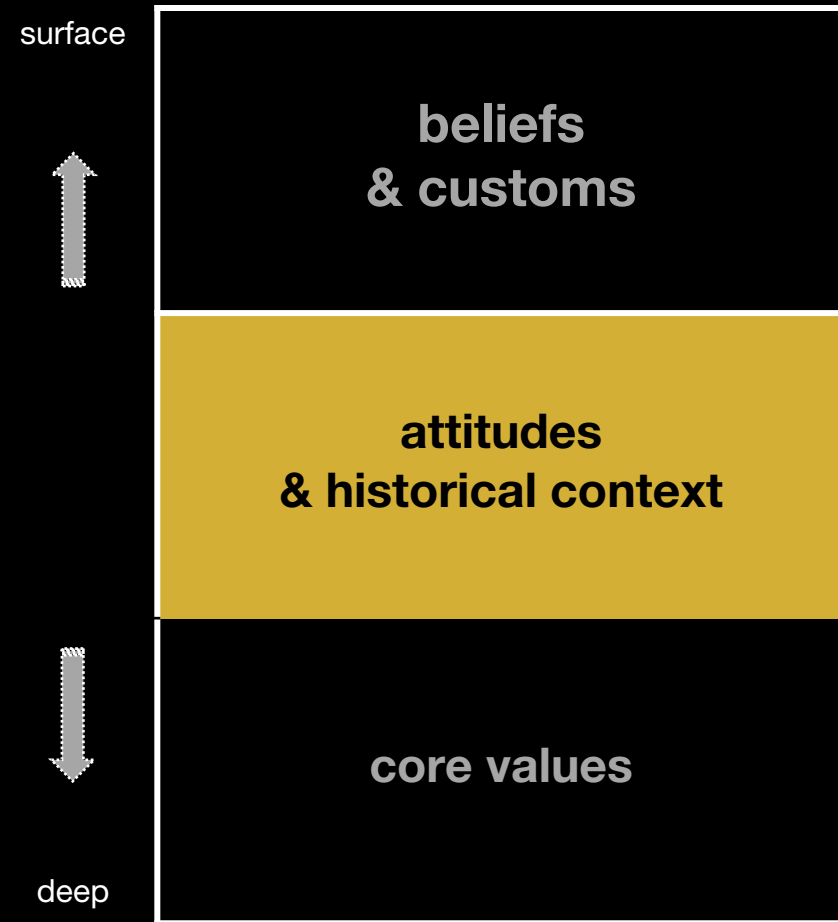
The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines culture as:

**a social group's customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits**

and this is a great starting point.

The included spectrum illustrates cultural depth as a function of society, and businesses must consider where within your market's consumers fall.

Having said that, it is just as important to know what culture isn't. Culture is neither something to fetishize nor is its access to be confused with automatic trust.





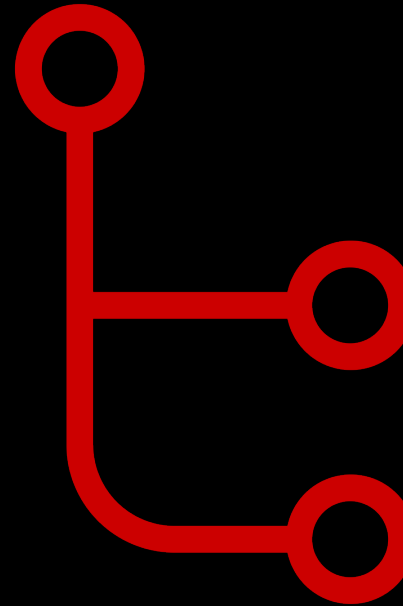
# Culture as a connector.

At times, today's ubiquity of media can make us observe culture as a method of communication, and culture's inherent ability as a connector has much to do with that. Simultaneously, these observations exemplify why culture is essential to hold in high regard when trying to convert consumers to customers in a lasting way.

Lastly, since we tend to look at behavioral trends when determining our subsequent actions, we must note the relationship between culture & behavior.

## **culture:**

a collection of material and non-material components.



## **identity:**

provides feelings of belonging, security, and access to social networks which provide support and shared values & aspirations.

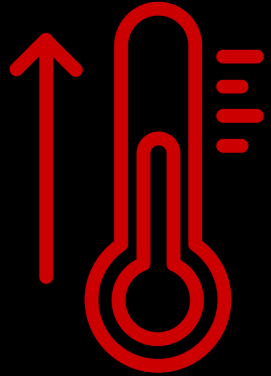
## **behavior:**

individual phenomena shaped by culture

**How Culture  
Influences Brand  
Acceptance/Adoption.**



# Culture in scientific context

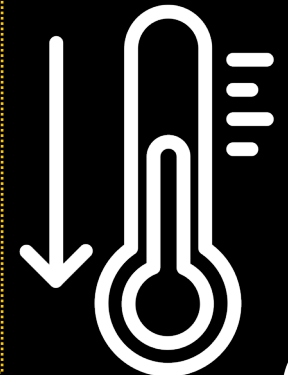


## high-context culture

- Communication is indirect, implicit, subtle, layered and nuanced
- Non-verbal cues like tone of voice, eye movements, gestures and facial expressions carry a great deal of meaning
- True intent of the message is not communicated verbally and is often left to the interpretation of the individual which requires contextual understanding and reading between the lines. In other words, verbal message is indirect often talking around the point and requires shared cultural context to carry meaning
- Focus on long term relationships to derive meaning which makes explicitness unnecessary

## low-context culture

- Communication is concise, straight forward, explicit, simple and clear
- Requires attention to the literal meanings of words than to the context surrounding them
- With emphasis on sending and receiving accurate messages, nothing is left to interpretation and actual intent is conveyed in words. Repetition is often used to provide the necessary clarity
- The purpose and outcome of the communication takes precedence over interpersonal relationships. Focus on following standards and procedures leads to short term relationships. This requires that more value be placed on logic, facts and directness of the message



# Culture: quantified scientifically

Coefficients:

## of innovation:

the rate or probability that an innovator will adopt or create something new over time

## of imitation:

accounts for the effects of “word of mouth,” “social contagion” or “influence,” often due to those considered “innovators.”



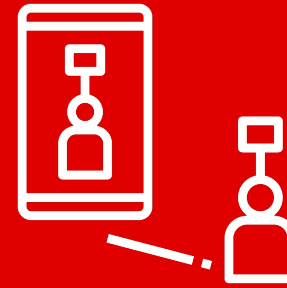
# Cultural indices are highest

**coefficient of innovation**



**high-context culture**

**coefficient of imitation**



**low-context culture**



# Axiom of culture:

If **high-context culture** leads product/service adoption and influences the imitators who then support the scale of said product/service, continually understanding, accepting, advocating for, and empowering cultural innovators is **beneficial for your business and its bottom line.**



# Case in point: Black American Culture



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**Black American Culture  
is a high-context culture.**







**Black American culture has always been one of America's greatest exports, particularly throughout the 20th century.”**

**Mark Anthony Neal  
Chair, Department of  
African & African-American Studies  
Duke University**



# Cultural intersections of high influence



**tech/social adoption**



**music**



**fashion**



**vernacular/colloquialisms**



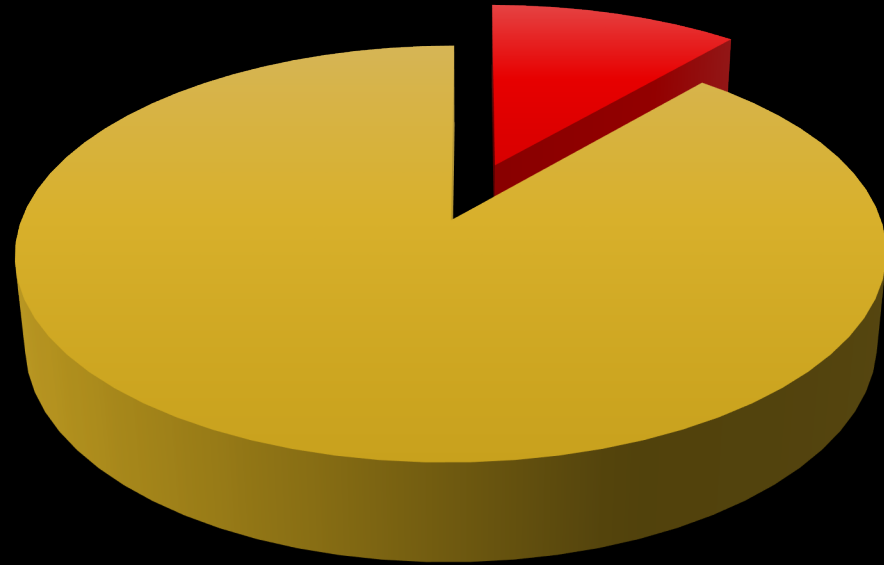
**food**



**sports + entertainment**

# Black American buying power

**\$1.6  
trillion**



*Sources: MAGNA Global, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis*

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**we've seen the black dollar  
influence business on a  
regular basis.**



# whether via colonization...

**Denny's** @DennysDiner  
hashbrowns on fleek

RETWEETS: 29,413 | FAVORITES: 22,430

9:12 AM - 30 Sep 2014

**Brands Saying Bae** @BrandsSayingBae · 20h  
pic.twitter.com/DAG9XAN1MD

181 retweets, 284 favorites

**IHOP** @IHOP  
Pancakes on fleek.

RETWEETS: 27,382 | FAVORITES: 18,528

1:00 PM - 21 Oct 2014



# appropriation...



**tense relationship...**



**IVY  
PARK**



Why Beyoncé's  
IVY PARK – Adidas  
Partnership Has  
Struggled





# acknowledging place within culture...





# celebrating culture...



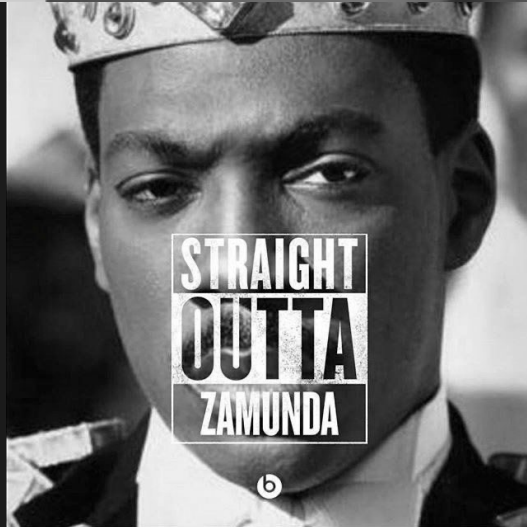
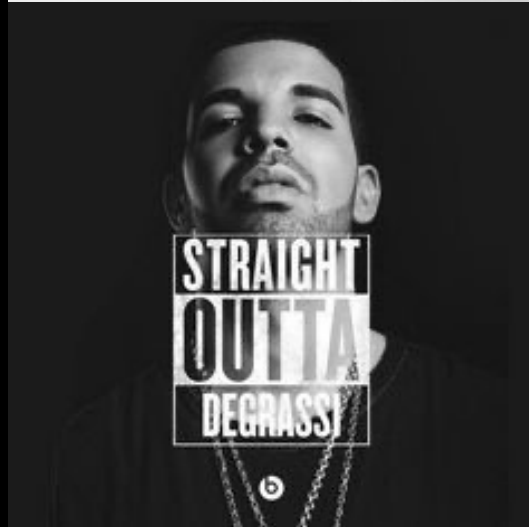
FENTY BEAUTY  
BY RIHANNA



SAVAGE  
FENTY  
LINGERIE BY RIHANNA



# or full cultural integration.



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# Epilogue.

Using a well-known, highly prevalent example of how culture can impact sales illustrates **culture's importance to every business's bottom line**. As we've seen, more often than not, the \$1.6 trillion of Black American buying power influences much of the remaining \$12.63 trillion of revenue generated in the United States. Not only is the spending power of Black culture essential, but it also drives the remaining spending.

Moreover, reviewing the spectrum of outcomes with respect to culture displays the dangers of simply trying to leverage culture instead of finding methods or paths of integration. In an environment where more consumers are looking to match their dollars with companies that share their values, cultural fluency is one of the most significant ways your company can actively brand itself. And, since people are not known to buy products but to buy brands, it behooves your business to take culture seriously and learn the best ways for your company to emulate **and** incorporate the culture(s) of your target consumers into your internal business culture.

Always remember, to your bottom line, the consumer **is** the hero.



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