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The evolution of the brand backstage phenomenon and its impact on  
brands and consumer behavior

*By:*

*Marie Brossard, Slav Slavov, Claire Castel*

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Lund School of Economics and Management

# SBM

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# The evolution of the brand backstage phenomenon and its impact on brands and consumer behavior

Marie Brossard, Slav Slavov, Claire Castel

## Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to first define brand backstage phenomenon; then to define the different brand content that can be used by brands and investigate if some of them fits better particular types of brands; and lastly to try to assess the impact brand backstage might have on the customer.

**Methodology:** Firstly, a literature review was conducted to define brand backstage starting from the concept it derives from: brand content. In addition, the importance of brand orientation was highlighted to further understand how brand backstage can impact a brand strategy. Once the context is set, the paper explains the three types of brand backstage content that can be used and a case study is conducted to analyze how particular types of brand use this phenomenon to leverage their brand strategy. Finally, a quantitative survey has been conducted in order to assess the impact that brand backstage has over customers' brand sensitivity and judgement.

**Originality/Value:** This paper is among the first ones to define the brand backstage phenomenon and to offer certain findings on how to use brand backstage content in order to reinforce the brand strategy and the customer behavior.

**Keywords:** Brand backstage, brand content, brand orientation, market orientation, consumer behavior

**Paper Type:** Paper research

## Introduction

In order to keep their unique added value throughout lifetime, brands have been frequently engaged in protecting their ingredients, components or manufacturing methods from imitation (Narsey & Russel, 2013). However, Narsey & Russel (2013) explain that brands are willing to reveal certain *behind-the-scenes* content to their consumers by opening their inner world and giving them a sneak peek opportunity to certain areas of the business such as marketing, manufacturing a product, behind the scenes of an event, and so on. Just as Kapferer (2012) mentions it, nowadays brands need to go a lot further than just being functional providing experiential rewards. Kapferer acknowledges the fact that companies are trying to be more and more aspirational when creating brand content, using intangible values, in order to create an even

stronger bond with customers through a unique experience.

One of the first use of *backstage* content was done by Claude Hopkins and his marketing campaign for Schlitz beer at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ciotti, 2014). Until then, not many people within the business industry had been keen on revealing the method of manufacturing the product (DigitalMarketing, 2014). The famous advertiser believed that being the first-mover in a market and tell the story of the beer creation would bring competitive advantage. By showing the backstage to the consumers, Schlitz has created a unique, at that time, bond between the company and its stakeholders by giving them a reason to care (McClain, n.d). (See appendix 1)

Many other companies began revealing different manufacturing processes in order to

capture consumers' attention. In her article related to the introduction of miniature factories during companies' exhibitions in the 1930s, Marsh (2014) discusses the importance of capturing the audience's attention by revealing them part of the manufacturing process of their products. The best example showing the dramatic change in the way companies presented themselves was Ford (Schrenk, 2014). Exhibitions focusing mainly on educating customers about the mass production of the vehicles were replaced by influencing manufacturing presentation enhancing the brand recognition in consumers' minds (Schrenk, 2014). Another example of a significant backstage content exposed to the public by a company can be seen in the wine tourism where consumers have been invited to visit wine houses and experience all the different processes of making wine. As it has been explained in the 2011 Wine Tourism Research Marketing report: "the role of wine tourism marketing is essentially to transform wine from being a low-involvement product to a high-involvement experience" (Carlsen & Charters, 2006, p.9). Finally, it is worth mentioning the role that the Luxury brands have played in introducing the *backstage experience* to the business world throughout the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century. This specific phenomenon and the market of luxury goods have glued together so well due to the former being a powerful tool of creating emotional experience by telling a story and the latter being all about heritage and symbolism (Dudognon, 2016). Different luxury brands have been using their savoir-faire as well as their craftsmanship as a key marketing message when aiming for showing the backstage of their work to the customers hoping to strengthen the emotional bond and increase the brand loyalty even further (Doran, 2012). Luxury brands, such as Hermès, have been very productive in showing its customers how their products have been made hoping to bring them even closer to the brand's heritage (Guillaume, 2016).

To conclude, the backstage phenomenon was already present even though the term itself came around at the beginning of XXI<sup>st</sup> century. Researchers have been reflecting on the shift to

consumer-centric view where customers are not passive in the consumption of products and services (e.g. Vargo, 2004 & Schroeder, 2009). Holt (2002) summarizes the shift in consumer behavior with the following statement:

Sovereign consumers are no longer willing to watch whatever companies choose to present onstage. Rather, they now feel that they have been granted the authority to walk backstage to see the what the wizard is doing behind the scrim and to make sure that his character is consistent with what is presented onstage (Holt, 2002, p.86)

The rest of the paper will focus on the Brand Backstage phenomenon nowadays. Main topics will be related to how companies are adapting it to the rapid digital advancement as well as how consumers react when exposed to it.

## Literature review

### *The need for Brand content*

Traditionally, a brand is defined as:

a set of mental associations, held by the consumer, which add to the perceived value of a product or service (Keller, 1993).

However, this definition is too limited for the present competitive environment. Keller's definition neglects two main characteristics of brands: **1)** a brand needs to tie a strong emotional bond with its consumer; **2)** a brand must be built upon a community: "No fans, no brand" (Kapferer, 2012, p.11). A more accurate definition, in line with today strategic branding, could be:

a name that symbolizes a long-term engagement, crusade or commitment to a unique set of values, embedded into products, services and behaviours, which make the organization, person or product stand apart or stand-out (Kapferer, 2012, p.12).

Kapferer's definition helps to better understand

the current trend in branding of publishing editorial content about their brands. In recent years, brands have not limited their communication to advertising and the organisation of events anymore (Bô, 2010; Campan, 2010; Guével, 2010). According to Bô (2010) and Guével (2010), brands are now trying to involve the consumer in a whole universe through the creation of different editorial contents such as short films, books, magazines or video clips. They state that brand contents respond perfectly to the need of strengthening the emotional bond with the brand and building a strong community around the brand. Further, luxury brands, which possess a really appealing emotional capital, are really good at it. They are the ones that have exploited brand content more deeply. Guerlain for example has retraced the whole history of its iconic perfume Shalimar in a short movie called *The Legend of Shalimar* (Guerlain Corporate Website, 2012). Bô (2010) is one of the precursor of the Brand Content concept, he defines it as “an editorial content created, or largely influenced by a brand” (p21). However, Bô (2010) argues that if a brand wants Brand Content to become the cornerstone of its communication, it requires a symbolic, artistic or historic depth.

#### *Brand content VS. Branded Content*

One must not confound brand content which is supported directly by the symbolic, artistic or historic deepness of the brand and a branded content which is the association of a brand with a pre-existent content (Bô, Campan & Guével, 2010). As Bô (2010) states, the branded content responds to a logic of partnership between a brand and an existing content which whom it has common characteristics or affinities. On the other hand, as Bô (2010) explains, in brand content, the brand will assume directly the role of the editor: it will finance and create the content by itself. He concludes that in some situations, the brand content can even become media of its own - Colours Magazines from

United Colours of Benetton is a good example of it.

Through this distinction, it can be seen that the first aim of Brand Content is not to convey a message to the consumer but to implicate the consumer into the brand universe and attract them so that it gives the will to be exposed to the brand. It marks the end of the era where branding meant linking a name to a single, clear and salient consumer benefit and repeated it over and over to encourage the consumer to buy the product. Brand content goes way beyond that, here the aim is to offer an enthusiastic experience to the customer.

Moreover, distinguishing branded content from brand content suggests that the latter is a very large concept that encompasses many different techniques and brand backstage is one of them.

*Brand backstage: a type of brand content focusing on the company's daily life*

According to Bô (2010), Brand Content can be defined through three main characteristics:

1. The content must have an intrinsic value
2. The product is put into perspective
3. The content addresses to the individual not the consumer

However, it is necessary to define what is meant by Brand backstage. Cambridge dictionary (2017, n.p.) defines the backstage as:

the area behind the stage in a theatre, especially the rooms in which actors change their clothes or where equipment is kept. If something happens backstage, it is not generally known.

Brand backstage is therefore the fact, for a brand, to show what is usually kept secret. If the store is seen as *the stage* and the product as the *show*, then the room where the actors change would be the employees and the room where the equipment is made would be the whole making process of the product. Hence, brand backstage can be defined as: *the*

*communication process by which a firm gives insight on what happens before a product is put in a store shelf, from the point of view of the product or/and the employee.*

The brand backstage is, therefore, a very precise Brand Strategy tool. It focuses its content on how the company works and brings value to the final product. Moreover, as the content unveiled to the consumer is often strategic or internal (content that comes directly from within the brand offices), it is the brands themselves that, most of the time, create and edit backstage content. This aspect gives the opportunity to say that Brand backstage is part of the Brand Content concept. However, as this paper argues, Brand content (Bô, 2010) has three main characteristics which also need to be considered in the brand backstage. These three characteristics are described as follows:

### **1. The content must have an intrinsic value**

As Bô (2010) describes, the first characteristic of Brand content is not to convey a message or a precise information on the product but to provide added value to the consumer. Further, he claims that it can be entertaining or it can help the consumer in its daily life or else, it can enhance the consumer culture. It is not a content that is meant to be sold but that is meant to give a meaning to the consumer.

Therefore, brand backstage clearly fulfils this condition. For example, when disclosing the typical day of their marketing assistant, firms allow consumers to immerse themselves into the company and to feel as if they were part of it. Consumers will learn, without noticing, the main values of the company through the synergies between employees and, they can even identify themselves to the employees. By allowing consumers to enter company's brand backstage, it entertains them while at the same time giving them the opportunity to know more about their favourite company or product.

### **2. Brand content puts the product into perspective**

According to Bô (2010), a critical difference between brand content and traditional advertising is the time they can allocate to their

subject. Contrary to traditional marketing, where brands have a limited span of time to convey their message, brand content allows brands to take their time. Moreover, as opposed to an ad, brand content, in order to attract and keep the consumer interested must take the time to put the product into perspective (Bô 2010). As reported by Bô (2010), the aim is not to talk about the superiority of the brand or product but to place the product at the centre of the brand history or culture.

Once again Brand backstage fits perfectly with this characteristic as, the principal goal of the concept is precisely to give insights on the *daily life* of the product before it ends up in the shelf of our favourite stores. Brand backstage gives a meaning to the product, it gives it depth by allowing the consumer to understand the ins and outs of its creation.

### **3. Content addresses to the individual not to the consumer**

Bô (2010) expresses another main difference with traditional advertising. He argues that brand content, tries to reach the individual as a person whereas traditional advertising addresses the individual as a consumer. With editorial content, the brand will try to touch the intellectual and affective part of the individual (Bô 2010). The aim is not to highlight a particular benefit for the consumer but to make him feel closer to the brand.

Brand backstage content succeeds in reaching the intellectual and emotional part of the individual, as it uses a content that is readily accessible for everyone. They do not need to be active customers of the brand or to be part of the targeted group. They just need to be curious!

*Brand backstage as part of the brand's strategic orientation*

As previously mentioned throughout the paper, brand backstage is considered to be a very precise marketing tool used by brands to uncover some facts about their activity to the customer. It should be wisely thought out to be implemented successfully as it should integrate different characteristics. As such, brand

backstage is a tool used as part of the brand's strategic orientation which includes the principles influencing a company's strategic marketing activities (Urde, Baumgarth & Merriles, 2011). Urde, Baumgarth and Merriles (2011) mention two different types of orientation - market orientation and brand orientation. According to them, market orientation relates to a mind-set putting the customer's satisfaction at the core of the company's marketing strategy and using brand image as a fundamental concept. On the other

hand, they point out that brand orientation focuses on the brand as a strategic hub and resource to trigger customer satisfaction, using brand identity as a fundamental concept. Further, as brand-oriented approaches come directly from the identity of the brand and the organization, it is an inside-out approach. On the contrary, market orientation is an outside-in approach as it comes from the image customer and non-customer stakeholders have of the brand (Urde, Baumgarth & Merriles, 2011) (see Figure 1.1).

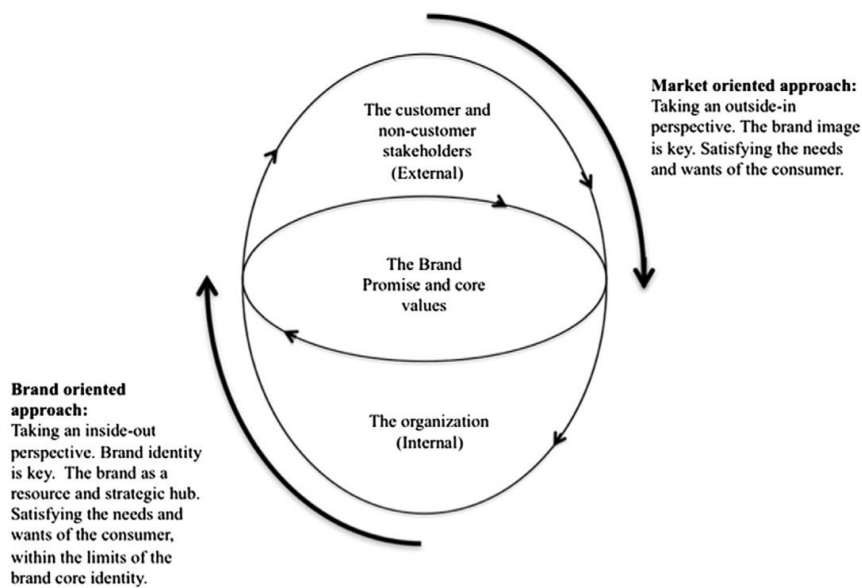


Figure 1.1: The market and brand oriented approaches (based upon 'The Egg Model', Urde, 1997, Urde et al. 2011).

These two concepts also lead to two hybrid approaches which are: 1) market and brand orientation where the view of the market comes first, linked with the character and identity of the brand, 2) brand and market orientation,

where the view of the brand identity comes first but still with an important role played by the needs and wants of the customer (Urde, Baumgarth & Merriles, 2011) (see Figure 1.2).



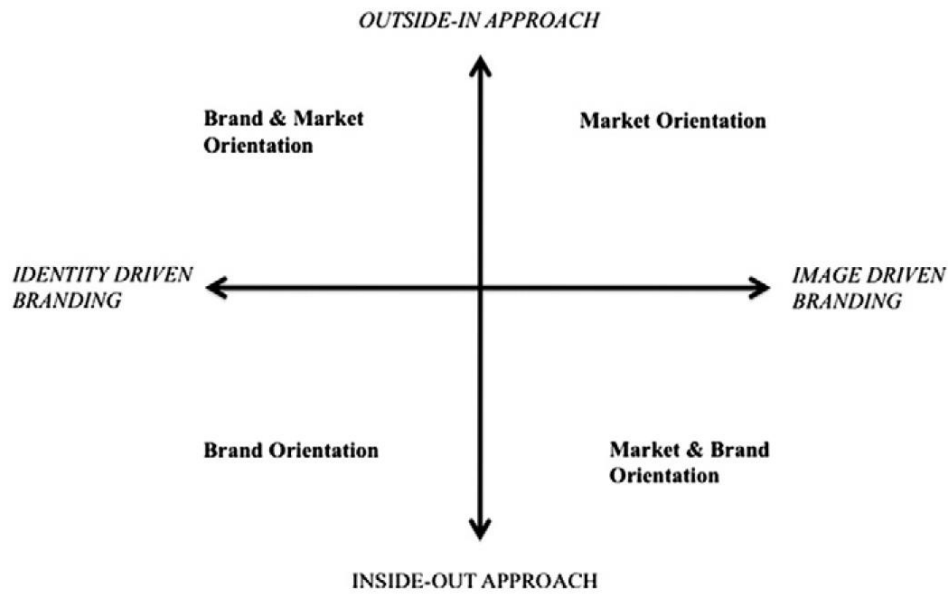


Figure 1.2: The brand and market orientation matrix (Urde et al., 2011).

Drawing on our definition of brand backstage, it becomes obvious that this concept involves brand image and brand identity as important parts of its disclosure process. Hence, brand image is directly linked to brand backstage as the aim is to make the consumer feel closer to the brand and this instantly shapes the external image of the brand. Regarding brand identity, disclosing *behind-the-scene* contents and the daily life of the organization is automatically involving communication on the brand's identity, its internal culture, its values, its symbols and visions (Kapferer, 2012). This, of course, depends on the genuineness of the brand backstage content produced by the brand. Depending on those four patterns of strategic orientation, it should be analysed which of them is brand backstage serving the most. This topic will be further discussed in this paper, while considering different case studies. What can be uncovered for now is that brand backstage can be relevant for different types of strategic orientation as different types of brand backstage do exist.

*A phenomenon: brand backstage as a response to the rise of social media and the new attitude of customers toward advertising*

According to all observations on brand backstage, one fact seems obvious: brand

backstage became more and more popular thanks to the usage of social media and the rising power of the consumer that comes with it.

*Social media as an easy way to reach customers*

The Cambridge Dictionary (2017, n.p) defines social media as: “website and computer programs that allow people to share and communicate information on the internet”. As said before, a characteristic of brand content, and by extension, brand backstage, is to reach the individual and make him feel closer to the brand. Nowadays social medias are the best way to reach directly the individual in its daily life. Social media and the Internet in general made communication and sharing of information easier for everyone in the world, including brands. Brands now have a tool allowing them to reach people anywhere in the world. One of the major problems one can see in the rise of advertising and content production on social media is that it can sometimes become too much for the customer and make him feel reluctant to this kind of contents (Go, 2015). Brands have an easy way to reach the customers, but they have to use this tool carefully to capture customers' attention and make sure that they are willing to receive



information on their brand. Here the customer's reaction is at the centre of the brand's activity on social media (The Economist, 2015).

#### *The customer's empowerment on social media*

It is true that with the internet, the consumers have gained power (Kapferer, 2012). They have acquired a new, interactive culture which lead the brands to involve them more and more into their content and product conceptions (Kapferer, 2012). Moreover, it is common to say nowadays that customers try to avoid advertising, especially on the Internet where tools such as Adblock (Burstein, 2017) are widely used. Kapferer's (2012) understanding of this new world states that currently the internet, social media and blogs have become *the truth of the market*, different from the *official truth* disclosed by the brands. The *truth of the market* can be defined as was it really underneath the advertising set up by the brand. Social media triggered the diffusion of customers' interactions between each other leading to the diffusion of their opinions on products, these customers sometimes becoming *influencers* who are truly believed by their reader or viewers (Kapferer, 2012, Holt, 2016). This truth goes against the *official truth* communicated by brands in general, only disclosing attractive aspects but often no authenticity. Here, the brand backstage concept can be enclosed as a will of brands to adapt to the Internet reality and to disclose the very truth about them, involving customers and by extent, gaining their trust. Producing authentic content with interaction and involvement of the consumer is the best way to make them want to see the content and not feel like they are being exposed to an advertising.

#### *Brand backstage as an adaptation to a new digital culture*

A key point made by Holt (2016) in his article on branding at the age of social medias, states that brands actually succeed when they manage to become part of a culture. Indeed, the rise of the Internet and social media triggered the rise of a brand-new culture based on new codes, behaviours, aspirations of people. People can be part of groups, or digital crowds leading to

cultural innovation called *crowdcultures* (Holt, 2016). These *crowdcultures* produce on social media in general such a large amount of innovative and creative content that it became hard for brand to compete with new kind of influencers, such as Youtubers. Having stated this point, it becomes clear that traditional advertising and branding is not the best way to stand out on social media as it does not fully involve the customer, and does not provide him with valuable and creative content, as expected (The Economist, 2015; Holt, 2016). Brand backstage appears as a possible response to this new culture, a kind of branding based on the web culture. Thanks to brand backstage, the customer accesses content he wants to see more than typical advertising, and most of all content that fits his own digital culture: authenticity, truth, creativity, disclosure of real characteristics. Thanks to brand backstage diffusion, a brand can create its own *virtual club* where the customer's interests are at the core and where the brand stops excluding the customer but involves him and creates a genuine relationship with him (Kapferer, 2012).

## **Case Study**

Following the literature review, three main types of brand backstage can be distinguished: product, employee and behind the scenes brand backstage. The product-oriented strategy will put forward the manufacturing process of a favourite item or/and what is it composed of. This type of content also encompasses the progress of a new collection for example. On the other hand, the employee content will unveil the life of consumers' beloved company. It, of course, includes the way employees work, their role as well as the way they achieve their goal within the company. Moreover, it also ranges from the pictures of its team building afternoon to the progress of its office renovation or funny content by its employees: everything that happens in the office and affects the employees. Finally, brands can also disclose behind the scenes contents. It will be characterized by content showing the backstage of a promotional activity. In addition, it focuses

on how the company advertise the product. Most of the time, behind the scenes contents will offer to the fans a glimpse at how the last photoshoot or fashion show of the brand took place.

However, considering the different existing brands it can be stated that the different types of brand content are not used by the same types of brands and that the way they communicate it will change from one type of brand to another. This paper will focus on three main industries: Luxury Brands, Fashion-retail brands and Food brands. These industries are particularly relevant considering their differences in terms of how they use brand backstage, what they communicate on and what benefits they gain.

#### *Luxury brands, undisputed queen of product brand backstage*

Showing how a product is made and what it is composed of is something Luxury brands have been doing for several years now (e.g. Dumas, Hossenlopp). It can be explained first, by the fact that luxury brands are in their essence focusing on content creation (Bô, 2010): their products are the result of a creative process and they design their stores in a creative way, to procure a cultural experience to the customer. Therefore, it is not surprising that they have been using brand content and to a certain extent brand backstage. However, it has been discovered that they do it very differently from the other types of brands. First, it can be argued that Luxury brand focus their brand backstage on product content. The main reason, is that it allows them to put emphasis on the know-how of the brands, on the superior quality of their product by showing to the consumers that it is not any product that they are buying, it is a tailor-made product. Still, the main difference of Brand backstage as used by Luxury brands lies in the fact that they do it physically. Hermès will not show how its iconic Birkin bag is made with a five-minute video, no! It will organize a whole event *Hermès, Hors des murs* (Guillaume, 2016) (translation: Hermès, outdoor exposition) (*Appendix 2.1*), and bring its craftsmen to show directly in front of consumers how they bark tan, cut, assemble the leather to create this unique piece that is a

Birkin Bag. The French Equestrian Luxury brand is not the only one that have understood the importance of organizing such events, LVMH group's main brands organize each year open house events (LVMH Corporate Website, 2016) (*Appendix 2.2*). This phenomenon can also be witness in the proliferation of Luxury brand exhibitions showing off to the public the pieces that have built the brand reputation, their first sketches and how they were produced. Through these events Luxury brands keep the legend alive, they maintain the dream and the imagery associated with the brand. In fact, through these events the brands inculcate its values to the customers. It enables them to highlight the importance of craftsmanship and heritage and therefore to communicate their core values. By talking about their products Luxury brands actually manage to speak about themselves and their values and vision. As seen above, brand backstage is therefore used by the brand as part of its strategic orientation and in this case reinforces Luxury Brands' brand orientation.

#### *Fashion retail brands: brand backstage taking over social media*

Nowadays, almost every major retail brand, especially in the fashion industry, has an account in all kinds of social media. They use these media to display pieces of brand backstage by showing their behind-the-scenes taking different forms: sneak peeks, making-of, fashion show backstage, etc. For fashion retail brands, broadcasting the *making-of* their advertising campaigns or fashion shows serve several objectives: triggering the interest of fans and displaying the product in a way the consumer will not perceive it as advertising. An interesting example of retailer brand backstage could be the 2015 launch of the H&MxBalmain capsule collection by H&M (2015) (Cope, 2015). Before the actual launch of the campaign, H&M displayed different videos on social media showing the making of the ad, and sneak-peeks into the collection (*Appendix 2.3*) (H&M Youtube Channel, 2015). In that way, one could think H&M wanted to make the fans and potential consumers closer to the brand and interested in

the new collaboration, trigger their interest. Customers feel privileged as they have access to unique content that was never seen before, as if something usually secret was finally disclosed to them. What is interesting to note in that case is that luxury brand, such as Balmain in the H&MxBalmain case, tend to imitate what fashion retailers do nowadays, by displaying their entry level products on social media, in a more market oriented way than they used to do. A shift of luxury brands from a brand-oriented strategy to a brand-and-market-oriented strategy regarding brand backstage can be seen, where the needs and wants of the customer's take more and more space within the frame of the brand focus.

#### *Food retail brands: backstage as bringing people together*

Given the definition of brand backstage, one could think it more adapted to luxury or fashion retail brands. Nevertheless, it is now very common for food and beverage retail companies to use brand backstage to communicate with the customers. Through all investigations, it had been noticed that these food and beverage retail companies use brand backstage in two different ways: to communicate on the product and on the daily life and experiences of employees.

Regarding product brand backstage, McDonald's is a good example. When looking at the different products offered by the brand on the website of the company, MacDonald's is providing each time the origin of the meat and details about its composition (*Appendix 2.4*). This use of product content by food and beverage retail brands can be explained by the fact that the consumer is more and more concerned about the quality and origin of the products.

However, to create a community a brand needs more than product backstage: they need to emotionally engage the customer (Kapferer, 2012) through for example some employee backstage content. Michel et Augustin, a French food company providing premium dairy products and cookies is what can be called a master in this field. In June 2015, the brand was

contacted by Starbucks who wanted their recipes to evaluate their potential to be introduced in Starbucks's coffee shops (Michel et Augustin Corporate Website, 2015). In order to have more impact, Michel et Augustin decided to send their head of communication, Charlotte, to Seattle to try and meet Howard Schultz, Starbucks's CEO, in person. They shared it on Youtube with their community by filming the whole adventure live for 48 hours from Paris to Seattle, showing the ups and downs of the trip but also the crucial moment when they succeeded in meeting Howard Schultz. (*Appendix 2.5*) They created a huge buzz with these Youtube videos (around 200 000 views on Youtube for each in 48 hours) and the hashtag #AllezHowardUnCafé (meaning #HowardLet'sHaveACoffee) (Michel et Augustin Corporate Website, 2015, Michel et Augustin Youtube Channel, 2015). By doing so, they succeeded in strengthening their community through employee content. Watching the eight videos, one starts to feel attached to Charlotte and wants her and the brand to succeed. More than just presenting a brand, this video tells more about the values of Michel et Augustin: creativity, engagement and positivity.

By using products and employee content brand backstage, food retail companies manage to create and engage their communities. They increase the consumer's brand sensitivity as he can identify himself with the brand. In this way, it can be advocated that these processes are based on brand orientation but one must keep in mind that the food retail companies use consumer satisfaction as a driver so their orientation can be called a brand and market orientation.

#### *Findings: The brand backstage positioning matrix*

When looking at the different types of brand backstage and the cases examples given before, it has been concluded that the different types of brands can be positioned according to their strategic orientation and the means by which they communicate their brand backstage.

To better visualise this, a Brand Backstage Positioning Matrix has been created (see Figure 2.1) with two axes: the strategic orientation of the brand (the middle of this axis being the hybrid models) and the communication medias from physical events to

the more recent social medias (the middle of this axis being traditional broadcasting medias such as press, TV and so on).

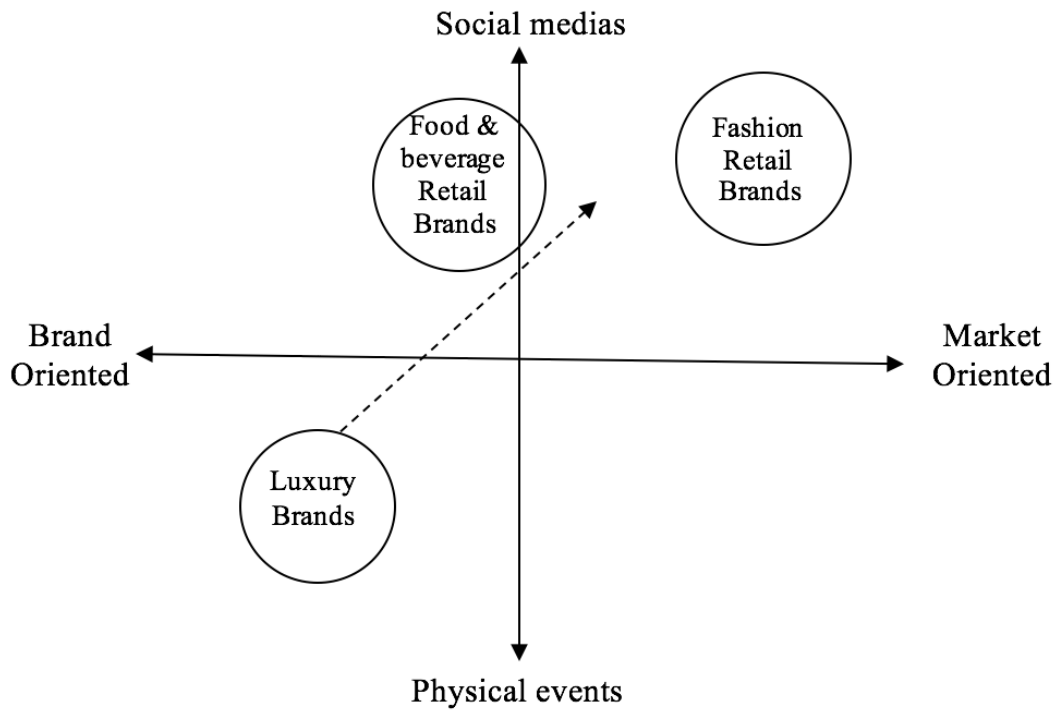


Figure 2.1: The brand backstage positioning matrix

In the matrix the three types of brand, given as examples, can be found being differently positioned. The case of the Luxury brands is interesting. They are positioned on a more brand oriented way, using brand backstage content to communicate their values to customers, with physical events. Nonetheless, the dotted arrow symbolizes the tendency of luxury to follow the example of Fashion retail brands on brand backstage: high use of social medias to promote their products and how they fit the customer’s needs and wants: market oriented. It is believed that Luxury brands will not *move* but create a *dual positioning*. Indeed, it has been noticed that the use of brand backstage through social media are used by

Luxury brands to promote the products from the downward stretch of the brand. By moving completely toward the position held by Fashion retail brands, Luxury brand would face a high risk of brand devaluation. They face a challenge where they need to promote the entry products, which aim is to finance *the Griffe* and the Luxury brand, (Kapferer, 2012) while at the same time continue to nourish the legend. To overcome this hurdle, Luxury brands should continue to organize those physical events that show the genuineness and uniqueness of the brand and promote their entry-level products via social media that requires less marketing cost.

Finally, the food and beverage retail brands follow a brand and market oriented strategy through the use of social media. This hybrid position is established by the use of employee and product contents that enable them to communicate the values of the firm while keeping a focus on how to satisfy their customers.

## **Survey: Methodology of research**

### *Research questions*

In light of the theoretical framework and the case examples that have been presented so far in this paper, a quantitative research has been conducted in order to investigate the influence that backstage content has on consumer behavior(See Appendix 4). To achieve this, an online survey has been created accumulating numerical data that was later transformed into relevant statistics. The decision to focus on quantitative research was based on Keller's (2006) research article on measuring brand equity supporting this kind of evaluation when trying to track the level of key brand performance elements such as awareness and loyalty as well as analyzing the consumer behavior towards the backstage as type of content marketing. Three research questions have been formulated and will be addressed in the analytical part:

1. How are consumers evaluating the level of exposure to backstage content and its influence over their decisions?
2. Where do consumers feel most exposed to backstage content?
3. How are consumers reacting to different types of backstage content?

### *Research design*

The survey itself has been divided into two parts. The first one focuses on revealing how often do customers think being exposed to a brand backstage content and to what extent they are interested in knowing more about it. This part is also discussing the main means used by

companies to communicate brand backstage content.

The second part of the survey introduces the three main types of backstage content to the customers: behind the scenes content, employee content, product content (*savoir-faire*). The main objective of this section is to evaluate how these three backstage experiences are influencing consumers on certain aspects such as the emotional bond created with the brand, brand superiority, brand credibility, perceived brand quality and brand consideration.

The population for the study has been millennials who are currently undergoing their higher education. The paper has focused on this specific target group as it has been subject of analysis and commentary by many researchers focusing on the evolution of their interaction with the brands and how do they make buying decisions (Barton, Fromm & Egan, 2012). The paper also considers the fact that the extracted data would be in great need for companies when forming their strategic and tactical decisions.

## **Survey: Findings**

### *Descriptive Statistics*

A total of 63 consumers in the focused target group have answered the online survey. The results could not be compared to other studies on brand backstage influence over consumer behavior due to the relatively scarce amount of research done about this subject.

### *Level of exposure to backstage content and its influence over consumers*

Only 6% of the respondents have never felt exposed to a brand backstage content. This is a very strong argument supporting the paper's idea that the brand backstage phenomenon not only exists but also plays an important role in consumer-brand relationship. The backstage plays the role of a unique experience that strengthens customer-brand relationship by engaging consumers in a complicated multi-sensorial exchange containing a narrative that

humanizes the brand (Hollenbeck, Peters & Zinkhan, 2008)

A further strengthening of the argument, proving that customers are highly aware of this opportunity presented by the brands, is the fact that more than 65% of all questioned claim being exposed to certain backstage content at least once per week (see Appendix 3.1). However, only 20% of those interested in backstage content are actively searching for it by themselves showing that this phenomenon is still in its development phase and is not impacting the consumer behavior at the highest possible level (see Appendix 3.2).

#### *Means of exposure to brand content*

As this paper is focused on the millennials, it was very important to conduct an analysis on the different means of exposure in order to understand where consumers think a backstage content can be found. Three specific social media have been identified by consumers as being the main channels used by companies to communicate backstage content: Facebook, followed by YouTube and Instagram (see Appendix 3.3). A logical explanation of these results can be seen behind an official data showing the most famous social network sites putting Facebook and YouTube at the top two spots (Statista, 2017). Given the importance of social media, companies need to put an extra effort on being very effective and credible when communicating to the audience through different digital channels (Barton, Fromm & Egan, 2012). Failure in doing so might have a detrimental effect on the bond between the brand and its customers.

#### *Reaction to different backstage content*

Four questions have been asked to all respondents concerning the emotion they felt while watching different backstage content. This was done in order to have a comparative platform and conclude which type of backstage substance has the most influence on consumers. The four questions asked were the following:

1. Did you feel annoyed?
2. Did you feel exposed to a commercial when looking at the content?

3. Did you want to know more about the brand after seeing the content?
4. Did this content strengthen your emotional bond with the brand?

Beginning with a *behind-the-scenes* video from Adidas, vast majority of the respondents felt annoyed by the fact that it has not been the video for which they went on YouTube. Moreover, watching this behind-the-scenes content did not have the expected positive impact on their desire to know more about the brand itself as only 10 out of the 63 questioned did want to learn more about Adidas campaign after watching the short clip. Furthermore, only few of them felt being more emotionally attached to the brand as a consequence of what they have seen (See Appendix 3.4). On the contrary, the employee content, where General Electric is promoting a unique activity using company's employee in a storytelling photo, had greater success influencing the participants in the survey. The vast majority of respondents did not feel annoyed from this backstage content. Even further, larger proportion showed interest in knowing more about the brand and the organized activity itself. All this lead to twice as much respondents, compared to the *behind-the-scenes* content, feeling stronger emotional connection after seeing the photo (see Appendix 3.5). Same conclusion can be conducted from the data related to the last backstage experience to which respondents were exposed: the product content showing the manufacturing or craftsmanship process of a specific product via a photo. Here again, consumers did not feel as annoyed as with the behind-the-scenes video they have seen. In addition, just as with the employee content, a lot of people strengthened their emotional bond with the brand (See Appendix 3.6).

An aspect that is valid for all three brand backstage experiences is the significant equality in perception of the content. A vast majority of respondents felt being exposed to a commercial watching all three types of backstage substance (see Appendix 3.4, 3.5, 3.6). This data is a strong argument of the idea that millennials show a great deal of intelligence as consumers nowadays and

companies need to be at their best in order to win them over with content marketing campaigns (Barton, Fromm & Egan, 2012). In a world of rapid technological advancement and innovation, this generation of young buyers engages with brands more than ever before seeking multiple sources of information before making purchase decisions (Barton, Fromm & Egan, 2012).

Finally, when asked to rate the three types of brand backstage experience from the one they are the most sensitive to, to the one they are the less sensitive to, a surprising result came out. Even if the behind-the-scenes video content was the most annoying for consumers to watch and the least dominant on consumers' minds, the majority of them have put it as the most influential among all three types of content (see Appendix 3.7). This can be explained by the fact that a video can easily bring more emotions to a consumer than a single frame by telling a unique story that is emotionally touching. Respondents had also the opportunity to rank the level of impact that a brand backstage content would have on their perceptions about the brand. The most influenced aspect would be the brand credibility or differently said, how trustful and likeable the specific brand is. This can be related to all backstage experiences showing corporate social responsibility and activities supporting good causes. The second most influences aspect of the brand is the perceived brand quality. By being transparent enough when showing their manufacturing processes, savoir-faire or craftsmanship, brands are giving strong indicators to customers about the quality of their products or services. As Melin (2002) describes one of the brand functions, being a guarantee is about offering consistent quality and backstage content can support this argument. Respondents have also showed that even if a certain backstage content is strong, this would not influence the brand superiority and consideration in consumers' minds. A fact proving how strong a brand loyalty of consumers can be even when exposed to a phenomenon as the one this paper discusses.

## Conclusion

To draw conclusions out of the research lead around brand backstage, it was observed that brand backstage content can be whether brand or market oriented depending on the intention of the brand to give emphasis on its core values or on the customer's needs and wants. Nevertheless, it is not unusual to see brand backstage content focusing both on identity and image of the brand, creating hybrid strategic orientations. The case study analysis revealed the different existing types of brand backstage (behind-the-scenes, product backstage, employee content) and that these different types are used by different types of companies depending on their strategic orientation. The brand backstage positioning matrix sums up these findings by allowing to locate the different type of brands studied namely luxury brands, fashion retail brands and food retail brands, depending on their strategic orientation and their way of using brand backstage. It is still important to note that even if it has already evolved through history, brand backstage still has ongoing trends such as the tendency for luxury brand to position their backstage strategy close to fashion retail brands when it comes to their entry level products.

A second objective of this paper was to study the impact of brand backstage on customer's opinion about the brand. The survey conducted allowed to observe the impact of the different brand backstage on the consumer. In the end, it can be concluded that brand backstage, of any kind, undoubtedly has a positive impact on brand quality, credibility, superiority and consideration. Considering the limitation of the research, it has to be acknowledged that it would have been interesting to interview companies on brand backstage, which could have given this research paper the much needed business insight of why brand backstage content is being used by them. This could have helped us to compare the brand's intentions and the outcomes achieved that can be observed on the conducted survey. The survey itself has its limitations and one of them is the fact that it was mainly conducted on a narrow age group, out of a young population which makes hard to



draw conclusions for every consumer. Moreover, the questions focusing on the impact of each kind of brand backstage were also taking in perspective the kind of social media used, which must have biased the questions by giving too much attention on this media rather than on brand backstage itself. Still, from this data, it has been observed that even brand backstage can be perceived negatively by the consumer if it is not broadcasted in the right way. Brand backstage was frequently actualised by brands that use it and is still nowadays an evolving concept. The brands that use it understood that it has a clear positive impact on consumer's perceptions of the brand. As such, brand backstage can be considered as a powerful tool for brands, when used wisely, to overcome consumers' growing negative opinion about traditional advertising methods.

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# Appendixes:

## Appendix 1: Examples of Claude Hopkins' advertising campaign

### Schlitz

## In Filtered Air.



The picture shows a room in which Schlitz Beer is cooled—a plate glass room to which air can only come through filters.

The beer is cooled by dripping over frigid pipes in air as pure as human means can make it.

And that's but one extreme.

Before the beer comes to this room it is brewed in air tight cauldrons. After it leaves here it is filtered, then sterilized. Absolute cleanliness all through.

Not another article of your food or drink is the subject of such caution. But beer is saccharine. Any impurity would multiply in it and make the beer unhealthful.

It is by such extremes as we show you that we maintain the reputation of Schlitz Beer for absolute purity.

"Green" beer—half-aged beer—is the beer that causes biliousness. Your physician will tell you that Schlitz, the beer that made Milwaukee famous, will not make you bilious.

**DICTIONARY FREE.** We will send you a 200-page up-to-date Webster Pocket Dictionary upon receipt of 50-cent stamp, 20-cent postage. Address, SCHLITZ, Milwaukee, Wis.

### Perfection of 50 Years

Back of each glass of Schlitz Beer there is an experience of fifty years.

In 1848, in a hut, Joseph Schlitz began brewing. Not beer like Schlitz beer of today; but it was honest. It was the best beer an American had ever brewed.

This great brewery today has new methods. A half century has taught us perfection. But our principles are 50 years old; our aims are unaltered. Schlitz beer is still brewed, without regard to expense, according to the best that we know.

We send experts to Bohemia to select for us the best hops in the world.

An owner of the business selects the barley and buys only the best that grows.

A partner in our concern supervises every stage of the brewing.

Cleanliness is not carried to greater extremes in any kitchen than here.

Purity is made imperative. All beer is cooled in plate glass rooms, in filtered air. Then the beer is filtered. Then it is sterilized, after being bottled and sealed.

We age beer for months in refrigerating rooms before it goes out. Otherwise Schlitz beer would cause biliousness, as common beer does.

Ask for beer, and you get the beer that best suits your dealer. He may care more for his profit than your health.

Ask for Schlitz, and you get the best beer that the world ever knew.

Ask for the brewery bottling.



*Appendix 2.1: Hermès Hors-des-murs*

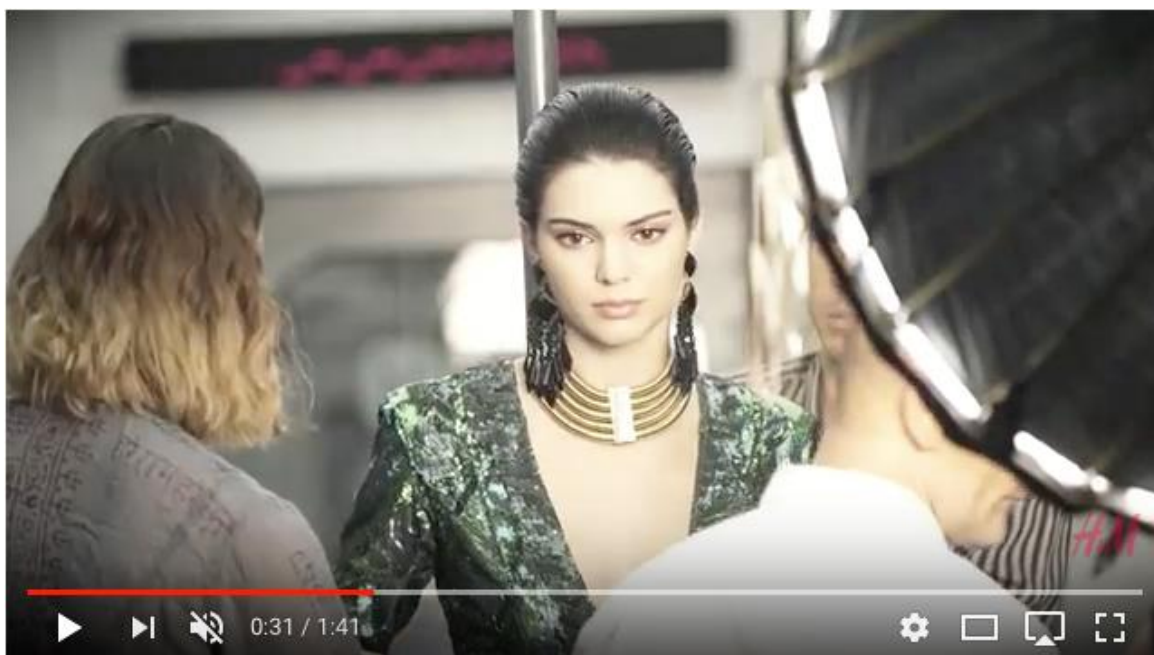


*Appendix 2.2: “Les journées particulières” by LVMH*





Appendix 2.3: H&M X Balmain “Making of”, behind the scenes content



Appendix 2.4: Macdonald's website product backstage

**Let's talk quality**

**It's only ever whole cuts of British and Irish beef that make our 100% beef burgers**



FIND OUT MORE >

**Our chicken? 100% breast meat only**



SEE MORE >

**With 52% reduced salt\*, we're always improving our Happy Meal®**

\*Based on Chicken McNuggets®, Fries and a Fruit Shoot now and in 2003.



FIND OUT HOW >

**And that's not all**



**Delicious, roasted Arabica coffee beans**



**All of our pork is British and from RSPCA assured farms**



**Our free range eggs are round for a reason**

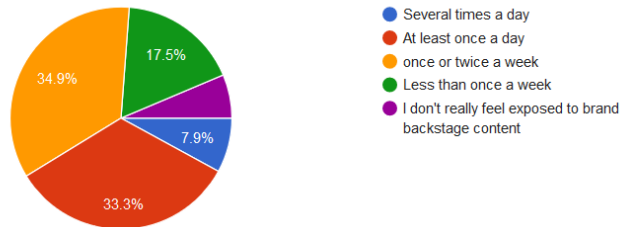
*Appendix 2.5: Michel&Augustin's employee backstage content*



Appendix 3: Selected questions from the quantitative survey conducted

How often do you think you are exposed to brand backstage content?

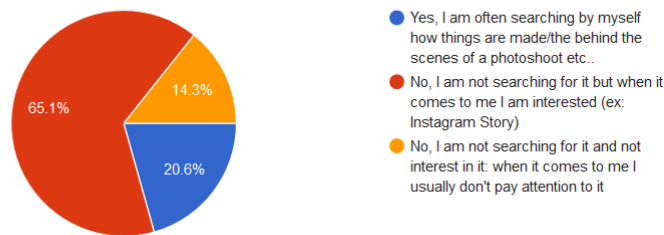
63 responses



3.1.

Are you willing to know more about your favorite brands' backstage?

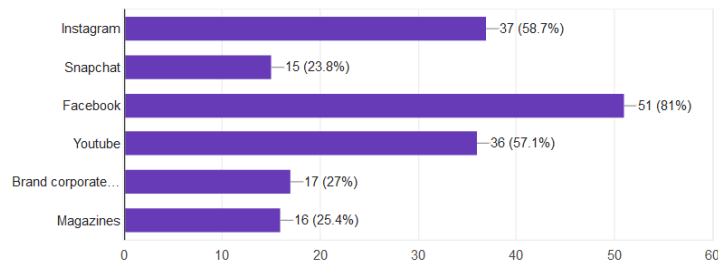
63 responses



3.2.

What are the main means that expose you to brand backstage (you can choose several answers)

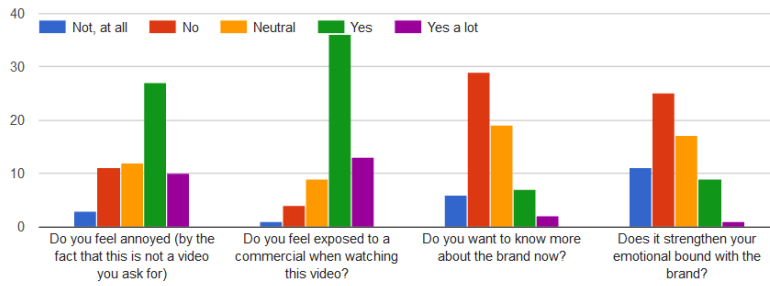
63 responses



3.3.

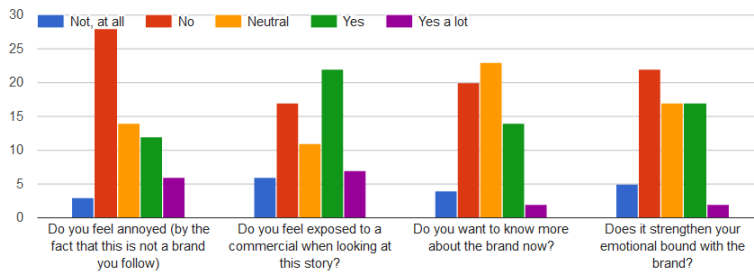
Imagine this video pops up before the Youtube video you want to watch

3.4.



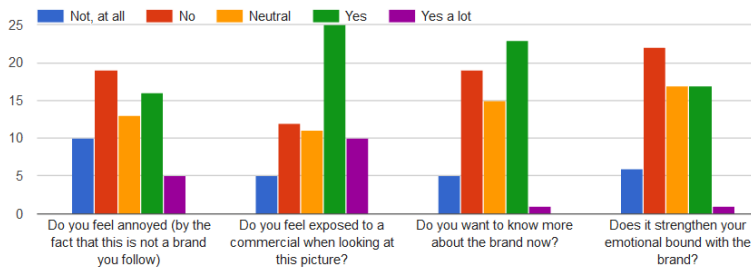
Imagine you're on Instagram and you're exposed to the story above

3.5.



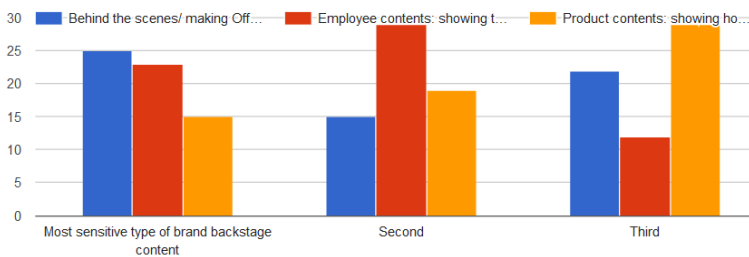
Imagine you're on Snapchat and you're exposed to the photo above

3.6.

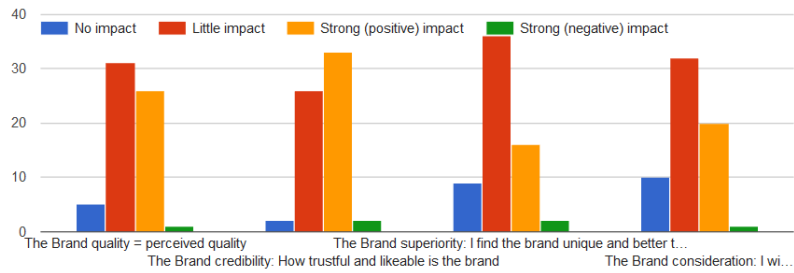


Rate these three types of brand backstage content (from the one you are the most sensitive to, to the one you are the less sensitive to).

3.7.



From a general point of view, Brand backstage will influence my opinion on



3.8.

*Appendix 4: Link to full consumer based quantitative survey*

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeUTi5LUMIooWP6SpOsTdCw7bdSMRuzDHdJ0bXGGaQLVMhHsA/viewform>