The Style Is the Brand: the Poetic Choreography of Idea Behaviour

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This article introduces style as the behavioural determinant to represent the enchainement of ideas as it inscribes itself into a brand. It proposes to conceptualise the relationship between consumer and idea behaviour, and advances style as a poetic and choreographic function of the brand, in an increasingly fragmented perceptual universe.

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ABSTRACT
This article introduces style as the behavioural determinant to represent order, clarity and the enchainment of ideas as it inscribes itself into a brand. It proposes to conceptualise the relationship between consumer behaviour and idea behaviour, and advances style differentiation as the fundamental poetic function of the brand, in an increasingly fragmented, fluid and chaotic perceptual universe. Brand style offers a refreshing critical perspective on distinctive lyrical expression, as a vehicle for managerial consolidation, and how its core choreography may be poetically communicated.

STYLE AND THE PARADOX OF THE LAST REMAINING CONSTANT

‘Le style est l’homme même.’
(Buffon 1894)

The more splintered marketing’s meaning particles and atomic artefacts in the consumer’s physical, digital, and literally mobile universe become, the more urgent the quest for a theoretical and managerial anchors for the conveyance of brand meaning is. The explosion of possible meaning and communication channels offers an abundance of disjointed richness in which few of the traditional brand models that promise a soothing coherence or constancy survive. Postmodernity has unsecured and unmoored and endless deferral of meaning, managers have embraced the inevitability of relinquishing control over their brand’s destiny, and the upmost achievement is to perform the parting ritual with some elegance (Kelly 1994). In response to these shifts in the provenance and influence of idea generation, both consumer behaviour and marketing have suspended the belief in the power of brand-initiated ideas in return for the exclusive, and wholesale embrace of the co-creative, participatory, customer-initiated, consumer-led, crowd-sourced ways of world-making. The consumer-brand relationship has become a tennis match in which conceptual models and praxis decrees new rules in which only one player seems to have the initiative, and the brand’s newly acquired role is to endlessly practice the return of the consumer’s serve, every minute of the day. On the face of it, 2016 very much seems the wrong time to perform the parting ritual with some elegance.

Style meaning, is less and less managerially determined and the disposal of the influence of idea centric arguments has been accepted as a matter of fact (Iglesias and Bonet 2012; Iglesias, Ind, and Alfaro 2013).

This article makes a humble proposal to revisit style as a source for inspiration to support the idea side of the court, in the context, full acceptance and celebration of the fluid interactions pertaining to brand meaning. The style edict proclaims that the content itself is predisposed and ultimately defined by the manner in which it is expressed. We identify style in elements, motives and form relationships, but not least in an all-over quality which we may call expression (Ackerman 1962, 1978). It has been argued that style is easily understood and perceived, and difficult to parse and study. Or to revisit the earlier tennis metaphor: Novak Djokovic’s style includes how he hits a tennis ball, plus a range of other expressive qualities that makes his winning performances distinctly characteristic. The performance of style is at once subjectively witnessed with ease as a directly grasped quality and near unanalysable (Toolan 1996). In everyday life and as a social process, distinguishing styles is empirically unproblematic (Rosenblum 1978). As an aesthetic academic challenge, a phenomenon that in its essence defies to be broken down in elements and features and derives its relevance from a holistic expressive complexity has proven to be precariously enigmatic. Its resistance to deconstruction in combination with its elusive perceptual directness makes the seemingly simple notion of style an under-investigated area in consumer and idea behaviour.

Style in its broadest sense has long been seen as one of the most constant of physiological products (Gourmont 1907). Style has been defined as a strand in a culture or civilization and a coherent, self-consistent way of expressing certain behavior or performing certain kinds of acts (Kroeber 1963). Style provides an internal order in its expressiveness (Schipper 1994). Style correlates habits of meaning within the credible limits of expressive variability. This basic and foundational reliability as a reference to a way of being, combined with the natural propensity to serve marketing’s eternal call for differentiation, make explorations into aspects of style a contemporary attraction. Style definitions live in different guises in many disciplines, but its meaning is captured in a shared simplicity and directness in the common understanding as: an idiosyncratic way of doing something. This idiolect, as the particular variety of codes used, provides an aesthetic propeller shaft towards an inner unity. Style literally sets and defines the tone and provides a driving force back to the core of a being, entity or dynamic cultural artefact. Style concerns itself with precision and conciseness of expression, fluency in its characteristic rhythm and flow, and in a distinctive tone of voice. There are beneficial paradoxical aspects to the referential anchoring qualities of the style concept, which make it more attractive for the contemporary concerns in fragmented meaning making universe. Style is a more valuable concept in the currency of studies of markets, marketing and behaviour as the understanding of the dynamic quality of its constancy is unfolded.

First, the constancy of style is relative. As a centripetal force is still gradually variable, in the same way one voice can mellow, become more ironic or philosophical over time. It is subject to an evolving sameness from a recognizable core. While resistant by virtue of its reliance on its past utterances, buffing and corrosion add to the owned differential patina of its voice. Second, style survives in its distinctive deviation from a norm; this can be achieved by situational deviation and individual deviation (Osgood 1960). Its inclination to remain true to its expressive roots is contingent to the changing situational backdrops against which it resonates. The congruent quality of a recognizable style over time may support of the functioning of perceptual fluency (Fransen, Fennis, and Pruyn 2010). Third, the form is the substance, or the content. Style and substance are often so inextricably intertwined, it is does not make sense to distinguish the what and the how (Jacquette 2000). Style theorists would propose that ‘a different way of saying is in fact saying a different thing’ (Hough 1969). As such, critical stylisticians struggle with the common what-how separations of definitions of content and style. Fourth, style is defined both in any particular moment and in the attributable expression across moments. Style is exemplified in instances, but by nature relational. Stylistic moments must cohere sufficiently to integrate into a series of related patterns (Kroeber 1963). Fifth, while style’s fluidity and all-over cloudiness is difficult to capture in discrete ele-
ments, aspects such as the timbre of a tone of voice, the rhythm of
flowing utterances require an exactness of expression to maintain its
holistic quality. In style as much as in poetry, expression depends on
‘le mot juste’, and precision gives it power.

**STYLE AS POETIC BRAND CHOREOGRAPHY**

‘No verse is free for a man who wants to do a good job.’
(Eliot 1917)

Style has been proposed as an essentially poetic quality of ex-
pression. Style is the point of poetry (Widdowson 1992, 1996). Style
is a poetic code, with terms that may be expounded or avoided (Jako-
bsen 1960). The justification for style as a poetic concept is not least
supported by its scope: the variety of expression and syntax possible
in poetry is far wider than in prose. While content may be narrated,
style is embodied in its lyrical quality. What sets poetry apart from
prose is what sets style apart from content. Poetic language is ex-
traordinarily precise (Chatman 1960). Style study requires the same
thoroughness as the under logical paradigms, and has to find the lyr-
cal balance between a vagueness of sensing and feeling and the pre-
cision of expression. Style offers a persuasive, rigorous unity (Holly
1997). The conception of style as an idiolect, requires the same ap-
proach as poetics: a sequence of non-banal utterances (Householder
1960), instantly attributable, and high density scapes presented with
a decisive brevity. Poetics and stylistics share an analytical elusive-
ness. We perceive a style or a poem without being able to fully ana-
lyze their properties into elements or specify the necessary and suf-
ficient conditions for it (Goodman 1975).

The turbulent introduction and acceptance of poetics in con-
sumer behaviour (Sherry and Schouten 2002; Wijland 2011) is
reminiscent of the struggle to discern a role for style in consumer
research. The expressive and the cognitive don’t make great din-
ner conversations nor bedfellows, and the observation ‘style enters,
where facts stops and feelings start’ (Goodman 1975) indicates the
mimetic relationship style and poetry have with the dominant logic
of research culture.

Much more interesting than the how-what distinction in the
style debate is the notion that style in the idea making process pre-
cedes the conceptual idea as a guiding principle for the genesis of
behaviour. In the evolving praxis of creative briefings of agen-
cies, the word style is rarely literally parameter of, but tone of voice
has never left the initial strategic parameter of a given behavioural
change challenge. The planner’s briefings that contain this defining
tone of voice description are less a systematic observation of expres-
sion. Style is embodied in its lyrical quality. What sets poetry apart from
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ficient conditions for it (Goodman 1975).

Scott’s (1994) call for methods in consumer behaviour that
study style, without reducing an utterance to its components has re-
mained largely unanswered. Why has style not been fully unfolded
as a conceptual approach in idea behaviour or marketing commu-
nication? It closest opening gambits for integration in mainstream
discussions eventuated during the adjacent upswing of rhetorics
in consumer behaviour, and the development of theoretical models
for lifestyles. The commonalities of life style in consumer behaviour
and brand styles in idea behaviour includes that both embody observable
patterns that develop and emerge from the dynamics of living in a
society (Lazer 1963; Plummer 1974).

Style fits the schemata of consumer behavior in that it may be
primarily designated as a depiction after the fact (Ackerman 1978),
based on the consumer’s perception of traits common to a brand. In
contrast, style fits the protagonistic approaches in the conscious
development of the idea behavior in the fact that it can be an intention-
al strategy of influence and persuasion, prior to market interaction.
What remains in this argument is that style is not superficially dec-
rative or ornamentally subservient to content, but the brands buttress
and articulation of its essence as inalienable lyrical expression.

In the predominantly textual study of rhetoric in consumer be-
havior (McQuarrie and Mick 2003; McQuarrie and Philips 2008;
Mick 1986), style features in the margins. It may be that at a para-
digmatic level a phenomenological concept such as style, defies the
application of a semiotic arsenal is inclined to notice the symbolic
qualities of content. The common methodological approach in rhet-
oric, whether textual or visual, has been content analysis. In most
cases this concerns itself with the ‘what’ of content, and a counting
of elements. This approach was not least enabled by a highly or-
ganised media landscape, in which the limited shape of expression
and ingrained schemata (a print advertisement or a TV commercial)
allowed structured comparisons and a counting of elements or units,
in an academic research environment dominated by positivist expec-
tations. The relative mental distance from aesthetic considerations
in the wider behavioural research community easily disposes of style
as a redundant decoration. In this environment and in the habit of
content analysis excellent researchers have limited the style concept
to ‘an arrangement of elements’ (McQuarrie and Phillips 2008) as a
matter of course, based on the formal attributes of an archaic media
landscape that no longer exists. The loss of both traditional media
and the formal aspects of a particular vehicle consistency disable the
known research mechanics as going concerns. The opinion that any
differentiation and establishment of a rhetorical system has to start
in the tight focus on a magazine ad or banner ad (McQuarrie 2008)
precludes the contemporary development of style constructs. Well
before these relatively recent investigations, it has been confirmed
that the nature of style resists fragmentation into units and an intona-
tion of an utterance that cannot be isolated easily or even pointed to
with precision (Scott 1994). Scott calls for methods that study style,
without reducing it to its components. In visual rhetoric the sender’s
intention frames a message with an interested party’s attempt to influ-
ence an audience (Scott 1994). The quality of the crafting of content by its producer takes center stage in this living argument under a new firmament that is less served by signal processing, and more based on an exploration of fluid state-space models. How a situated idea behaves in embodied and experiential contexts transcends traditional mediation.

While in the body of work of rhetoric, style has been affirmed to carry a great deal of information (Mick 1986; Phillips and McQuarrie 2002; Stern 1992), the challenging observation of idiosyncratic expression, rhythm, fluency and tone of voice of utterances didn’t fit a well-developed and sophisticated programme of schemes, tropes and rhetorical figures (McQuarrie and Mick 1992). Its study requires a programmatic shift from content analysis to style analysis, and as such inevitably includes the bravery of accepting that the flavours of the how are a potentially more unifying force than the functional what components. Interpretive frameworks in consumer behaviour, including ones that find their justification in rhetoric, have usually gravitated to content rather than form. The approach in which rhetoric doesn’t rise above a traditional chasm of style versus content, and the acute separation of the two is seen as a defining characteristic of rhetoric (McQuarrie and Philips 2008) doesn’t do much to enhance the potential of style to rise above the status of decorative embellishment in consumer behaviour and marketing. The salient differences between content and style analysis beyond the what and how chasm are that content analysis is concerned mainly with making inferences from message indicators to either source or receiver states and characteristics, style analysis is more concerned with predicting (or interpreting) to message indicators or events from knowledge of source variables (Osgood 1960a).

In contrast with the study and culture of the creation of brand and idea behaviour, aesthetic considerations in general struggle to find the main stages of academic consumer behavior and marketing literature. In disciplines other than marketing and consumer behaviour, the burgeoning area of stylistics has enabled a richer evolution of the style concept. The claim of stylistics include that it offers a systematic study of expression, it can within limits increase knowledge, that such knowledge can be consolidated, and can be communicated to others. The critical stylisticians who make creative brand ideas and define how they behave in the market look for expressions that are perceptually and expressively salient. Idea behaviour is the approach to the differential understanding of the performance of existing and newly developed market interventions and assumes the creation of performative ideations are a consequence of a brand’s history, and living interactive motivations. Idea behaviour is by nature experiential and embodied and its space for expressive variability is both influenced by a brand’s heritage and the urgency of its environmental currency. Ideas in a brand context are stylised concepts for world-making.

**THE BEHAVIOURAL QUALITIES OF BRAND STYLE**

"What style shall I choose to clear up the immense chaos of diverse, contrary, often vile, and sometimes sublime sentiments which ceaselessly agitate my soul?"

(Rousseau 1955)

The cursory treatment of brand style in both academic and managerial circles may be linked to its elusive character (Person and Snelders 2010). Yet, the dynamic aesthetics of a differentiated style offer managers one of the last serial motives to normative idea behaviour for their brands. It offers a behavioural grounding to challenges as yet unexplored, with an in-built radar to keep a distance from competing expressions and experiences. The contemporary attraction of the style concept as a stable pattern for behavioural change may be argued on the basis of four organic angles that offer new opportunities for the inner quality of idea behaviour.

**Style is a relational concept**

Style represents order, clarity and not least the opportunity of an *enchainement* of ideas (Buffon 1894), as a true perception of the relation between objects. In the same way that service dominant logo proposes brand value-in-use (Merz, He, and Vargo 2009), style offers a structure for expressive patterns-in-use (Widdowson 1996). Style both defines form and a relational pattern, and the internal relationships among the individual parts (Ackerman 1962). It is an expressive linking pattern in the dynamic connection of discrete moments, and a relation between the (brand) expression and the world.

**Style is an experiential concept**

It offers a media-independent and embodied perspective to the potential harmony of the lived and performed patterns of idea behaviour. Style is the characteristic ‘signature feature’ (Jacquette 2000) of the functioning of a brand. Style is a contextual concept. In current mobile segmentation strategies, the intention of behavioural ideation aims less for a resonance with the profile of an individual or group, than relevance in the situations in which we communicate. Style influences the ordonnance of ideas and the arrangement or disposition of parts. Style is a gravitational concept. Style has been embraced as an autonomous set of understandings in a social setting (Rosenblum 1978). Style gravitates to its own tone, and may at once resist and promote formational development. Styles may dynamically change over time, within their own pace and rhythm. A change in idea behaviour is in itself set by the parameters of style the expressive artefacts a brand carries within itself. The fluid aesthetic patterning occurs within an internalised behavioural heritage as a confluence conversation with its own history. Style is a poetic concept. What makes new explorations in style such a promising trajectory for idea behaviour in part sustained by an internal aesthetic rectitude. Both style and poetics survive by means of an associative under-coding. The adjacency of the aesthetic concepts of poetics and style, may is exemplified in their common dependency on the necessary openness to potential meaning association (Eco 1989; Wijland 2009).

The brand concept has already been prefixed to a plethora of marketing themes and notions: from brand identity to brand design, from brand image to brand personality and brand culture to brand-scape. This article proposes a re-invigorated interest in the potential of brand style in mobile, and digital, experiential and embodied contexts. Based on the earlier style definition, brand style is the idiosyncratic way in which a brand does something. Novak Djokovic’s style is best expressed in his behaviour. The legitimization of this initial call for a fresh engagement with style as an act may be recaptured as follows. Brand style is a timeless media- and vehicle-independent concept and viable in future contexts. It is a performative concept that is actionable and discernable in any environment. Brand style is a behavioural concept. It shows a longitudinal mentality in aesthetic dimensions, how old and new ideas act, and what they are able to credibly claim and communicate. Brand style offers a rare normative reference in a fluid landscape, both within itself an in relation to other brand styles. Finally: brand style offers the poetic openness for engaging market dances. It is uniquely positioned to accommodate the full complexity of a brand’s presence (Wijland and Fell 2009).
CONCLUSION

Style is the answer to everything.
A fresh way to approach a dull or a dangerous thing.
To do a dull thing with style
is preferable to doing a dangerous thing
without it.
./.
Not many have style.
Not many can keep style.
I have seen dogs with more style than men.
Although not many dogs have style.
Cats have it with abundance
./.
Style is the difference,
a way of doing,
a way of being done.

6 herons standing quietly in a pool of water
or you walking out of the bathroom naked
without seeing me.

(Bukowski 1972)

The behavioural study of the interactive style of market dialogues may be intimated from a consumer and idea perspective of the creative continuum. This article challenges the widely accepted shift in the balance of the brand’s authorial intent to exclusively consumer-led views and may reclaim the creative space within the subtleties of the internal and relation powers of brand style. This is not to turn back the clock towards a preordained, nostalgic or lost supremacy for makers, but rather an argument for a poetic choreography in which a brand’s idea makers can confidently set the tone, rhythm and expression for interaction. In synchronization with the urgent call for a honing of the rhetorical skills of brand managers in the face of a consumer-centric meaning making landscape (Iglesias and Bonet 2012) this article proposes a re-evaluation of style as a future-oriented driver for idea behaviour.

Brand style is not primarily conceived to be reactive; it is the implicit protagonist in the business of the continuous genesis in idea behaviour. Whether in text or visual, in embodied performance or silent experience, style creatively leaves its finger- and foot-prints all over the behaviour of brand ideas.

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