

PUR4243 – Industry Perspectives: Brand Relevance and Culture

University of Florida
College of Journalism and Communications
Fall 2025 – Mondays, Period 11 (6:15–7:05 PM)
Virtual Course via Zoom

1. Course & Contact Information

Instructor: Geoffrey Schiller
Email: gschiller@ufl.edu
Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom
TA: None

2. Course Description

This course explores the intersection of brand storytelling and cultural relevance in the public relations and marketing ecosystem. Students will examine how brands become, stay, or lose cultural relevance through strategic communication. From Super Bowl campaigns to TikTok virality, and from brand boycotts to influencer partnerships, we will analyze what happens when culture and commerce collide. Through case studies, guest speakers, weekly discussions, and a final project, students will develop the tools to think critically about brand identity, cultural shifts, reputation, and purpose in the real world.

3. Course Objectives

- Define brand relevance and its connection to culture
- Analyze how culture influences brand behavior
- Apply storytelling, platform, and influencer strategies
- Develop culturally grounded communication plans
- Present insights and campaigns with clarity and creativity

4. Evaluation and Grading

| Component | Weight |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Participation & Attendance | 50% |
| Midterm Presentation | 25% |
| Final Campaign Project | 25% |

Participation Criteria:

- Participation is defined as cameras being on all at times. Failure to do will negatively effect your grade.
- Participation is further defined as contribution from each student to the class via asking questions and/or adding commentary.
- Attendance is defined as being camera on from the start of the class through the end of the class. Failure to remain in attendance for the duration of the class will harm your attendance grade. Failure to be present at the beginning of class will harm your attendance grade.

Classroom behavior expectations:

- Professionalism and courtesy for fellow classmates is expected to be maintained throughout each class session.
- Students must be fully present during class which means no cell phone usage, nor any other tabs aside from the Zoom Link open on computers for the duration of the class (unless otherwise expected for the purposes of the class session).

Recommended Texts

- Recommended sources include: Adweek, Ad Age, NYT CMO Today, Digiday, Marketing Dive

6. Weekly Schedule & Class Descriptions

- Week 1 – Aug 25: Intro: What Makes a Brand Culturally Relevant in 2025
→ Overview of course expectations. Discussion: Which brands feel relevant and why? Students reflect on cultural forces that drive relevance.
- Week 2 – Sept 8: Channels and Culture: Where Relevance Is Made
→ Explore the role of platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Reddit. Case: Women's sports, TikTok-driven virality.
- Week 3 – Sept 15: Brand Purpose: Authenticity vs. Optics
→ Examine brand intention vs. public perception. Case: Bud Light vs. Dove's CROWN Act.
- Week 4 – Sept 22: Narrative Building: How Brands Shape and Ride Cultural Stories
→ Break down narrative arcs and cultural storytelling. Cases: Barbie Movie, e.l.f.'s TikTok campaign, etc..

- Week 5 – Sept 29: Client Perspective: Staying Culturally Fluent
→ Guest speaker (TBD) from a senior brand manager. Students ask questions about trend evaluation, internal brand decisions.
- Week 6 – Oct 6: Creator Culture: Influence & Identity
→ Case studies: Hailey Bieber x Rhode, Alix Earle x SipMargs. Discussion on influencer-brand fit and cultural alignment.
- Week 7 – Oct 13: Brand Resets: Nike, CoverGirl, Abercrombie
→ Explore brand reinvention strategies. What makes a comeback feel earned?
- Week 8 – Oct 20: Midterm Presentations (Solo Brand Relevance Snapshot)
→ Students present cultural evaluations of brands. 5-min solo format with peer Q&A.
- Week 9 – Oct 27: Debrief + Campaign Strategy: Planning for Relevance
→ Review midterm themes. Intro to final project. Discuss how brands plan for always-on cultural engagement.
- Week 10 – Nov 3: Athletes, Identity & Cultural Power
→ Explore how athletes (e.g., Megan Rapinoe, Angel Reese) drive cultural relevance for brands like Nike.
- Week 11 – Nov 10: Final Project Workshop (Live Zoom, Campaign Drafts)
→ Students workshop their campaign ideas in breakouts. Instructor check-ins and feedback.
- Week 12 – Dec 2: Final Presentations (All Students)
→ Live solo presentations of final projects (7–8 min each). Slide deck required.
- Week 13 – Dec 9: Wrap-Up: What Brand Relevance Really Means
→ Class reflection and takeaway discussion. What trends and brands will define 2026?

7. Midterm Project Brief

Each student will present a 5-minute solo brand analysis evaluating a brand's current cultural relevance.

- Include brand overview, cultural context, assessment of relevance, and your POV on what they should do next.
- Slides optional but encouraged. Q&A will follow each.
- Graded on insight clarity, brand understanding, and delivery.

8. Final Project Brief

Each student will develop and present a solo brand campaign rooted in a cultural insight.

- Must include brand background, cultural insight, big idea, and execution strategy.
- 7–8 minute presentation with required slide deck.
- Graded on cultural fluency, creativity, strategy, and clarity.

9. Academic Policies and Resources

Refer to <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolices> for official university-wide policies.

10. ACEJMC Accreditation Objectives

By graduation, all students should be able to:

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press
- Understand multicultural history and the role of communication professionals
- Communicate in ways that empower traditionally underrepresented communities
- Present information creatively using appropriate tools
- Write clearly for a variety of audiences and formats
- Apply ethical principles in communication
- Critically evaluate and conduct research
- Apply basic statistical concepts
- Use current tools and technology relevant to the profession