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Cultural Truths

Cannes Lions Festival
of Creativity 2025





Cannes Lions '25 was a cultural flashpoint

This year creativity stood at the crossroads of technological acceleration, economic pressure, and shifting cultural expectations. Amidst rosé-fueled panels and over-the-top activations, deeper truths surfaced: the industry is experiencing a reckoning with purpose, progress, and people.

In this report, we distill key cultural insights that should shape how brands show up in the world, and why experience matters more than ever.

1. Experiences are the medium of meaning
2. The creative translator imperative
3. AI as a cultural mirror, not just a tool
4. The collapse of silos: commerce, community, creativity as one
5. Purpose can't be performative

1

Experiences

 DOORDASH Ads

are the medium
of meaning

YOUR BRAND, OWNING THE MOMENT

If content is king, experience is queen, and she's running the Croisette.

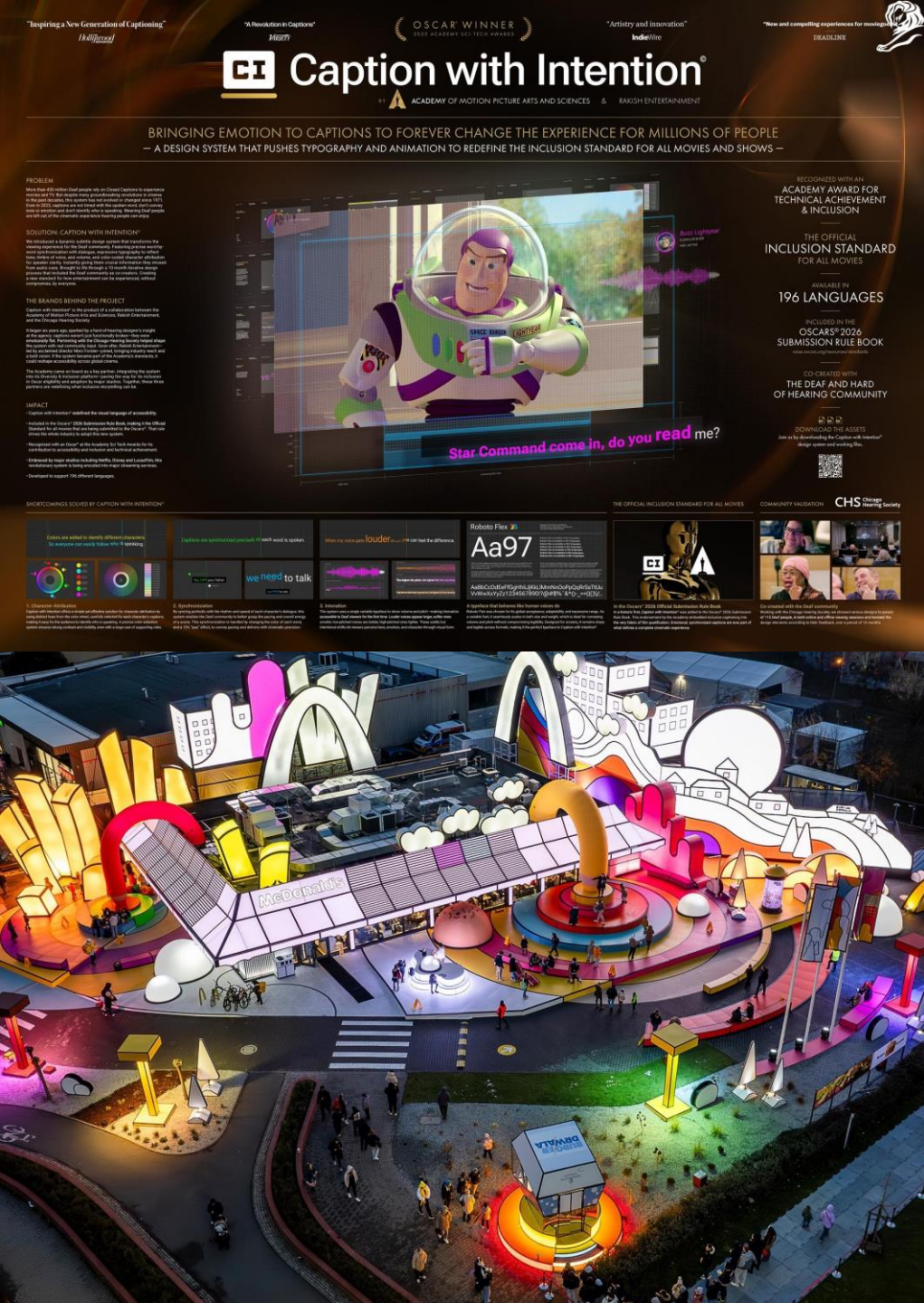
From Meta's skate park to Amazon's rosé fountains and DoorDash's inaugural appearance in bold red, the IRL footprint of Cannes was bigger, louder, and more competitive than ever. But scale wasn't the differentiator, meaning was.

- The most effective experiences weren't the most expensive—they were the most intentional: multisensory, inclusive, designed to be documented and felt.
- Younger audiences gravitated toward spaces that let them *do* something, *make* something, or *feel* something real.

CULTURAL TRUTH >

**Culture isn't absorbed passively.
It's made through participation.**





TREND 1 | EXPERIENCES ARE THE MEDIUM OF MEANING

Awards Insight

While some case films leaned heavily on sizzle and spectacle, the work that stood out at Cannes delivered true, immersive brand experiences, not just experiences made for film.

Grand Prix-winning “Caption with Intention” (FCB Chicago, the Chicago Hearing Society, and Rakish Entertainment) didn’t just nod to accessibility, it redefined media participation through a lens of cultural equity.

Similarly, McDonald's Polska's “Winter Takes on Colors” turned a physical restaurant into an interactive coloring experience, inviting real-time creative expression and community engagement. These were experiences designed to be felt, not just filmed.

CULTURAL TRUTH

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Does the Brand Experience & Activation category need to be redefined?

Experiential leaders are calling for a reexamination of the category so that creativity and craft are recognized alongside the real-world interactions of a true brand experience.



A group of six people (three men and three women) are seated on a stage in front of a large white backdrop featuring the TikTok logo. The individuals are dressed in casual attire; some are wearing polo shirts, while others are in t-shirts or a cap. They are all smiling and appear to be engaged in a lively discussion or performance. Several of them are holding microphones, and one man on the far left is pointing upwards with his right hand. Another man on the far right is raising his fist. In the foreground, the backs of several audience members' heads are visible, indicating they are seated and watching the event. The overall atmosphere is energetic and celebratory.

TikTok

2

The creative
translator
imperative



If 2024 was the peak of the creator economy hype, 2025 marked its grounding.

Creators aren't just distribution channels; they're cultural interpreters and co-creators. Partnerships that worked were built on mutual respect and data-informed trust, not transactional endorsements.

- Creators were everywhere from TikTok's beach to Spotify's stage. But the most resonant stories came from those who built connection, not just content. The takeaway: culture is co-authored.
- Gen Z creators demanded more diverse, inclusive, and values-driven stages, literally and figuratively.

CULTURAL TRUTH >

In today's creator economy, influence isn't just measured in reach. It's measured in relevance, co-creation, and values alignment.

Awards Insight

Vaseline Verified was a breakthrough social campaign that transformed viral “Vaseline hacks” into scientifically tested truths.

As unsafe trends spread on TikTok and Instagram, Vaseline stepped in with lab-tested validations and direct creator engagement, reclaiming authority in a creator-led space. Verified hacks earned a “Vaseline Verified” badge, turning science into a symbol of trust and driving massive engagement. The campaign achieved over 63M interactions, sparked cultural collaborations, and boosted sales while guiding users toward safe, accurate skin care practices.

By engaging creators directly, the brand built a trusted, platform-native system of advocacy.

CULTURAL TRUTH >

When brands mix viral hack culture with science and social fluency, they can battle misinformation with creator-enabled momentum.



Photo Credit: Cannes Love The Work

“INGENIOUS”
verge

Vaseline Verified

“The Vaseline Verified tick is a must-have”
yahoo!

Context
Today, people are rediscovering the wonders of Vaseline jelly, finding ingenious new ways to use it. Shoe polish, spice guard, teeth whitener, pomade—viral Vaseline hacks are constantly shared online, almost daily.

Challenge
With so many unofficial hacks out there with our name on it, we had to ask, do they actually work? And are they safe? Vaseline needed to step in and respond with the authority only we have.

The Idea: Vaseline Verified
For the first time ever, we got scientists to test these viral hacks in labs.

In this campaign, our lab proof became the official Verification we used to engage directly with users and creators of hacks, pitching their hacks to officially verify them or debunk them—turning a social media trend into organic advertising content for Vaseline.

87% positive sentiments
450+ creators engaged
+13.9% Retail Sales Value Growth*
7.1 Million organic views+reach

+69% Vaseline mentions
+1293% hacks mentions
+43% Underlying Ecom Sales Growth*
63.3 Million total interactions

Media mentions: yahoo!, CNET, TODAY, inkt, PRWeek, New York City, E! Entertainment, FILE, allure, inStyle, BuzzFeed.

Key campaign milestones:

- We broke into the thinking world of hacks on social.
- By scientifically verifying hacks.
- Official Vaseline Verified status was shared.
- And made Verified hacks shoppable.
- Top creators were awarded with a trophy and e-commerce revenue.
- Even celebs and brands wanted to join in, sporting collabs with Cole Vassell, Doritos, and more.

verified
Turning organic “hacks” content into verified income streams

GET YOUR CUTICLE GUARD HERE!

£4.50
Vaseline Petroleum Jelly 250ml
Sold by UnileverUK

Buy now

And made Verified hacks shoppable.

They earned commission from tube sold through their hacks.

3

AI as a
cultural
mirror,

not just a tool

Creativity isn't being replaced by AI. It's being challenged by it.

While AI headlined nearly every panel, the tone this year was more anxious than euphoric. Yes, AI is a tool, but it's also a test. A test of imagination, ethics, and identity. Cannes revealed an industry straddling excitement and existential dread.

- Apple and Shonda Rhimes offered the most resonant refrains: creativity is human. And creativity matters most when it's under threat.
- Practical adoption is accelerating. AI is being used for everything from performance copy to hyper-personalized media planning.
- The risk? A flood of sameness. The opportunity? A renaissance of weird, unexpected, deeply human work that stands apart.
- The dark side is only getting darker. A wave of AI-fueled scandals, including a revoked Grand Prix forced Cannes to confront its credibility crisis. The result? A new global integrity framework designed to curb manipulation and restore trust. But can it?

CULTURAL TRUTH >

In the age of AI, credibility is the new creative currency, and it's earned, not assumed.



Photo credit: Sean Ebsworth photography

The collapse
of silos:
commerce,

4

community,
creativity as one





We're in the age of convergence. The lines are gone.

Content, commerce, community, and purpose no longer live in separate silos. Cannes revealed a flywheel model of cultural engagement where every touchpoint matters, and every touchpoint is *monetizable* when done right.

- Emma Chamberlain and Pinterest's coffee collab?
Not just a launch. A vibe. A community. A cultural statement.
- From Tik Tok Gardens to Creator Rooftops, brands aren't just advertisers, they're ecosystem architects.

CULTURAL TRUTH >

Cultural capital is the new ROI. Value isn't just captured in transactions—it's built through shared meaning.



5

Purpose
can't be

performative

Purpose under pressure: when standing still isn't an option

Cultural tension was palpable—from geopolitical conflict to DEI fatigue, major global issues were noticeably absent from official stages. Brands talked purpose but avoided heat. Behind the optimism, many sidestepped the hard conversations audiences expect them to engage with.

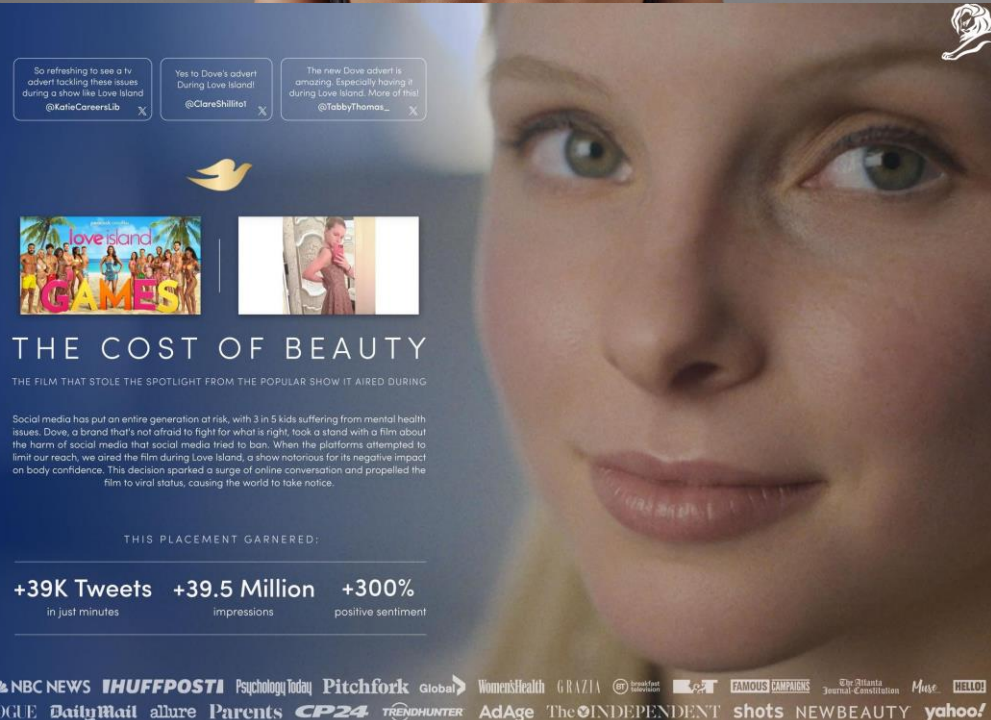
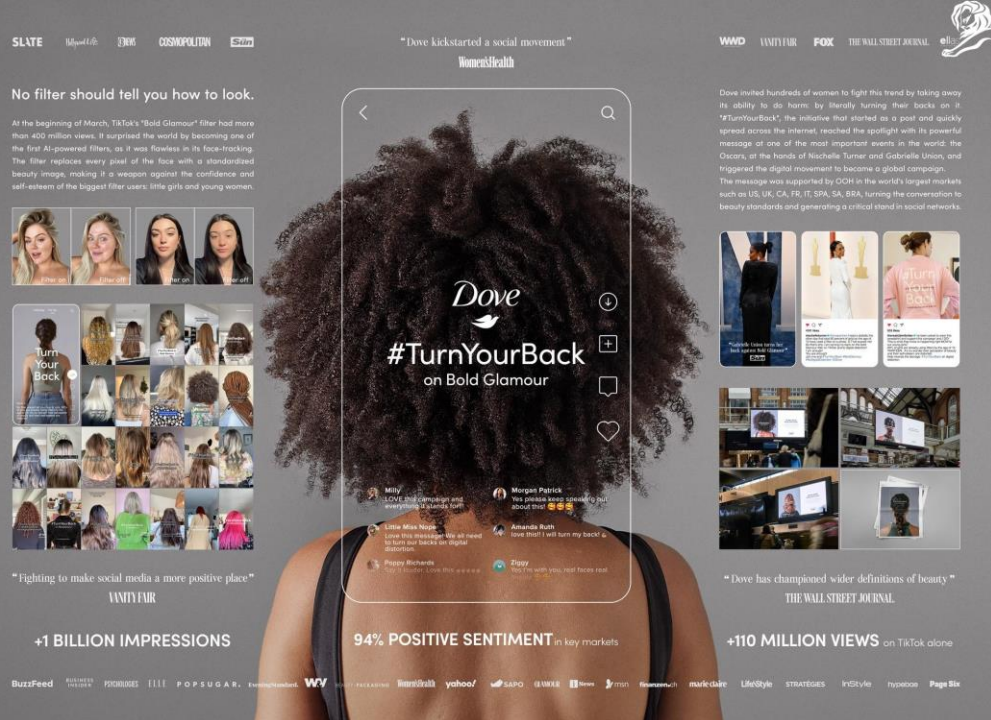
Silence has consequences. Inaction, especially from brands known for purpose-driven work, created visible gaps in credibility. Real impact requires clarity and conviction. The brands making cultural waves, like Dove, aren't just talking values; they're legislating them.

Disillusionment is growing. Some major agencies have announced they won't enter Cannes Lions next year, questioning whether awards still reflect integrity or values.

CULTURAL TRUTH >

In uncertain times, relevance comes from boldness, not branding. Culture demands action, not optics.





TREND 5 | PURPOSE CAN'T BE PERFORMATIVE

Awards insight

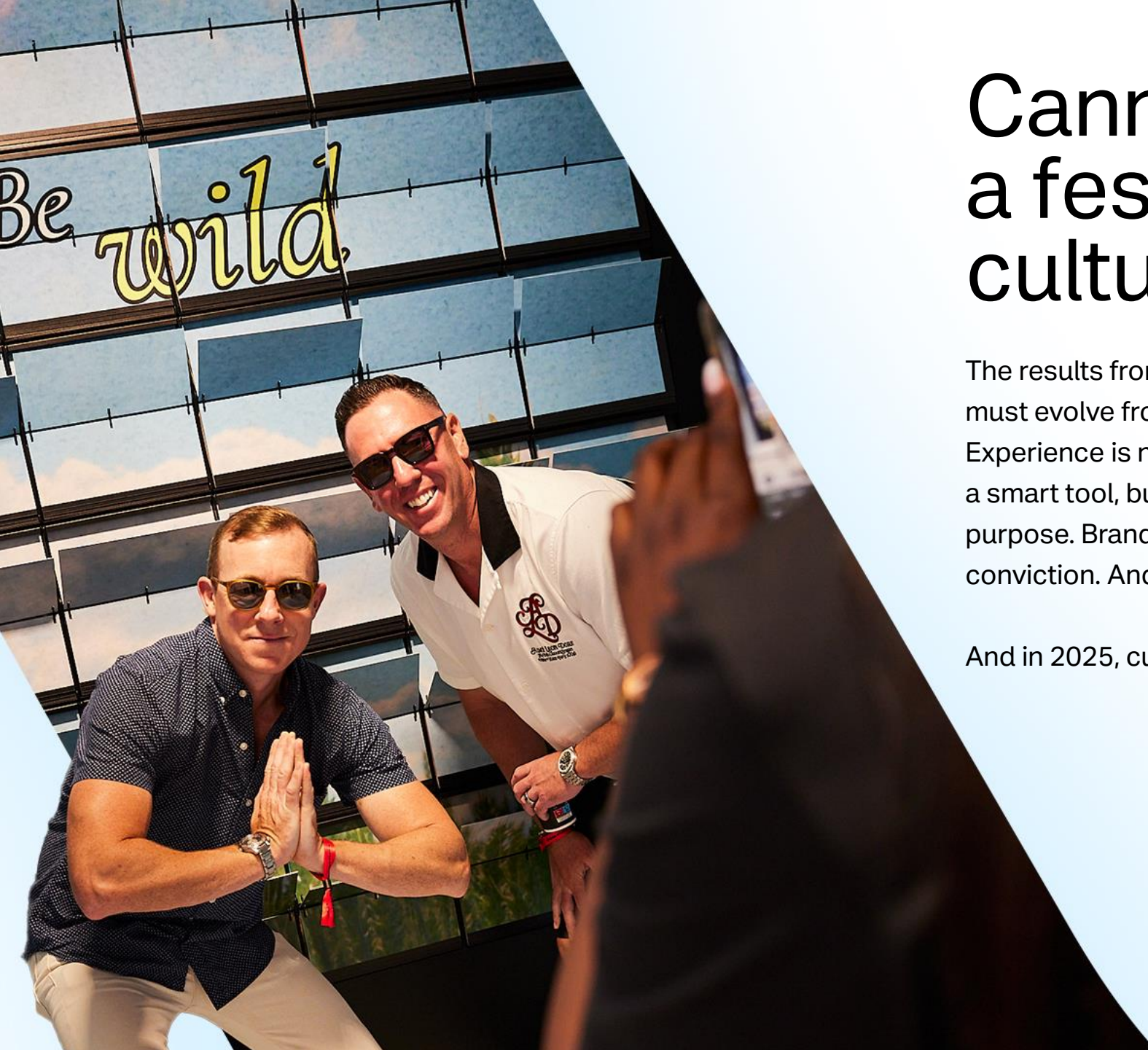
If there was any doubt, Dove washed away all concerns about their commitment to their initiatives. Brands making cultural waves driving real change will see the spotlight—especially in times when many are playing it safe.

The campaign transformed the brand from a declining soap company into a global beauty powerhouse by challenging industry norms. Instead of using models, Dove featured “real women” to redefine beauty as a source of confidence, not anxiety. Sparked by a global study revealing that only 2% of women considered themselves beautiful, the campaign inspired cultural and policy change, reaching millions through initiatives like the Dove Self-Esteem Project. Since 2004, the platform has driven over \$28B in revenue and expanded Dove into seven product categories worldwide.

The brands making real cultural impact embraced this tension: Dove’s long-term commitment to real beauty and legislation around AI-driven filters wasn’t a campaign. It was a movement.

CULTURAL TRUTH

When brands lead with long-term conviction, not campaigns, they don’t just join cultural conversations, they change the standards.



Cannes is more than a festival – it's a cultural stress test

The results from the five-day gathering were clear: brands must evolve from advertisers to cultural participants. Experience is not just a tactic; it's a stage for values. AI can be a smart tool, but also a cautionary one. A proof point for purpose. Brands can become cultural anchors but must have conviction. And be a mirror for culture.

And in 2025, culture is asking for more.



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Bolder + Culture-Driven

Culture's moving fast. Let's shape it together.

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