

# CULTURAL STORYTELLING IN PERFUME BRAND COLLABORATIONS: ENHANCING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how cultural storytelling in perfume brand collaborations fosters emotional connection between consumers and brands. While prior research identifies “culture” as a key success factor in collaborations, the specific mechanisms by which cultural storytelling strengthens consumer–brand relationships remain underexplored. To address this gap, the study develops a theoretical framework focusing on three mediating mechanisms: identity congruence (IC), sensory coupling (SC), and narrative coherence (NC). A qualitative multiple-case design was employed, analyzing three high-profile collaborations—*Baccarat Rouge 540* (Maison Francis Kurkdjian × Baccarat), *Another 13* (Le Labo × Another Magazine), and *Eau Triple Iris de Malte* (Buly 1803 × Louvre Museum). Data sources included brand-owned archives, campaign materials, social media content, and four expert interviews. Thematic analysis involved deductive coding of data into IC, SC, and NC, followed by cross-case comparison to identify recurring activation patterns. Findings show that cultural storytelling activates IC, SC, and NC in distinct ways across cases, jointly fostering emotional connection. However, these mechanisms did not emerge automatically. Their effectiveness depended on recurring managerial choices—partner fit, story-first design, and multi-channel experience—which were inductively derived as managerial levers.

Conceptually, the study clarifies the mediating mechanisms linking cultural storytelling to emotional connection in a scent-led category. Practically, it provides brand managers with an empirically grounded framework for designing collaborations that extend beyond product function to cultivate loyalty and enhance willingness to pay.

*Keywords: Cultural storytelling, Emotional connection, Collaborative marketing, Perfume brands, Brand identity*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The global perfume market has recently become one of the fastest-growing segments within the beauty and personal care industry, having recorded a revenue increase of 6.8 billion U.S. dollars from 2018 to 2024, with a further steady rise of 13.2 billion U.S. dollars expected from 2024 to 2030 [1]. This indicates that perfume has moved beyond being a luxury for a select few and has become an essential consumer good that expresses personal identity and sensory experience [2]. These market shifts have brought important changes to consumer behavior. Contemporary consumers value emotional connections with brands that go beyond mere product purchase and regard perfume as a means to express their own identity and values [3]. In particular, as the MZ generation (Millennials and Gen Z)—characterized by sensitivity to trends and a taste for originality [4]—has risen as a major consumer group, brand identity and narrative have become critical factors in purchase decisions [5].

In this context, brand collaboration has evolved beyond limited-edition product development. It now serves as a strategic tool to strengthen brand identity and deepen emotional connection through cultural storytelling [6]. In practice, successful collaborations combine the cultural assets and symbolism of each brand to deliver differentiated experiences and value. Prior research has highlighted “culture” and “personality” within brand identity as success factors in perfume brand collaborations [7]. In this paper, we focus exclusively on “culture” and examine how cultural storytelling contributes to emotional connection.

To address this aim, the study adopts three theoretical mechanisms drawn from prior literature—identity congruence, sensory coupling, and narrative coherence—as analytic lenses. Using a multiple-case study of three perfume brand collaborations, informed by expert interviews and secondary materials (brand archives, campaigns, and social media), the analysis investigates how these mechanisms operate in practice. This research is guided by the following questions:

- **RQ1.** How does cultural storytelling in perfume brand collaborations contribute to forming emotional connection between consumers and brands?
- **RQ2.** What strategic implications does cultural storytelling provide for enhancing consumer experience and brand loyalty?

By answering these questions, the study is expected to demonstrate how cultural storytelling fosters emotional connection in perfume brand collaborations through specific mechanisms. It further anticipates that the effectiveness of these mechanisms is conditioned by managerial choices in structuring collaborative strategy.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study develops a framework that synthesizes insights from prior literature to explain how cultural storytelling fosters emotional connection in perfume brand collaborations. The framework centers on three interrelated themes—cultural storytelling, emotional connection, and mediating mechanisms—identified through literature review and refined in light of the research questions.

### 2.1 Cultural Storytelling

In competitive markets, storytelling is one of the most effective ways to communicate with consumers [8]. Stories increase comprehension and evaluation [9] and act as one of the most influential types of communication [10][11][12][13][14]. Recent studies report that when brand stories are integrated with sensory experiences, emotional connection with the brand is strengthened [15]. Cultural storytelling, in particular, allows consumers to empathize with a brand’s values, encouraging identity congruence and forming bonds that extend beyond purchase. In perfume branding, olfactory stimuli amplify these effects: as a medium that evokes memory and emotion, it allows brands to deliver cultural experiences that transcend the product itself [16][17].

### 2.2 Emotional Connection

Emotional connection refers to a consumer’s enduring affective bond with a brand, encompassing constructs such as self–brand connection, brand attachment, and brand affection [10][18][19][20]. It arises when consumers perceive the brand as a symbolic entity integrated into their identity and life narrative. Emotional connection is characterized by affective responses [21](e.g., affection, pride, nostalgia), psychological belonging [17][22](e.g., to a cultural community), and sensory memory anchoring [23]. It drives brand loyalty, repurchase intention, and willingness to pay [24]. In perfume branding, olfactory stimuli’s neurological link to autobiographical memory intensifies this connection, especially when reinforced by cultural storytelling [17].

### 2.3 Mediating Mechanisms

Prior research identifies three mechanisms through which cultural storytelling fosters emotional connection: identity congruence, sensory coupling, and narrative coherence [7].

- (1) **Identity congruence (IC):** The alignment between the collaborators’ cultural values and those of target consumers. When the story, symbols, and tone resonate with the consumer’s self-concept, self–brand connection strengthens and evaluative responses improve [25][26]. Consumers tend to choose brands congruent with their identity, and perceptions of self–brand congruence positively influence choice, satisfaction, and loyalty [25][27][29].
- (2) **Sensory coupling (SC):** The process by which olfactory cues anchor the collaboration story in autobiographical memory and affect [30]. In fragrance, scent acts as an emotional “anchor,” making narratives more vivid and personally relevant [31][32]. Indicators include explicit note–story cross-references, scent descriptors tied to cultural heritage, and memory-related consumer talk (e.g., “reminds me of ...”).
- (3) **Narrative coherence (NC):** The consistency of the collaboration story across pre-launch, launch, and post-launch touchpoints [33]. Coherent motifs reduce meaning breaks across

channels and phases, thereby extending engagement beyond purchase. Indicators include cross-channel continuity, repeated motifs, and seamless handoff across consumer touchpoints.

## 2.4 Theoretical Integration

Together, these mechanisms explain how cultural storytelling translates symbolic meaning into lived consumer experience. Identity Congruence (IC) is the alignment of cultural values between collaborators and target consumers, reinforcing self-brand alignment. Sensory Coupling (SC) refers to the process through which olfactory cues anchor collaboration narratives in autobiographical memory. Narrative Coherence (NC) captures the consistency of the collaboration story across pre-launch, launch, and post-launch phases, minimizing meaning breaks and extending engagement across touchpoints.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore how cultural storytelling operates in perfume brand collaborations and how it fosters emotional connection. A mixed strategy combining literature review and in-depth interviews was employed [7].

### 3.1 Case Selection Criteria

Cases were selected from 30 global perfume collaborations based on the following criteria:

- **Brand fit:** Globally distributed brands for which perfume is a core product.
- **Attention metric:** Top 10% by the annualized count of Instagram hashtags and Naver Blog mentions since launch. Public data from both platforms were collected using a web-scraping workflow and tracked from their release dates until August 31, 2024. Counts were annualized (total mentions ÷ months since launch × 12), duplicates/spam removed, and stratified samples manually verified for brand relevance.
- **Sustainability:** Initially launched as limited editions but later integrated into the permanent lineup, as verified through brand official websites and press coverage.

Based on these criteria, three representative cases were selected.

1. Baccarat Rouge 540 (Maison Francis Kurkdjian × Baccarat)
2. Another 13 (Le Labo × Another Magazine)
3. Eau Triple Iris de Malte (Buly 1803 × Louvre Museum)

Table 1. Case overview and criteria fit. Source: Author.

Case	Release Year	Mode (LE/PE <sup>1</sup> )	Evidence of sustained traction (Instagram hashtags / Naver mentions)
Baccarat 540	2016	LE → PE	2,000 / 70
Another 13	2017	LE → PE	170 / 120
Eau Triple Iris de Malte	2019	LE → PE	120 / 100

### 3.2 Data Collection

This study employed both secondary and primary data sources.

- **Secondary data:** Brand-owned and campaign materials were collected and analyzed, including official websites, press releases, marketing campaign materials, and social media content.
- **Primary data:** In-depth interviews (45–60 minutes) with four professionals, each with over 15 years of experience in the perfume industry in visual merchandising, retail sales, marketing, and product planning, offering multi-perspective insights.

Table 2. Interview participants. Source: Author.

ID	Occupation	Position	Experience
Expert A	Visual Merchandising (VMD)	Team Leader	20 years
Expert B	Retail Sales	Manager	18 years
Expert C	Marketing	Team Leader	17 years
Expert D	Product Planning (MD)	Senior Staff	15 years

<sup>1</sup> LE=Limited Edition, PE=Permanent Edition.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied in three steps. First, all excerpts from interviews and secondary materials were deductively coded against the three mechanisms of identity congruence (IC), sensory coupling (SC), and narrative coherence (NC). Second, each case was summarized by aligning coded excerpts with mechanisms. Third, a cross-case comparison identified similarities and differences in mechanism activation. A pattern was considered recurring when present in at least two cases and supported by more than one data source (interviews, brand-owned materials, or social media).

Table 3. Illustrative coding examples. Source: Author.

Case	Data Excerpt	Mechanism	Coding Rationale
Baccarat Rouge 540	“The square crystal facets of the bottle and the red crystal immediately capture consumers’ attention.”	SC	Visual and material cues act as sensory anchors that heighten emotional salience.
	“French artisanal tradition with modern sensibility delivered special cultural value.”	IC	Cultural heritage and values resonate with consumers’ self-concept.
	“Campaign narratives consistently highlighted the ‘540’ code and molten-crystal imagery across channels.”	NC	Repetition of symbolic motifs across media sustained narrative coherence and extended engagement.
Another 13	“Consumers see themselves as independent and creative, expressing identity through Another 13.”	IC	Strong alignment between product narrative and consumers’ self-perception.
	“Ambroxan... develops differently on each skin; polarizing but memorable.”	SC	Olfactory variability functions as a sensory–emotional trigger.
	“Transparent bottle and typewriter-style label feel simple yet refined.”	NC	Minimalist aesthetic is consistently enacted across channels.
Eau Triple Iris de Malte	“Fragrances inspired by artworks; product names taken from the paintings.”	NC + SC	Art-heritage narrative coherently repeated; scent–art linkage strengthens memory anchoring.
	“Consumers perceive themselves as cultured, intellectual, and sophisticated.”	IC	Self-image aligns with cultural storytelling embedded in the collaboration.

This process yielded recurring managerial choices that consistently shaped how the mechanisms operated, later conceptualized as managerial levers.

### 3.5 Validity and Limitations

- **Validity:** We pursued triangulation across multiple sources—scholarly literature, brand-owned materials, campaign/social content, and four expert interviews—to enhance the credibility of findings.
- **Limitations:** The absence of quantitative testing limits statistical generalization, and the limited number of cases prevented a detailed analysis of consumer segmentation or cross-cultural contexts.

## 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the multiple-case analysis, linking the theoretical mechanisms of cultural storytelling to empirical evidence from three collaborations. Thematic analysis generated open codes from raw data, which were mapped onto the mechanisms of identity congruence (IC), sensory coupling (SC), and narrative coherence (NC).

### 4.1 Baccarat Rouge 540

Expert interviews emphasized the symbolic power of Baccarat’s red crystal bottle, often described as “a collectible art object” (IC-aspirational luxury identity). Brand-owned materials reinforced this

positioning by highlighting the “540” code and molten-crystal imagery (NC-repeated motif across channels; SC-sensory anchor linking scent to visual imagery). Social media amplified these meanings, with TikTok users framing it as the “scent of the wealthy” (IC-prestige identity; NC-user-generated narrative extension).

#### 4.2 Another 13

Interviews revealed that Another 13 was widely perceived as a “chosen fragrance,” as its Ambroxan molecule developed uniquely on each wearer’s skin (SC-sensory variability anchoring autobiographical memory). Experts noted that this variability enhanced exclusivity and resonated with contemporary values of individuality and creativity (IC). Campaign materials reinforced this through minimalist bottles and numbered labeling (NC), while social media discussions emphasized gender-neutral, clean, and modern qualities (IC; NC-coherence across consumer communities). Personalized labeling services further deepened engagement (NC-ritual continuity; IC-self-expression).

#### 4.3 Eau Triple Iris de Malte

Interviews highlighted the cultural resonance of translating artworks into fragrances, with one respondent noting it “allowed consumers to experience art through scent” (SC-olfactory-art anchoring; IC-alignment with cultivated cultural taste). Calligraphy and engraving services reinforced personalized engagement (NC-ritualized continuity). Brand materials named perfumes after artworks and used classical illustrations in packaging (NC-motif repetition; IC-refined self-concept). On social media, the fragrance was framed as sophisticated and intellectual (IC-self-image of refinement; SC-iris note as sensory symbol of elegance).

#### 4.4 Integrated Model of Cultural Storytelling

Table 4. Case × Mechanism coding matrix. Source: Author.

Mechanism	Baccarat Rouge 540	Another 13	Eau Triple Iris de Malte
<b>Identity Congruence (IC)</b>	Luxury heritage and artistry align with aspirational consumer identities; TikTok users frame it as “scent of the wealthy.”	Values of individuality and creativity resonate with consumers; gender-neutral/modern identity fit.	Consumers identify with cultivated, intellectual, and refined self-image through art-heritage narrative.
<b>Sensory Coupling (SC)</b>	Amber-woody profile linked to “molten crystal” imagery anchors scent to visual/symbolic narrative.	Ambroxan molecule varies by wearer, anchoring scent in autobiographical memory.	Powdery iris note anchors cultural taste; olfactory cues link to artworks.
<b>Narrative Coherence (NC)</b>	Consistent use of “540” code and crystal imagery across campaigns and social media; narrative extended via user-generated content.	Minimalist motifs repeated across channels; personalized labeling sustains continuity.	Fragrance names, packaging motifs, and calligraphy services repeat art-heritage story across touchpoints.

Table 4 presents the within-case coding matrix that illustrates how data excerpts were linked to IC, SC, and NC. Table 5 synthesizes recurring cross-case patterns, which were subsequently interpreted as managerial levers. Figure 1 integrates these insights into a conceptual model that explains how cultural storytelling fosters emotional connection through the activation of IC, SC, and NC.

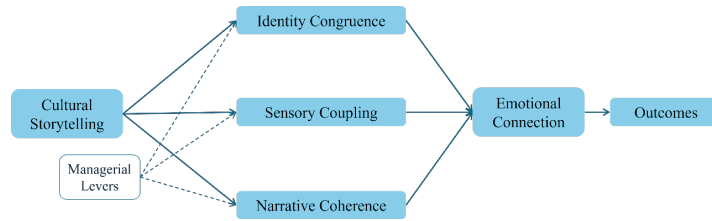


Figure 1. Conceptual model linking cultural storytelling to emotional connection. Source: Author.

Figure 1 consolidates the theoretical framework with empirical findings, illustrating how cultural storytelling fosters emotional connection through IC, SC, and NC.

A cross-case comparison highlighted that mechanisms manifested differently depending on collaboration contexts. Recurring activation patterns were observed in how managers aligned partners, structured stories, and orchestrated consumer journeys.

#### 4.5 Managerial Implications

The cross-case comparison identified three recurring managerial choices that conditioned the effectiveness of IC, SC, and NC. These were conceptualized as managerial levers: partner fit, story-first design, and multi-channel experience.

Table 5. Cross-case recurring patterns and inferred managerial levers. Source: Author.

Illustrative case evidence	Managerial lever
<p><b>Baccarat 540:</b> Luxury heritage and artisanal symbolism aligned with aspirational consumer identity. → IC</p> <p><b>Another 13:</b> Values of individuality and creativity resonated with consumer self-concepts. → IC</p> <p><b>Eau Triple Iris de Malte:</b> Cultivated and intellectual self-image aligned with art–heritage storytelling; repeated art–scent motifs secondarily reinforced. → IC+NC</p>	<b>Partner fit</b>
<p><b>Baccarat 540:</b> “540” code and crystal imagery fixed early in campaigns. → NC</p> <p><b>Another 13:</b> Minimalist motifs consistently enacted across channels. → NC</p> <p><b>Eau Triple Iris de Malte:</b> Art–scent link and classical illustrations embedded into naming and packaging from the outset. → NC+SC</p>	<b>Story-first design</b>
<p><b>Baccarat 540:</b> Symbolic codes repeated across media and extended via TikTok discussions. → NC</p> <p><b>Another 13:</b> Personalized labeling services extended narratives across consumer touchpoints. → NC</p> <p><b>Eau Triple Iris de Malte:</b> Calligraphy and engraving services ritualized continuity across retail and social channels. → NC</p>	<b>Multi-channel experience</b>

- **Partner fit** emphasizes the importance of selecting collaborators whose cultural assets resonate with consumer self-concepts. Alignment with heritage, individuality, or cultivated taste reinforced IC, while minimizing symbolic dissonance secondarily supported NC.
- **Story-first design** underscores the need to establish a shared motif system early in collaboration. Fixing a meaning architecture before production enabled consistent motifs across packaging, retail, and communication, reinforcing NC. Explicit mapping between scent notes and symbolic narratives facilitated SC.
- **Multi-channel experience** highlights the orchestration of touchpoints to sustain NC and extend engagement beyond purchase. By repeating motifs across online and offline channels and embedding ritual devices (e.g., personalized labels, calligraphy services), brands transformed symbolic narratives into lived rituals.

Collectively, these levers demonstrate how managerial choices condition the effectiveness of cultural storytelling. Conceptually, they extend branding theory by specifying empirically grounded practices that connect symbolic narratives to emotional connection. Practically, they offer guidance for designing collaborations that foster durable consumer–brand relationships.

## 4.6 Linking Findings to Research Questions

The findings provide clear answers to the research questions:

- **Answer to RQ1.** Cultural storytelling in perfume collaborations fosters emotional connection through three reinforcing mechanisms: Identity congruence, Sensory coupling, and Narrative coherence.
- **Answer to RQ2.** The effectiveness of these mechanisms is shaped by managerial levers. Partner alignment, Story-first design, and Multi-channel execution emerged as critical practices for sustaining emotional engagement and strengthening loyalty.

## 5 CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of Findings and Contributions

This study examined how cultural storytelling in perfume brand collaborations contributes to consumer–brand emotional connection. Through three cases—Baccarat Rouge 540, Another 13, and Eau Triple Iris de Malte—the analysis showed that cultural storytelling operates through three mediating mechanisms: identity congruence (IC), sensory coupling (SC), and narrative coherence (NC). These mechanisms transform collaborations into lived consumer experiences.

The findings further revealed that these mechanisms are not self-activating; their effectiveness is conditioned by managerial choices in collaboration design and execution. Three recurrent practices were identified: partner fit, ensuring cultural congruence at the stage of collaborator selection; story-first design, establishing a shared motif system early in the process; and multi-channel experience, orchestrating touchpoints to sustain narratives across consumer journeys.

In short, cultural storytelling—when structured through managerial levers—activates IC, SC, and NC, which in turn foster emotional connection. Conceptually, this study clarifies the pathways linking cultural storytelling to emotional connection in a scent-led category. Practically, it provides brand managers with an empirically grounded framework for designing collaborations that extend beyond product function to foster loyalty and enhance consumers’ willingness to pay.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the absence of quantitative testing restricts statistical generalization. The study focuses on identifying the mechanisms of cultural storytelling rather than achieving broad generalization. This focus, however, entails certain limitations in generalizability. Second, due to the limited number of cases, a detailed consumer segmentation analysis was not feasible. Future research should examine how the resonance of storytelling varies across cultural or demographic contexts and validate these differences through quantitative or longitudinal research designs.

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