

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF BRAND LOYALTY AND CONSUMER IDENTITY
AMONG MILLENNIAL MALES LIVING IN CENTRAL OHIO

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Brand loyalty is a common theme throughout consumer and market research, yet it has not been a major topic among anthropologists. The research presented here is an anthropological exploration of the social and cultural influences on how a unique demographic - millennial males - view their own loyalty to brands. Through the use of qualitative interviews and online surveys, participants provided insight in to how they viewed their favorite brands and how those brands fit in to their lives. After analysis was done on these interviews a number of themes and degrees of attachment were identified and discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the fields of business and marketing, “brand” is often defined in a modern sense as a “unique design, sign, symbol, words, or a combination of these, employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from its competitors” (Business Dictionary 2016). I would suggest, though, that brands predate modern marketing. Scholars have noted that branded forms of material culture in the form of sealing practices can be dated as far back as the Urban Revolution of 4000 BC (Wengrow 2008, 7). Furthermore, several archaeologists and anthropologists have pursued an understanding of the creation and persistence of branding “as a particular mechanism for structuring the marketing of mass-produced, replaceable goods in social contexts where there is often a significant separation between producers and consumers” (Martinon-Torres 2010, 213). Though not always framed in the context of branding or marketing, anthropologists have regularly attempted to better understand the role of material culture in the “negotiation of personal and collective identities and bonds” (Martinon-Torres 2010, 213).

Perhaps one of the most prominent instances of early anthropological research in this area is that of Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1922) exploration of the “Kula ring” in the Trobriand Islands, which suggested that consumption “does not answer to an individual economy of needs but is a social function of prestige and hierarchical distribution” (Baudrillard 1972, 30). This idea of a “social function” is still prominent today, not only in the eyes of social scientists, but also in the minds of marketers, advertisers, and brand strategists. According to Kravets and Orge (2010), “Brands, their symbolic qualities and cultural power have recently attracted

interdisciplinary scholarly interest” (207). Furthermore, McCabe and Malefyt (2010) write, “Corporate marketers assign meaning to products and create brand identities based on their understanding of research on what products mean to consumers” (252). There are a number of explanations and definitions as to what a brand really is. Kravets and Orge (2010) generalize branding as “a mode of connectivity between a producer and consumers” (207), while Diamond et al. (2009) argue that “powerful brands are the products of multiple sources authoring multiple narrative representations in multiple venues” and that, “a brand is the product of dynamic interaction among all those components” (130). However, a more general definition of brands and branding is as “marketing tools created for the purpose of differentiating a company’s offering from the competition” (Chernev et al. 2011, 67).

In recent years brands such as Google, Adidas, Microsoft, and many others have relied on the insights of anthropologists and other cultural experts to guide their marketing strategies and strengthen their connectivity with their customers (Baer 2014). The research presented here is an example of such anthropological research on brands and consumers, particularly on the feelings and perceptions of loyalty some consumers have toward certain brands in their life.

Client and Client Needs

Revolocity is a marketing and brand-strategy company based in Columbus, Ohio, and is one of those organizations that understands the importance of creating and maintaining connections between people and brands. They specialize in starting with consumer research and building meaningful brand content and experiences. Their work has included in-store product demonstrations, online video content, and social media strategies. The insights

presented in this thesis were part of a research project for Revolocity. Revolocity wanted greater understanding of the social and cultural constructs that motivate, guide, and enforce consumer identity and brand loyalty among a distinct segment of consumers, namely “millennial” males. My key contact at Revolocity was the Chief Strategy Officer, David Grzelak.

Research Problem

Mr. Grzelak had several clients who were exploring the question of brand loyalty among millennials – generally defined as individuals born between the years 1977 and 2000 (Qader 2013, 336). While he and his clients felt that there was a strong degree of brand loyalty in the form of personal attachment among baby boomers (individuals born between 1946 and 1964 (Qader 2013, 336)), they also felt that there was not the same degree of loyalty among their millennial customer base. His clients are not alone in their interest in millennials within the marketplace. There are numerous articles that attempt to deconstruct and understand the millennial generation with regard to consumption and marketing (Bucic et al. 2012; Doster 2013; Halliday and Astafyeva 2014; Gurau 2012; Nichols et al. 2015; Qader 2013; Young and Hinesly 2012). We both agreed that researching brand loyalty among millennials would be an applicable endeavor not only for his immediate clients, but for future clients as well.

My goal as an applied anthropologist was to provide Revolocity with useful perspectives on brand loyalty among millennials that could be applied when developing new marketing campaigns for their clients. A secondary goal of this research was to not only produce findings applicable to Revolocity's brand strategy in general, but also to give one of their clients a

glimpse into the consumption behaviors of their own potential customers. This client was Barbasol shaving cream, a men's hygiene product manufacturer based in Dublin, Ohio.

Research Questions

The main research question for this study was "What social and cultural factors influence how millennial males view and define loyalty to brands?" From this broad question, more specific inquiries were created to address this issue among millennials:

1. How do millennial males perceive and identify with certain brands?
2. What kind of brands do they identify with most?
3. How are they introduced to these brands?
4. What role does identity play in the selection of and commitment to specific brands?

Deliverables

The intended final outcome of this applied research project was to provide Revolocity with the following deliverables:

1. A written report detailing the methods of research, ethnographic data, analysis of the data, and findings
2. Recommendations for stronger brand strategy planning and consumer engagement among the target market
3. A verbal presentation of the findings to the brand strategy team at the Columbus, Ohio office, which would allow for an interactive exchange of questions and answers

regarding the research; teleconference or videoconference might be used to connect to the strategy and insights departments at Revolocity's other offices as well

4. A final summarized report for internal use; This report would serve as a quick reference guide to the information attained through the research, and might be shared with potential clients to explain the importance of these insights

The deliverables were presented to the client on August 16th, 2016, with the exception of this written report. Rather than provide recommendations as a separate deliverable, they were added to both the summary report and the verbal presentation. Overall the deliverables were received positively by the client, and sparked a useful dialogue about how the themes discovered in this research might pan out within other cultural contexts.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Research Design

Based on the exploratory nature of the research, I worked with my client to identify factors that might affect loyalty among my participants and used a preliminary literature review to narrow our focus (Bernard 2006, 353). A four-phase research plan was designed to carry out the research:

1. Review of the relevant literature to assess current trends and beliefs about material culture, brand loyalty, and millennial behaviors in the market
2. Observation of millennial males; Observation was conducted at a local barber shop that was known for having a predominantly millennial clientele
3. In-home interviews with ten millennial males
4. An Internet-based survey

Sample

Millennials are defined throughout the marketing literature as anywhere between 13 – 40 years old (Gurau 2012; Halliday and Astafyeva 2014; Qader 2013). To better focus on a specific age group, the decision was made with the client to use a sample of participants between 18 – 35 years of age. However, it should be noted that this research has its limitations. Particularly, the sample used for this study was comprised of male respondents from one geographic area and all of the same ethnic identity (European-American/Caucasian).

My final recommendation to Revolocivity was to conduct further research in to this subject with the addition of cross-cultural and cross-generational analysis.

Location

Observation was conducted at The Old Familiar Barbershop, which was known for having a predominantly millennial clientele, in Columbus, Ohio. The decision to observe and recruit participants from a local barbershop was based on the fact that one of Revolocivity's clients mentioned above – Barbasol shaving cream – was prominently displayed and regularly used at this particular barbershop.

Institutional Review Board Approval

Prior to observation and interview participant recruitment, written permission was obtained from the owner of the Old Familiar Barbershop to conduct observational research and recruit participants from that location. IRB approval was obtained to conduct research via observation and interviewing, and written consent forms were presented to all interview participants and signed prior to conducting any research. IRB approval was obtained a second time to conduct surveys, and all emails sent soliciting survey participation contained a notice of informed consent prior to providing a link to the online survey.

Recruiting

During the observational phase, participants for interviews were recruited either directly from the shop or via networking and an invitational flyer posted at the shop.

Interviews were then conducted with ten participants who agreed to do so at their homes.

These participants were selected based on their demographic fit within the age range of 18 – 35 years old, being of Caucasian ethnicity, and living within the central Ohio area.

Observations

Observations were conducted at the Old Familiar Barber Shop, located in Old Town East, Columbus, Ohio. Permission was obtained directly from the business owner and most of the observations involved very little interaction with the patrons. These observations were carried out from May 2015 through part of July 2015. A total of five visits were made to the shop by the researcher, each visit lasting two to three hours. These visits were made on Saturdays and Sundays due to the researcher's availability. Particular attention was paid to interactions between clients and their barbers, purchases of any products the barbers sell (pomade, shaving cream, etc.), and any signs of branding or brand identification among the clients. During the observation process, some clients made conversation with me about my research, and were then asked to participate in the interview process. During the months of the observations, a research recruitment flyer with tear-off contact information was posted on the front door for others to contact if interested.

Interviews

Due to restrictions on time for this study, rapid assessment ethnographic procedures were utilized to collect data. As H. Russell Bernard (2006) writes, "Rapid assessment means going in and getting on with the job of collecting data without spending months developing

rapport” (352). All interviews took place at the respondents’ homes. Respondents were recruited via interception with clients at the barbershop, personal networking with those clients or the shop owner, and a recruitment flyer posted at the shop. Interviews took place from August 2015 through September 2015. Each interview lasted anywhere between 50 and 150 minutes, with length varying depending on the respondent’s ability to discuss a given brand in detail. Written consent to audio record interviews was obtained immediately upon arriving at each respondent’s home, and all questions about the research were answered before beginning the interview.

Each interview began with a tour of the respondent’s home. Before this tour, respondents were directed to label a few branded items that they had a strong sense of loyalty to, with just a few words describing how they perceived each particular item. The instructions were left open-ended so as to not lead participants into using any specific words or phrases. The goal of the exercise was to allow participants to set the tone for how they viewed branded items with regard to importance, identity, functionality, or anything else that might arise.

After the guided tour through each respondent’s items and labels, a single brand was then chosen by the respondent to discuss further. The remaining interview centered on the brand that was chosen. The semi-structured interviews were divided into two main parts (see Appendix A), with the first section exploring the respondent’s understanding and perceptions of the brand. Questions regarding the history of the brand, where it has been and where it might be going, and personality traits the brand might have were asked with the intent of uncovering possible recurring themes among respondents’ answers. As the interviews moved further into the first section, respondents were asked about personal experiences with the brand such as

their first purchase, recurring purchases, or any other special connections. Once again, the purpose of these questions was to gain better insight into the perceptions each respondent had about their chosen brand, and continue to look for themes among their answers collectively. Finally, respondents were asked to anthropomorphize their chosen brand in their mind, and to describe the brand as a person. Respondents were then read three personality traits and asked to select the one that best describes that brand as a person. This exercise was meant to help create an identity for the brand that could then be compared to the respondent's identity discussed in the next section.

The second section of the semi-structured interview was focused on the respondent's own identity. As subjects changed, respondents were directed to keep the brand originally discussed in the first section in mind, and to consider their answers to the questions of identity as a consumer of that brand. The first exercise of the identity section was designed around the last exercise of the brand section. Respondents were given three pairs of traits and asked to pick a pair that best fit their own identity. These pairs of traits were created to be parallel to the brand traits mentioned above so that comparisons could be made between the two responses. The semi-structured interview then ended with open-ended questions regarding personal and social identity. All interviews were audio recorded, and those audio files were used to transcribe and code interviews into themes.

Analysis of the data involved thematic coding that allowed the researcher to "reduce data to a manageable form" (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, 58). The goal of using thematic coding was to easily identify recurring themes, as well as respondents' dimensions of attachment to brands. Analysis of the interviews was conducted using a general ethnographic

analysis approach which involved reviewing transcriptions and audio, and then creating and defining recurrent themes in the data. Individual interviews were coded using the same set of themes, with the addition of interview specific themes when necessary. Based on the exploratory nature of this research it seemed appropriate to invoke an inductive methodology. Generally, as new themes arose during the analysis they would be added to all the interviews and each interview would be reviewed again. However, in the case where a theme was unique to one respondent it was not added to other interview codes. All coded interviews were then reviewed, analyzed, and used to develop the concepts that contributed to the conclusions of the research (LeCompte 2000).

Surveys

During the initial review of the interview audio recordings, general themes were identified and used to develop a quantitative survey. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the quantitative measurability of themes discovered in the qualitative interviews. The survey followed the same basic outline as the interviews: Starting with general demographic questions, moving on to brand related questions, and finishing with questions related to personal opinions and attitudes (see Appendix B). This survey was distributed online through an email which contained a link to the online survey and information regarding informed consent. These emails were sent to 62 potential respondents within the researcher's personal and professional social networks. Email addresses were obtained via the researcher's professional social network on LinkedIn and personal email address books. The email body

included a brief overview of the survey, informed consent notice, purpose of the study, and a link to the Survey Monkey website where the survey was hosted.

Eleven valid survey responses were obtained. All respondents were men who identified as white or Caucasian, and who were between 25 and 33 years of age. Their annual incomes ranged from \$30,000 to \$95,000. The sample was thus characterized by a very narrow and particular demographic profile. Furthermore, the location of the individuals was not disclosed on the survey and therefore other regional cultural factors could not be assessed.

The survey took respondents an average of eight minutes to complete and consisted of 20 questions. Results were collected via Survey Monkey, which allowed for easy analysis of the data, and also helped to omit responses from those who did not meet the sample requirements (i.e. respondents who were not millennials). Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel and then compared to the findings from the qualitative interviews to help develop the final conclusions of the research.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review was to provide a foundation for the research phases that would follow. The review was divided into three main sections:

1. Anthropological perspectives on material culture and branding
2. Contemporary studies on brand loyalty
3. General marketing research on millennials

Reviewing anthropological perspectives was very important. Brand management is a subject that is sometimes assumed to be solely in the domain of marketing. However, branding and consumption play a vital role in the human experience, and anthropology offers a great opportunity for providing insights into these areas (Madsbjerg and Rasmussen 2014; Denny 2000). Primarily, the work of material culture researchers and archaeologists is cited to support this argument. Providing at least a summarized background of anthropology's role in this type of research should be suitable for those in the marketing field, as well as for fellow anthropologists.

The bulk of the literature review focuses specifically on brand loyalty and reviews primarily research from marketing scholars, though there were some articles by anthropologists and other social scientists. This section of the review discusses the ways in which loyalty has been conceptualized. The goal of this project overall is to identify what factors influence meaningful connections between millennial consumers and their favorite brands. As the literature review illustrates, there is a very distinct difference between this kind of emotional brand loyalty and repeat purchasing behaviors. Several articles in this section deal specifically

with consumer identity and how it motivates brand loyalty, while other articles provide case studies of loyalty through experience. The focus of this section of the review, however, was to understand how scholars have conceptualized brand loyalty.

The final section of the literature review discusses some of the current trends in research on millennials. The purpose of this section was to identify some of the themes and motivators already being discussed in the literature, which helped to eventually form some of the interview questions in phase three. Once again, many of the articles in this section came from marketing journals, with only one or two that would be considered products of the social sciences. This was mostly due to the high interest marketers already have with millennials, and there appeared to be more research overall coming from that discipline.

Evolution, Identity, and Branding

During an initial review of the literature on brand loyalty and consumption one will quickly realize that much of the current research on branding is being discussed regularly in business and marketing journals, with only a few anthropological scholars weighing in on the subject directly. Nevertheless, a number of anthropologists and archaeologists have noted and researched quite extensively the role of material culture in human society (Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1925), and many of the observations made on this topic share parallels with modern branding. As such, it seems reasonable to start with some of the more prominent scholars in those fields.

In the opening chapter of *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai (1988) sets out to “propose a new perspective on the circulation of commodities in social life” (3). Appadurai

argues that the values of commodities are created and maintained by the act of exchange, and that “what creates a link between exchange and value is politics” (3). “Politics” in this sense should be understood in the broadest definition of the term, regarding “relations, assumptions, and contests pertaining to power” (57). For Appadurai, it is the act of exchange that is most important because “it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” and “their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, [and] their trajectories” (5). Appadurai argues for a “commodity perspective” as an entry point for material culture studies, and emphasizes the importance this perspective can have on a number of disciplines.

Before one can begin to utilize a commodity perspective, one must understand what is meant by the word “commodity” in this sense. Appadurai (1988) suggests that previous theorists such as Marx and Simmel have proposed definitions that are either too confined or too general, and in turn posits that “commodities are things with a particular type of social potential” (6), and are “objects of economic value” (3). Drawing back to Marx, Appadurai highlights a quote from Engels stating that “[t]o become a commodity a product must be transferred to another, whom it will serve as a use-value, by means of an exchange” (Marx 1971, 48). It is made clear throughout Appadurai’s writing that exchange and value-creation are definitive components of commodities. In the context of the present research, this definition of commodity is important as the intention is to understand the strength of the bonds and connections individuals have with certain brands, and in a sense, how much value they ascribe to branded commodities.

Appadurai (1988) further argues that “commodity is not one kind of thing rather than another, but one phase in the life of some things” (17). In other words, while we may refer to

some objects at one point or another as “commodities”, there is also an active process he refers to called “commoditization”. Appadurai points to examples of the kula system of the Western Pacific where “valuables acquire very specific biographies as they move from place to place and hand to hand, just as the men who exchange them gain and lose reputation as they acquire, hold, and part with these valuables” (18). Appadurai notes Nancy Munn’s (1983) observation that “although men appear to be the agents in defining shell value, in fact, without shells, men cannot define their own value” (283). This is a significant statement of the importance that commodities and commoditization play in the social relations of people.

The relationship of value between individuals and objects is reciprocal and fluid, and this observation is relevant to the present research where there is a desire to understand this relationship in the form of loyalty and attachment to brands. Appadurai (1988) highlights the role of luxury goods in particular “whose principal use is rhetorical and social . . . simply incarnated signs” (38). Though not all branded commodities are considered by many to be luxuries, the branding of commodities in general bears a number of similarities with Appadurai’s requisites for “registering” as luxuries. Qualities such as price restrictions, complexity of acquisition, signaling complex social messages, fashion, and personal connections (Appadurai 1988:38) are all relevant to brands and certainly share a common thread with the concept of luxury in the marketplace.

In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss (1925) writes extensively about gift giving and exchange, and the role that these actions play in creating and strengthening bonds among individuals and groups. Much of Mauss’ book focuses on direct exchange of items and the value creation and social cohesion such reciprocal gift giving creates. Yet, Mauss’ argument need not be

constrained to direct exchange of gifts, as he writes, “Things sold still have a soul. They are still followed around by their former owner, and they follow him also” (84). In other words, the mere act of commoditizing an item and selling it in the market does not remove the human-to-object connection on either side of the transaction. In terms of brands, the manufacturer remains connected to the item via logos, trademarks, and other symbolic markers, while the consumer establishes a connection with the object by incorporating it in to their daily life.

Furthermore, the market itself may be viewed as a creator of connectivity between objects and people. Mauss (1925) states that “various economic activities, for example the market, are suffused with rituals and myths” and that they “retain a ceremonial character that is obligatory and effective” (92). This is very much in line with Appadurai’s arguments on the importance of the act of exchange itself. The decision making and negotiation – either internal or external – that come with being a consumer in the marketplace compel individuals to be involved in object selection and reinforce connections to those objects. The idea of rituals and myths in the marketplace is further developed when one considers the ways in which contemporary producers advertise and market their products, often with rich narratives that provide context for their products within the marketplace.

Mauss (1925) also argues for a comprehensive and holistic approach to studying systems of exchange. Mauss suggests that all of the various modes of exchange are “whole ‘entities’, entire social systems” (102), which beg for further research due to the complex nature of their presence. He argues that studying various exchange systems as “total social facts” elicits a dual benefit of uncovering facts that “relate to the general functioning of society”, as well as allowing researchers to see “the social ‘things’ themselves, in concrete form

and as they are” (102). In other words, studying the material culture itself, along with the avenues of selection and acquisition of material culture, would provide far more benefit than studying either one of them themes separately.

Even 62 years after Mauss made such arguments for more holistic research regarding material culture, some were still arguing that “academic study of the specific nature of the material artefact produced in society has been remarkably neglected” (Miller 1987, 3). Daniel Miller has researched and written extensively on more contemporary material culture studies, and believes that this general neglect within academia may be related to the negative connotations of studying a part of culture that may be viewed as overly materialistic. Countering such arguments, Miller (1987) suggests that there may be a tendency for some academics to focus too much “on relations to goods *per se* at the expense of genuine social interaction” (4). Miller argues for the “analysis at the micro-level of the actual relationship between people and goods in industrial societies”, thus echoing the holistic approach advocated by Mauss (1925).

While many scholars throughout the literature have provided useful investigation of early artifacts as material culture that reflect individual producers or small groups of people involved in gifting or direct trade, Miller (1987) has been able to successfully extend material culture studies to the exploration of mass produced goods. “Mass goods represent culture, not because they are merely there as the environment within which we operate, but because they are an integral part of that process of objectification by which we create ourselves as an industrial society: our identities, our social affiliations, our lived everyday practices” (Miller 1987, 215). Miller’s (1987) analysis goes further than the politically driven motivations of

Appadurai (1988), and examine the role of mass produced material culture in all facets of human life.

Similar to Miller's (1987) views on mass produced goods, Grant McCracken (1986) writes, "Consumer goods have a significance that goes beyond their utilitarian character and commercial value" (71). In "Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods", McCracken (1986) argues that "cultural meaning flows continually between its several locations in the social world, aided by the collective and individual efforts of designers, producers, advertisers, and consumers" (71). McCracken's stance is not a one-side, materialistic approach that positions producers in control of consumers, but instead offers a flexible and fluid relationship between the two. As McCracken illustrates, "Social groups can seek to change their place in the categorical scheme, while marketers can seek to establish or encourage a new cultural category of person (e.g., the teenager, the 'yuppie') in order to create a new market segment" (72).

McCracken (1986) places his focus on the movement of meaning from consumers to the goods themselves. According to McCracken, "Meaning first resides in the culturally constituted world" (74). He recognizes meaning as an abstract component of culture, and demonstrates how it starts there and moves to material objects – particularly consumer goods – through rituals of exchange, possession, grooming, and divestment (78-80). Eventually this meaning that is transferred to goods is once again transferred to individuals as consumers appropriate meaningful properties of goods through their procurement and use (McCracken 1986, 80). With respect to brand loyalty, McCracken's article lays a solid foundation for analyzing the meanings that branded goods acquire, and how individuals employ those meanings.

While the rise of mass produced branding can be dated as far back as the fourth millennium BC (Wengrow 2008, 8), the emergence of the concept of branding is much harder to pinpoint. One reason for this, as Elizabeth Hirschman (2010) argues in “Evolutionary Branding”, is that, “Brands have personalities, are icons, represent reference groups, represent the self, mark ethnic boundaries, anchor nostalgia, and are romantic partners. . . They tell stories about us, and we tell stories about them” (568-567). This argument is not too far from other conceptualizations of brands discussed by marketers where “the most compelling brands are those whose narratives are ‘multistoried stories’” (Diamond et al. 2009, 119), and where brands gain meaning from a variety of sources including “the culture at large, the founder’s brand creation myth” and “the company’s stewards” (Diamond et al. 2009, 122). All of these traits support the argument that brands are much more than a functional market device created for the purpose of helping consumers differentiate between products and producers. This concept of the brand is much bigger, and incorporates ideas that may very well have been of interest to early humans. Hirschman argues throughout her article that, “the human impulse toward the composition of self- and group-serving narratives underlies the origination and perpetuation of branding” (568).

Hirschman’s concept of families as brands is an example that provides a framework for viewing contemporary branding as a way to create inclusion and strengthen social ties within communities. Furthermore, contemporary branding may be a result of the distinctly human ability to “anthropomorphize objects and to form affiliations from symbolic, as opposed to merely kin/family, ties” (569). These arguments regarding inclusion and community echoes the concept of “consciousness of kind” as an element of brand community (Muniz 2001, 413).

These parallels in theory strongly suggest the importance of viewing brands as social objects which are socially constructed (Muniz 2001, 427; Appadurai 1986, 38).

Hirschman provides narratives from consumers who used YDNA to identify their male ancestry and trace back family stories based on their surnames. She explains that such revelations about these haplogroups create a “[g]enetic sisterhood and brotherhood [that] draws on the evolutionarily adaptive pull to identify with others like ourselves” and that “[r]ather than a ‘family of brands’, they constitute the ‘brands of family’” (571). These “brands of family” provide bases for establishing the consumer in space and time, and create an inclusive brand with which they can share history, myths, and symbols. Writing about a case study of Todd Johnson, Hirschman states, “Just as commercial brands – for example, Johnson’s Pledge furniture polish – have constructed stories about their accomplishments, so too has the I1b Johnson family” (573). Stories of the Johnson family haplogroup include a multifarious history of hunting mammoths, migrating from the Balkans to England to the Danube River, and appropriating the famed Venus of Willendorf as a family “brand symbol” (573).

The narratives Hirschman presents demonstrate two very important things: First, it supports her argument that “[b]rand stories and human stories are both the products of a human tendency to see causality in the world” (581); and second, they demonstrate that these stories are integral to defining and maintaining brands. With regards to the present research on brand loyalty these insights are quite relevant, as “loyalty” here refers to emotional attachment and identification, and not merely repeat purchasing habits (a point that will be expanded on further in the next section).

In her article, “The Role of Ordinary Goods in Premodern Exchange”, Monica Smith (1999) posits that the use and display of specific items and commodities allow the users to signal important information about themselves to others, such as personal identity, group identity, social status, and other indicators of self and individuality. In particular, Smith’s article focuses on how “ordinary goods – household furnishings, containers, and utensils – are valued for their social as well as for their functional content, where social content is expressed through decoration, form, and choice of material type” (109).

Smith highlights the fact that archaeologists have previously recognized the symbolic significance of particular items such as luxury goods among elites, but also contends that “modern material-culture studies show that *every* object embodies a symbolic aspect” (116). Her argument is further supported with evidence provided from an archaeological investigation in Kaundinyapura, India. This evidence suggests that, “Ordinary goods, in their appearance and physical composition, recalled to their possessors and observers the larger-scale cultural links which the inhabitants maintained with their neighbors in a landscape of dispersed population” (130). Echoing the emphasis of the symbolic role of brands that Hirschman (2010) calls attention to, it is surprising that there are so few similar articles in the archeological sub-field of anthropology.

Paul R. Mullins is an anthropologist at Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis who agrees that the overall lack of consumption studies in archaeology is surprising. In “The Archaeology of Consumption”, Mullins (2011) states that “archeology has been strangely silent even as it has paradoxically produced rich material evidence of consumption patterns across space and time” (134). Mullins notes that archaeologists have often viewed consumption as

more of a logical end point for the creation of goods and economies, while overlooking the role it has in shaping and maintaining societies. He discusses the tendency archaeologists have had toward examining trade routes and exchange patterns among people, and particularly the act of trade itself. However, Mullins asserts that “little of this work examined how such goods were used when obtained” (135).

Part of the reason for this lack of focus, Mullins argues, is because archaeologists have often defined consumption in such a way that it has very little meaning. He writes, “For many archaeologists, consumption is simply a moment in the flow of goods throughout the social world” (134). Often times it is the flow of goods in itself – and the trade networks that develop therein – that become the focus of archaeological research, with the act of consumption and the goods produced taken for granted as a part of the process (134). In turn, Mullins urges for a much more broad definition of consumption as revolving “around the acquisition of things to confirm, display, accent, mask, and imagine who we are and who we wish to be” (135). This definition is very much in line with the description of brands and branding provided by Hirschman (2010), Smith (1999), and Diamond et al. (2009) above, and tends to be a recurring theme throughout the literature presented in this review – not only from anthropological sources, but from journals dedicated to marketing and other social sciences as well.

An important note to make about the articles cited in this review thus far is the attention they give to many of the outward and visible components of consumption. From the “family brand” concept, to ordinary goods, to the act of consumption itself, all of these examples typically have some place in the public, or at least in the social sphere. In “Inconspicuous Consumption: Non-Display Goods and Identity Formation”, Monica Smith

(2007) provides a contemporary study of consumption and identity formation that takes place in private. Rather than exploring the ways that items are used to outwardly signal status or assert social roles, Smith looks at how the use of hygiene products, pharmaceuticals, and underwear translates to identity formation among individual users. In this paper, Smith develops “the idea of ‘reflexive identity’ to describe how people use material objects in private to define themselves prior to and independent of their social roles as perceived by others” (412).

Smith calls attention to a distinctive difference between the definition of “identity” and the definition of a “role”, where identity is characterized by an internalized process of defining one’s self, and roles are characterized by the socially enacted, public projections of one’s identity (414). This distinction is important for understanding how identity can be formed in private, as it demonstrates that one does not necessarily need any social confirmation to create and change their identity. According to Smith, “The realization of a social role has three components: that which is intended and projected by the individual; that which is intended and acted upon by others; and that which is developed by others independent of the individual’s volition” (415). When considering brand loyalty, it is the first realization above that is most relatable, as loyalty implies intention.

In some ways, it could even be argued that repeated purchase is identity-work. As Smith states, “Actions with material culture need to be performed regularly in order to sustain identity” (416). As I have discussed earlier in this review, the type of loyalty in question is not confined simply to repeat purchasing behaviors, but to constant interactions and personal connections with brands. Though Smith’s article is not intended to be about brands specifically,

she makes a very important point when stating that “every act, even a routinized one, is a deliberate decision that results in interactions between a person and an object for the production of physical changes and emotional stasis” (425). The decision to stick with one brand on a regular basis, therefore, can be included in this analysis.

Smith argues, “Human evolution was both accompanied and conditioned by the use of physical objects” (430). When looking at how people connect with brands that represent physical objects, anthropologists have the upper hand. By providing contemporary methods of qualitative and quantitative research on human behavior with an evolutionary and holistic perspective, we can provide a more complete picture of those connections. And the evolutionary perspective is important in this type of research because “when viewed in an evolutionary perspective, the use of goods is a component of human behavior with at least a million-year time span...our ancestor *Homo erectus* may have lacked the capacity for language, but was able to make stone tools of remarkable consistency and symmetry by 1.65 million years ago. These Acheulean hand-axes are widespread in Africa and Eurasia, suggesting that they were important cultural markers” (425).

This thesis project is situated in a burgeoning stream of research by applied anthropologists who work in the areas of market research and advertising (Brown et al. 2003; Denny 2000; Madsbjerg and Rasmussen 2014; Malefyt 2000; McCracken 1986; Sunderland and Denny 2007). For instance, applied anthropologists in advertising have provided valuable insights into how “a qualitative perspective on consumers’ lives, particularly one that offers ethnographic insight. . .can inform more authentic advertising strategies and help generate positive exchange value for consumers and companies” (Malefyt 2015, 2500). Contrary to a

common view that advertising has a negative effect on social relations in the United States, Malefyt (2015) argues for a positive and reflexive relationship between marketers and consumers. Similarly, anthropologists who focus on marketing, such as Arnould et al. (2017), echo this kind of relationship between producer and consumer. The article “Fetish, Magic, Marketing” discusses at length the “parallels between the fetishization of consumers [by marketers] and the fetishization of objects [by consumers]” (Arnould et al. 2017, 28). The implementation of anthropological methods in contemporary market and consumer research has been well documented in the past two decades (Sunderland and Denny 2007), and its application toward stronger brand strategies has been likewise noted (Brown et al. 2003).

Brand Loyalty and Consumer Identity

In reviewing the current literature on the subject, it was discovered that “brand loyalty” is conceptualized in a number of ways. For example, many articles on the subject seem to be measuring the degree of brand loyalty by analyzing solely the frequency of repeat purchases. In this sense, brand loyalty is quantified in a way that allows companies to make decisions based on consumer behavior. In “Antecedents of True Brand Loyalty”, Kim et al. (2008) point out that “a 5% increase in customer loyalty can increase a company’s profitability by 40 to 95%” (99). Thus, it is obvious that businesses are interested in increasing loyalty that is manifested in increased purchase frequency, but the dynamic perspective that Kim et al. are presenting suggest that it would be wise to question some of the methods of measuring loyalty used in the past, and seek a balance of qualitative and interpretive approaches to how humans interact with their favorite brands.

As the title of their article suggests, Kim et al. are concerned with identifying what kinds of conditions are necessary for fostering “true” brand loyalty, which they identify as a consequence of brand commitment and “a strongly held positive attitude toward a brand” (103). They create a distinction between the concepts of brand loyalty from the more general understanding of brand commitment while insisting that, although brand loyalty is not necessary for the presence of brand commitment, brand commitment is indeed a necessary precedent for true brand loyalty. The distinction between the two is made with the argument that true brand loyalty “has both attitudinal and behavioral elements”, while brand commitment is a “behavioral intention held with affective and cognitive conviction” (100). In other words, mere consumption of the brand may not always be attributed to positive attitudes or feelings about a brand *per se*, but could just be a by-product of economy, geography, availability, or even product category.

In their article, Kim et al. construct a conception of attitudinal strength along Krosnick and Abelson’s (1992) dimensional breakdown of “extremity, intensity, certainty, importance, and knowledge” (101). They employed questionnaires to test a total of ten hypotheses regarding the relationships between brand loyalty and brand commitment, brand knowledge, attitudes toward brands, purchase behaviors, and other aspects of consumerism. Their findings suggest that “rather than initially considering the cognitive aspects of the brand, consumers firstly rely on their feelings about a certain subject brand” (114). The interaction between cognitive conviction and affective conviction ultimately defines true brand loyalty, according to Kim et al.

One interesting limitation in this study was the brand choice allotted for participants to choose from. Before actually getting to the survey questions, participants were instructed to choose a brand from a list, and then to answer questions related to that brand. Understandably, such a method is bound to have limits simply due to the nature of its format (no one wants to scroll through a list of thousands of brands). However, by choosing to include mostly high-end brands such as “Bulgari, Calvin Klein, Fendi, Fossil, Gianfranco Ferre, Giorgio Armani, Emporio Armani, Gucci, Guess, Lacoste, Luxottica, Sergio Tacchini, and Other[s]” (105), Kim et al. create an analysis that risks under-representing lower income populations and being inapplicable to relationships with non-status brands.

Despite the limitations presented, Kim et al. do bring up an intriguing point: There is something significantly distinct between observed consumer behavior and the emotional attitudes that define brand loyalty. Measuring the physical consumption of brands as products may provide businesses with an understanding of how consumers incorporate the tangible qualities of brands in to their lives, but this is only half of the brand loyalty equation. As Jeanne Binstock van Rij (1996) writes, “Customers want *intangible* [emphasis added] benefits – the myth and magic that satisfy the mind and imagination” (20). This idea of intangible benefits seems to be either overlooked or ignored by those who would prefer to make decisions based solely on sales statistics, rather than trying to understand how their products fit in to the lives of their consumers.

In her article “Trends, symbols, and brand power in global markets: The Business Anthropology Approach”, Jeanne Binstock van Rij argues that, “Brand image is no longer a marginal dimension of business, but the very core of business identity and strategy” (19). A key

word one will notice throughout the literature on brand loyalty is the term “identity”. Brand identity can be different from how one might normally construct their own identity, because it can be a shared identity. Van Rij illustrates this by using the example of the “American Dream”. She argues that through television, “Particularly in the second- and third-world countries, they learned about ‘the inalienable right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness,’ the right to choice linked to desire, marriage linked to love, and the right to the expression of one’s identity in the marketplace” (21). This romanticized view of Western identity has permeated throughout the world, and in turn it has created a shared identity amongst those who wish to embrace it. Brands today can be used by individuals as a tool to craft a very similar feeling of shared identity in their own way.

Van Rij provides a case study about brand stories and identities with The Body Shop. The Body Shop is a women’s beauty supplies and cosmetics retailer that is changing the industry by providing shoppers with products that emphasize environmentalism, political action, and social responsibility. Despite a lack of advertising, the business has grown beyond the United States, to 45 markets all around the globe (22). The Body Shop was able to foster such successful growth through a rich and complex creation of a shared identity between the brand and consumers:

Natural herbal ingredients is a rich metaphor. It is an attack on the effects of industrial pollution and a magic amulet honoring the natural, renewable world and source of life. The Body Shop theme of self-care, self-renewal, and environmental renewal is a metaphor for the domestic household writ large – active, informed women protecting their bodies, their children, their pets, and their orderly, frugal households. Animal protection is a beloved piece of the British cultural code. In the U.S., no testing on animals is a metaphor not only for the love of family pets but for protecting the world’s endangered species. This theme has been picked up by many American companies that sell to women. (22)

One could argue that van Rij's analysis goes too far, or that it projects these feelings and metaphors onto the consumers without any real evidence, but without extensive ethnographic research on the Body Shops consumers, how can anyone say for sure? Van Rij writes, "About 85% of all communication is non-verbal" (19). In other words, typical methods employed by market researchers could be missing out on a lot of useful information – information that is not particularly easy to gather. As the excerpt above illustrates, it can often be coded in to symbolic metaphors that are realized on a somewhat subconscious level.

It is not only imperative that marketers understand how their customers identify with their products, but it should also be noted that understanding the motivations for brand loyalty is equally important. Lauren I. Labrecque et al. (2011) emphasize the significance of conflicting motivators, namely conformity and escapism, in their article "Exploring social motivations for brand loyalty: Conformity versus escapism". They stress that, "Although existing scholarly research investigates consumers' use of brands to define social ties, it does not address consumers' underlying motivations for using brands to forge these social ties" (458). The main argument presented in their article is that consumers are divided, by varying degrees, between using brands as a way to fit in with others and improving their self-image, or using brands as a way to "break away from his or her present environment" (458).

These two motivators are not chosen arbitrarily. Deciding which motivator can be said to be acting on a specific consumer is based on certain variables such as passivity versus activity. "The motivation to conform can largely be seen as a passive state, whereas the motivation to escape can be seen as a more active state" (461). The major argument here is that those who are less informed about the brands they identify with are more likely to be

motivated by conformity, while those who seek out brands based on product knowledge are more likely to be motivated by escapism. This argument is supported by prior research in advertising on “value expressive” – or “image” – advertising, versus “utilitarian” – or “functional” – advertising (461).

It is interesting to note that the results of Labrecque et al.’s study do not support the hypothesis that conformity has a positive effect on brand loyalty, which they define as long-term, quality brand relationships (459). This may be due to the passivity of conformity, i.e. one who is passively engaged in using a brand’s products may not be as inclined to stick with that brand when popularity shifts to a competitor. In this case, loyalty may be attributed to subconscious beliefs about a brand’s image. Conversely, Labrecque et al. found that escapism does positively influence brand loyalty, which reinforces the notion that those who are better informed about the brands they like will create strong ties with those brands, and those brands may be more central to identity creation. In this way, conformity can be applied to explain a sort of default brand loyalty that grows through the general acceptance of a certain brand’s product power in the market (such as the iPod within the digital music player market). Those who are motivated to disassociate themselves from certain social groups however, often seek out brands that may not be in the mainstream, but still hold a significant place within a niche market (an example would be the 300+ distributions of the Linux operating system within the PC operating system market) (459). By making informed choices and identifying with these brands, there develops a “self-empowerment remedy, which consumers use to cope with powerlessness in the marketplace” (460).

Invoking cross-cultural examples, Jenny Huberman's (2012) article "Forever a fan: Reflections on the branding of death and the production of value" provides an anthropological view of how brand identities play an intriguing role in modern mortuary rituals. Although the number of examples provided are few, Huberman's analysis is full of insight on how consumers live and die by their favorite brands. In this case, however, brand loyalty is framed around the concept of fandom, or "the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text in the form of books, television shows, films or music, as well as popular texts in a broader sense such as sports teams and popular icons and stars ranging from athletes and musicians to actors" (Sandvoss 2005, 8). Being a part of a fandom means being a part of a community centered on a brand, even if it is not a brand in the popular sense of the term.

Huberman's article unintentionally brings up another interesting dynamic in the brand loyalty literature. That is, there is a symbolic identity externalized by fans and brand loyalists, and those external identities are also important. Huberman's article mentions several examples that involve the unexpected deaths of otherwise healthy, young adults. Given the circumstances, it is unlikely that every one of these individuals had created a living will that discussed their wishes for a *Doctor Who* or *KISS* themed funeral. In other words, the themed funerals discussed in the article were more than likely thought up by friends and family of the deceased, who learned to identify their recently departed loved one with those brands.

Huberman's article also plays with the concept of escapism, as fans engage in "emotionally charged forms of consumption which enable them to both project and locate themselves in an external world" (478). This is especially telling when one considers the special nature of death, and the myths surrounding it. By incorporating brands in to funeral services,

the entire service becomes an escape from the mainstream. Not only does the deceased get to be remembered as a loyal fan, but the mourners are invited to be a part of a truly special and unique send-off. In this sense, brand loyalty breaks away from its functionalist tendencies of community and identity development, and moves towards a more symbolic and interpretive nature.

In “Between Mothers and Markets”, Moisio et al. (2004) investigate further how the family identity is constructed through the preparation and consumption of food. Food is chosen as the category of study because it is “charged with symbolism and may have a constitutive role in domestic rituals” (Moisio et al. 2004, 362). The authors elaborate on the identity constructing components of food such as enforcing gender roles, maintaining patriarchal family ideology, and socializing moral values (364). Moisio et al.’s article makes an important distinction by focusing on the actual interactions between the participants in the study and homemade food. The stories that they tell and the metaphors and images they describe reinforce the centrality of the consumer’s perceptions. While the preference of the respondents was in favor of homemade food, there were mixed feelings about market-made “homemade” foods, as well as mixed definitions of what truly constitutes the term “homemade”. Furthermore, how homemade food is defined and used in the household helped to “reinvigorate their idealized family meanings” (379).

Aaron Ahuvia (2005) discusses how both material possessions and social activities play a role in identity construction as well in his article “Beyond the Extended Self: Loved Objects and Consumers’ Identity Narratives”. His article broadly supports the claims made by Belk in “Possessions and the Extended Self”, while attempting to clarify Belk’s more abstract concept

of a core versus extended self (179-180). Rather than attempt to identify a metaphorical difference between the two, Ahuvia argues that, “We should acknowledge that selfness is a continuous variable with a gray area between possessions that are, or are not, part of a consumer’s identity” (180). Ahuvia continues by explaining that “[c]onsumers attempt to reconcile identity conflicts in three ways, which I call ‘demarcating’, ‘compromising’, and ‘synthesizing’ solutions” (181). He elaborates to explain that when consumers are faced conflict between two identities they either reject one and accept the other (demarcating), create an identity partway between the two (compromising), or a mixture of both (synthesizing) (181). Ahuvia demonstrates these forms of conflict resolution through the presentation of two case studies that were representative of the interviews as a whole (172-179).

One must keep in mind, however, that identity is both a personal and social element which is dependent on a myriad of cultural factors. In “Finding Ourselves in Images: A Cultural Reading of Trans-Tasman Identities”, Denny et al. (2005) highlight this important point with an exploration of “salient ideas, metaphors, and meanings embedded in representations of New Zealand, Australian, and trans-Tasman cultural identities” (1). Through the use of photo diaries and interviews, the authors led an ethnographic study that uncovered the significance “males”, “sports”, and “mates” (2-5). Nearly all of the advertisements chosen as representative of Australian, New Zealand, and trans-Tasman exuded some sort of male centered storyline. “In both New Zealand and Australia sports is a currency”, and all of the photo diaries and interviews with those from New Zealand and Australia touched on the concept of mates (3-4).

In particular, the concept of mates reminds the reader just how important culture can be with regard to how certain social identities are understood, as the authors note that “[t]he U.S. has no equivalent cultural category” (4). The concept of mates introduces a unique category of maleness centered on a specific type of partnership between men that may include stark age differences and an element of mentoring. It is also important to note that while at the time there may not be a prominent culture of mates in trans-Tasman society, that may not always be the case. In closing, Denny et al. write, “A cultural analysis also requires a recognition that the ‘truths’ on which advertisements depend, are social constructions” and “are subject to change” (11).

Millennials in the Marketplace

Understanding how millennials fit in to the context of marketing has not been an easy task for consumer researchers. There are many assumptions that have been made about this generational cohort that risk over-generalizing the millennial identity. Timothy J. Fogarty (2008), in “The Millennial Lie”, writes:

There seems to be little disagreement in the literature, or more accurately, the reportage, that this group is the creation of a new conventional wisdom about parenting. Thus, they have been convinced that they are “special” in every way, and that their success is virtually preordained if they carefully work within the rules that their parents and other authority figures have constructed. In this Weltanschauung, the Millennials are much more “outward” directed. They crave the structure that limits their freedom in their own life, and tend to espouse conservative positions on the larger questions of the day...They accept the role of rapid technological advance by seamlessly incorporating “the next new thing” into their lives...They relish the premises of a consumer society. (369-370)

Similar generalizations are consistent throughout the literature on millennials. Positive attributes include the arguments that “they grew up in a time of immense and fast-paced

change,” and that “they were born into a technological, electronic, and wireless society with global boundaries becoming more transparent” (Qader 2013, 336). However, there are also negative assumptions that “they are self-absorbed,” and “are image-driven”, with “a greater need to be accepted, constantly connected with their peers, fitting in, and social networking” (Qader 2013, 336). From a marketing perspective, these apparent qualities of millennials have made them more difficult to market to overall, and are forcing consumer researchers to seek new avenues of understanding what they want.

In “The Evolution of Experiential Marketing: Effects of Brand Experience among the Millennial Generation”, Iman Khalid A. Qader (2013) attempts to provide a basic understanding of millennials in the market place – particularly with regards to their interactions and experiences with “high-tech electronics” (337). Qader explores the role that customers’ experiences with brands have on brand equity, and suggests that the experiences actually influence equity and that this should influence marketing campaigns. With regards to millennials, however, he argues that they “have been targeted with extravagant advertising and commercials since a very young age; as a result, this generation is quite suspicious towards all marketing campaigns” (335). Qader argues, “Therefore, traditional mass marketing approaches do not work well with younger consumers” (336). Right away, we are confronted with a dilemma of how to deal with a generation that is seemingly immune to marketing methods of the past. Qader emphasizes the importance of experience, but some researchers have other ideas.

For example, to better understand the preferences of millennials, Amy M. Young and Mary D. Hinesly (2012) argue that we should look to their childhoods. In “Identifying

Millennials' key influencers from early childhood: insights into current consumer preferences", Young and Hinesly provide case studies of how "Collective Memory Groups" featuring millennial females and males identified certain archetypes among each of them. By examining the influence of prominent princess characters who encompassed both masculine traits such as being "self-sufficient" and "independent", and feminine traits such as "compassion" and "preference for pink", Young and Hinesly coined the "Pretty Pink Princess" archetype (150). This archetype was expressed by millennial women through an "unrecognized desire to 'feel like a princess'", and "an implicit preference for a store, spa, or entertainment experience that makes them feel special, and included with 'special recognition' through online or experiential events at the store" (150).

In a similar fashion, Young and Hinesly's "Collective Memory Group" of millennial males helped the authors to identify the "Iron Warrior as Savior" archetype. This archetype is a result of the less critical views of the military and war characteristic of the 80s and early 90s. Referring to the Gulf War, Young and Hinesly explain, "As the 'saviors' of the 'invaded and oppressed' in this war, Americans' views of the military, war, and soldiers transitioned from passively hostile to valued and appreciated", and that "the reintroduction of military themes in the lives of US children in the 1990s represented a growing comfort with these topics among the wider US society" (151). According to Young and Hinesly, the combination of a more palatable military and the rise in popularity of toy action figures like *Transformers* resulted in the current "Iron Warrior as Savior" archetype now prevalent among millennial males (151). Examples of this include warrior-like imagery in Axe brand commercials, the NFL's use of a

robotic football player as an on screen visual during games on TV, and video games that emphasize warrior imagery (151).

It is important to note that “these mental connections, or cultural archetypes, exist at a subconscious level, and are formed prior to full development of the cortex” (Young and Hinesly 2012, 149). For this reason, the authors articulate that we should not “rely on current reviews of popular culture to provide an adequate understanding of cultural time periods from a child’s perspective” (151). This is because the childhood perception of cultural phenomena may be drastically different from reality, and our review as adults may not allow for a fully aware and contextual understanding of its role on identity development. Young and Hinesly stress that we should “consider the cognitive developmental stage of children when trying to identify generational archetypes”, and that “cultural artifacts that are most influential to children center around objects and experiences that comprised their lives at the time” (151). Thus, the authors implicitly suggest a form of what one might call “modern archaeology” as a way to use artifacts and material culture of the past to better understand the present, and market accordingly.

We shouldn’t under-emphasize or ignore, however, what is going on in the here and now, and there are definitely factors that exist in the present time which can have an effect on millennials’ affective ties to brands. Calin Gurau (2012) calls attention to this fact in his article “A life-stage analysis of consumer loyalty profile: comparing Generation X and Millennial consumers”. Gurau’s research demonstrates that there may be less inter-generational variation of brand loyalty than what other researchers suggest, and that consumers of different generations but in similar life-stage groups may display similar patterns of brand loyalty behavior (103). According to Gurau, “Several studies outline that Millennials should not be

considered as a homogeneous group”, and that “the ‘myth’ of Millennials homogeneity and distinctiveness may be determined by the choice of specific groups as populations of study” (103). Therefore, Gurau attempts to better understand the role of life-stage with loyalty patterns among millennials and generation X consumers.

Dealing with behaviors related to loyalty specifically, Gurau identifies multiple attempts by previous researchers to define and segment loyalty. He provides five different breakdowns of loyalty, each suggesting four or five degrees of loyalty. Of the five presented, he states that “because of its clarity and conciseness” he would be using an adapted version of G.H. Brown’s (1953) categorization which includes “hard-core loyals”, “split-loyals”, “shifting loyals”, and “switchers”, renamed as follows:

1. exclusive loyalty: the customer buys exclusively only one product or service brand;
2. shifting loyalty: the customer buys frequently only one product or service brand, but occasionally tries other brands, attracted by novelty or special promotions;
3. shared loyalty: the customer buys exclusively two or three brands from the same category of products or services;
4. fragmented loyalty: the customer buys a multitude of brands, switching frequently. (106)

Gurau then explains that his methodology started with extensive desk research, followed by a series of ten focus groups – five in France and five in Romania – and finally a questionnaire was prepared in both French and Romanian languages and distributed face-to-face with 500 randomly selected respondents in each country (106). It is not clear whether or not Gurau’s methods involved direct discussion of actual purchasing habit, but it appears that the focus groups and questionnaires centered on five “elements used for evaluating product and service brands, considering three types of products and two types of services” (106).

The purpose of the categories listed above is to expand on the idea of loyalty and evaluate certain behaviors consistent with different types of loyalty, or “loyalty patterns”. “The findings indicate a high similarity between, on one hand, the loyalty patterns of Millennial and Generation X single professionals, and, on the other hand, between Millennial and Generation X married professionals” (Gurau 2012, 109). The study also found that there were different patterns of loyalty between cultural and economic contexts, suggesting that “the similarity between the brand loyalty profile of some Millennials and Generation X consumers indicate the necessity of a finer segmentation method” (109-110). Gurau’s research illustrates the necessary importance of not over-generalizing generational cohorts, and encourages future consumer research that is segmented based on life-stage.

Taking a look at younger millennials, Leigh Doster (2013) writes in “Millennial teens design and redesign themselves in online social networks” that a combination of life-stage and acculturation during developmental years helps to shape the way that millennial teens identify themselves. Doster explains that millennial teens, because of their younger age, are “immersed in a state of immense identity flux”, and that “because having grown up with digital technology their behavior and attitudes differ from adult users” on social media networks (267). Doster provides some of the usual generalizations about millennials, but also goes on to explain that “adolescents are continually immersed in ‘identity crisis’, grappling to ascertain their ‘true self’ and carve out their emerging role in society” (268). For this reason, she argues that millennial teens are drawn to consumption of symbolic signalers of identity, and that they project those symbols evermore through the use of social media through their self-presentations (268).

This is the first article in this review to deal with both millennials and identity, and Doster is very direct in her assertion that “as with previous generations, millennial teens often link their self-presentation to their consumption and use symbolic materials such as brands to convey identity messages to others” (269). There are several self-presentation strategies presented in the article, such as behaviors, physical appearance, activities, interests, and hobbies, however, her findings on the use of brands and material culture as self-presentation strategies are most relevant to brand loyalty. By incorporating brands and material objects into their online social profiles through the use of personal biographies, themes or “skins”, online groups, etc., the teens in this study created and maintained their identities (275). Doster also explains that teens regularly changed and updated these details on their online social networks throughout the course of the research, and that this suggests a rapidly changing and fluid self-identity (276). Doster closes with the following observation:

Perhaps one of the most significant implications emerging from this study is that millennial teens no longer need to physically consume goods in order to effectively present their identity to others. We have seen that they can appropriate pretty much anything without needing to outlay any expenditure. At first glance, this may seem rather worrying for marketers. However, if we consider that our budding young consumers are using OSNs [Online Social Networks] as a testing ground for adult life then we can assume that the brands that they ‘try on for size’ now may be favoured with their actual consumption in the future when they can afford them. (278)

In their article “Millennial cultural consumers: co-creating value through brand communities”, Sue Vaux Halliday and Alexandra Astafyeva (2014) attempt to conceptualize millennials consumption behaviors in a way that can be applied to their involvement and interactions with arts organizations. Similar to the other articles in this review, the authors summarize millennials with a generalization about how market and tech savvy they are as a generation and argue that “this is why internet social networks and virtual communities should

be taken in the consideration when developing a marketing product” (121). These generalizations are repeated throughout the literature regarding millennials and their inclination to easily adapt to new technologies. However, at times this belief can be exaggerated to the point of overlooking real, experiential connections between millennial consumers and brands. Halliday and Astafyeva write, “Noting Millennials key needs, it is then possible to conclude that value for MCCs [Millennial Cultural Consumers] can be defined as an experience, gained from the visit and use of services satisfying their emotional, relational, entertaining and self-development needs” (123).

According to the authors, there are three primary motivations for millennial consumers: (1) Intimacy/new relationships, (2) awareness/self-actualization, and (3) balance in work-life or education-entertainment (122). They argue that millennials are not nearly as good at establishing real-life relationships as they are with creating relationships online. Furthermore, they believe that millennials are generally optimistic and that they tend to be certain that they can make a positive difference in the world. Finally, the authors posit that millennials are very hard-working, but they also tend to believe that life should be fun and entertaining (122).

These are interesting points about millennials, but as motives for consumption they may seem a bit limited. Nevertheless, their insights bring more concepts to the table for consideration among consumer researchers, the most prominent of which is on the topic of experience, as “experience creates value; the experience is made up of emotions, feelings, memories, relationships and self-development” (129). According to Halliday and Astafyeva, “When designing cultural products for present-day youth audience cultural organisations’

managers should include in this product opportunities for self-development, as well as creation of emotions, feeling and memories” (129).

Not all brands, of course, rely on experiential marketing, and though experience may be one of the many factors that influence loyalty, traditional consumption considerations should not be ignored. In their study “Ethical Consumers Among the Millennials: A Cross-National Study”, Tania Bucic, Jennifer Harris, and Denni Arli (2012) test the extent of influence that nontraditional components of products have on consumption behaviors of millennials. Specifically, they looked at the idea of ethical marketing which can be broken down in to four main types: (1) Cause-related marketing, (2) socially responsible business practices, (3) corporate social marketing, and (4) corporate cause promotions (113). Conversely, “ethical *consumerism* [emphasis added] refers to choices based on social, nontraditional components of products and personal and moral beliefs” (113).

Using a cross-national, two-sample method of research, Bucic et al. engaged over 1000 millennials in Australia and Indonesia with questionnaires concerning cause-related purchasing habits. Overall, the findings from the study concluded that “for millennials, the foremost purchase considerations appear to be traditional factors, such as price and quality” (126). These findings were supported in both of the sample groups, and indicated that millennial consumers are indeed interested in ethical issues related to the products they buy, but those issues do not necessarily translate to action. However, when it comes to purchase frequency specifically, they found that “~20-30% of consumers in the surveyed Millennial market are willing to purchase goods on a reasonably frequent (monthly) basis because of their ethical credentials, and another one-third of the market engages occasionally in CRP [Cause-Related

Purchasing]” (127). It may be that brand acquisition is more dependent on price and quality of product, while regular consumption could be influenced even more by ethical marketing.

Overall, the articles on millennial consumers paint an overly-generalized picture of clichés with respect to the attitudes and behaviors of this generational cohort. As Bucic et al. put it, “Our lack of understanding might reflect their seeming conflicting goals: At times, their principal concern is self-gratification, whereas at other points, it is social improvement” (114). It may also be that attempting to study any generational cohort as a whole is a losing battle. There are many cultural variables, as well as social variables related to wealth, social status, and life-stage. While there may very well be some universal traits among all millennial consumers, the studies presented here provide a good argument for segmenting millennials and working from smaller segments toward the larger generation as a whole, regularly revising the research and identifying themes that are truly universal.

CHAPTER 4

QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND THEMES

Data Collection

Observations took place at the Old Familiar Barber Shop between May 31st, 2015 and July 19th, 2015. A total of five visits were made to the shop, each lasting about two hours. During these visits, notes related to the overall atmosphere of the shop, significant interactions between customers and barbers, and appearance of some of the customers were recorded.

Overall the barber shop maintained a “classic” barber theme with hardwood floors, vintage barber chairs, and one large mirror extending across the wall behind the chairs. Décor included dressed-up taxidermy, such as a mounted deer head wearing a Shriner’s fez, with a cigarette in its mouth. Vintage artwork related to barbering was scattered throughout the shop juxtaposed with modern artwork created by local tattoo artists, and large Ohio and United States flags hung at the back of the shop.

Through the décor, classic setting, and overall atmosphere of the barber shop (complete with a magazine rack containing everything from Playboy to Field and Stream), there was a very strong presence of archetypical masculinity. This atmosphere communicated a clear message that this was not a typical franchise hair salon, but rather a unique, independently owned and operated barber shop that specializes in cutting men’s hair, trimming beards, and providing an alternative to the Great Clips and Saturdays of the of the hair cutting and styling market. Through this, Old Familiar Barber Shop has attracted a large and diverse clientele of men in the central Ohio area.

Of this clientele, there is hardly a single cultural category to which all could be said to belong. Clothing styles varied from modern hipsters with tattered skinny jeans and tight-fitting flannel, to professional types wearing tucked in collared shirts or even full business suits. It seems worthy to mention that there was very little branded clothing to take note of. Levi jeans were easy to notice due to their distinct red tag on their back pocket, and many shoe brands prominently display their logos on their product (specifically noted were Nike and New Balance). However, these branded clothing items were exceptions to the rule, which seemed to be in favor of non-branded, plain clothing.

In general, there was very little interaction between barbers and their customers outside of the transaction itself. Most customers would enter the shop, give their name to the barber they intended to see, and then waited quietly, passing time on their cell phones. However, some shorter conversations related to some of the themes discovered later in the research did come up, and these conversations are noted where applicable below.

Table 1: Interview Participant Profile

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Race	Brand Chosen
Adam	25	White/Caucasian	Ohio State Football
Brian	31	White/Caucasian	Banana Republic
Christopher	30	White/Caucasian	Ford
Derek	34	White/Caucasian	Bower and Wilkins
Earl	29	White/Caucasian	Apple
Frank	32	White/Caucasian	Whole Foods
Greg	31	White/Caucasian	Justin
Henry	29	White/Caucasian	DC Comics
Isaac	33	White/Caucasian	Vans
Joey	35	White/Caucasian	Old Spice

During and after the observation phase, ten participants were recruited who were willing to invite me in to their homes and provide a one-on-one interview. These interviews varied in length, ranging from as short as 26 minutes, to as long as 122 minutes. The total time for all interviews was 13 hours, with the average time for each interview being 78 minutes. The audio recorded interviews included a tour of the participants' homes where they each had labeled a number of branded items throughout their home with words and phrases that they identified with the brand (see Table 2). These labels varied from single words to sentences, and reflected not only attitudes toward certain brands, but also justification for their presence.

After the tour, each participant was asked to choose one of the brands they feel most loyal to for the remainder of the interview (the brand did not necessarily have to be one labeled on the tour). The rest of the interview revolved around one brand in particular and discussed at length the participants' attitudes toward, and perceptions of, that brand, as well as their views on what it meant to be loyal to said brand. The interviews all took place in a quiet and comfortable area of the home such as seated at a kitchen table or on a living room couch. All of the participants appeared to be genuinely interested in the goals of the research and were willing to provide as much insight as they felt they could.

Table 2: Labeling Exercise Results

Respondent	Brand	Labels	Category
Adam	OSU Football	Winning, Football	Entertainment
Adam	Nike	Child Labor	Clothing
Adam	Star Wars	Visual, Scores, Tech, Storytelling, Toys	Entertainment
Adam	AdvoCare	Bro-Science, Pyramid Scheme	Food
Adam	Purina	Endorsed by girlfriend	Pet Supplies
Brian	Method (hand soap)	Girlfriend liked it, We like scent, Expensive	Toiletries

Brian	Gables (hair cream)	Blind test, Works well, Too oily, Replaced	Toiletries
Brian	Suave	Replaced cream oil, Less oily, Like four bucks, It works	Toiletries
Brian	Old Spice	Started with grandfather, Expensive, Like scent	Toiletries
Brian	Crest	Girlfriend recommended, Similar price	Toiletries
Brian	Pronamel	Girlfriend recommended	Toiletries
Brian	Neosporin	It works	Toiletries
Brian	Arm and Hammer	It works	Toiletries
Christopher	Verizon	Reliable, Good customer service, Wide coverage area	Technology
Christopher	Frigidaire	Durable, Attractive products, Functional	Kitchen
Christopher	Visio	Underwhelming, Clunky, Worked for us	Technology
Christopher	Store Brand	Not always quite the same, but still pretty good	Food
Christopher	Old Spice	It's what I've always used	Toiletries
Derek	Timberland	Durability	Clothing
Derek	Frigidaire	Reliable	Kitchen
Derek	Weber	Lasts forever	Kitchen
Derek	Dyson	The best	Cleaning
Derek	Nest	Easy to use	Houseware
Derek	Tommy Hilfiger	Comfort and style	Clothing
Derek	LG	Value	Technology
Derek	Bower and Wilkins	Highest quality	Technology
Earl	Micron	Professional, Quality, Top of the line	Office Supplies
Earl	Apple	Pricey, High quality, Reputation, Status	Technology
Earl	Tito's Vodka	Gluten free, Quality to value ratio, Least worst, Austin made	Food
Earl	Coke	Timeless, Joy and happiness	Food
Earl	Viva Paper Towels	Quality, Expensive	Kitchen
Frank	Roku	Meets needs, Within means	Entertainment
Frank	Trader Joe's	Honest, Value, Quality	Food
Frank	Meijer	Selection, Reliable, Value	Food
Frank	Whirlpool	Reliable, Value	Kitchen
Frank	Dyson	Perceived quality	Cleaning
Frank	Apple	Integration, Essential	Technology

Greg	Cholula	The real deal, Just the right hot, Ambassador of the Southwest	Food
Greg	Bare Naked	Balanced, Healthy, Eco-friendly and sustainable, No frills, no gimmicks, The real hiker's choice	Food
Greg	Dial	Fresh, Clean, Performance and formula, Doctor's choice	Toiletries Toiletries
Greg	Paul Mitchell	Industry leader. Best all around, Tradition, Mother's preference	Toiletries
Greg	Justin	Work horse, Durable, Quality and craftsmanship, Heritage and history, Commitment to domestic manufacturing	Clothing
Henry	Friskies	Quality, Affordability	Pet Supplies
Henry	Kraft	Only one we actually like the taste of	Food
Henry	Velveeta	Tastes better than store brand	Food
Isaac	Old Spice	It lasts, It never fails me, Swagger	Toiletries
Isaac	Vans	Lifestyle	Clothing
Isaac	Q-Tips	They work, Brand name	Toiletries
Isaac	Kleenex	Soft, Dependable	Toiletries
Isaac	Dial	Mom	Toiletries
Isaac	Band-Aid	Brand name	Toiletries
Joey	Old Navy	Nineties, Stupid commercials, White people, Cheap	Clothing
Joey	Band-Aid	Brand name	Toiletries
Joey	Old Spice	Trendy, Reinvented brand, Old brand that in now new, Pretty smart marketing	Toiletries
Joey	Silk Milk	First non-dairy milk, More expensive, Better to buy almond milk instead	Food

Following the interview process, the audio recordings were then reviewed and transcribed into a form a thematic coding. The coded interviews were then reviewed several

times to identify major categorical themes within the interviews. The major themes found in the qualitative data are presented in the next section as dimensions of attachment.

Findings and Dimensions of Attachment

The dimensions of attachment discussed throughout this section should not be misconstrued as an exhaustive list of those discovered throughout the research. Instead, one should consider them to be a generalized and concise summation of the most common and prominent dimensions of attachment among the participants. At first glance these tenets are distinct from the current literature on millennial consumers. However, there are a number of tie-ins that will be highlighted. Of the following themes, all ten participants brought up the concept of family as it relates to brand choice; nine of the ten participants also brought up the importance of value; all ten participants showed some type of identification with their favorite brands; and of the ten participants, eight showed signs of both active and passive loyalty, while one appeared to be uniquely active with regard to his purchasing habit, and another one was strictly passive with his.

Family

Among all of the dimensions of attachment identified in this study, the most prominent common dimension was that of family. The concept of family came up in every one-on-one interview, and also came up twice during the observational phase at the barbershop. Despite its commonality, however, the construction of family and its role in participants' connections with the brands was a diverse and complex relationship. For the purpose of organization and

clarity, the dimension of family has been broken down into two categories: (1) Family as identity and (2) family as an influencer.

Family as Identity

During the initial observations made at Old Familiar Barber Shop there were very few conversations of note between customers and their barbers. Customers who were waiting for their turn passed time quietly on their cell phones or by reading one of the magazines offered by the shop owners in the waiting area. Most conversations were between the barber and customer, and were limited to general greetings and appointment related discussion such as how customers would like their hair cut, beard trimmed, etc.

Nevertheless, one conversation did stand out between a barber and one of his customers whom he had not seen in a long time. This conversation stood out because of the personal nature of it and the topic of discussion, which was parenting. The customer had mentioned to his barber that he and his wife were expecting a child and that sparked a short conversation about raising children. The majority of this discussion focused on the fear and anxiety of being a new parent, and on the desire to be a good parent. Although the barber mentioned that he did not have any children of his own, they both discussed the topic as if there was an expectation to start a family based on their age and their peers' decisions to have children.

I was reminded of this conversation several times when discussing family with my interview participants, as a few of them had already been in the process of starting a family of their own. However, in the case of my interview participants, the discussions on this subject

went much deeper and were sparked by how their role as a family member affected their attachment to certain brands. This connection between a brand and its impact on family identity was most notable in the case of Frank, who talked at length about his loyalty to Whole Foods. For Frank, a great deal of thought is put into ensuring that his family is enjoying the best quality food that he can provide. He views Whole Foods as a brand that is open and honest about the products that they sell and the ingredients in them. These are very important traits that don't just influence his decisions to shop at Whole Foods, but also influence his loyalty to other brands, such as Meijer's natural food product line and Trader Joe's. These brands encompass a sense of responsibility that Frank also discussed when describing himself, stating, "I think that's all like being a person or an adult, you know, some level of responsibility."

Frank is 32 years and lives in a suburban neighborhood with his wife and newborn daughter. He is a middle-class professional currently working in the advertising business, who is just starting to build a family, and spends a good deal of his free time from work volunteering at his church. During our interview there were a number of occasions that required Frank to tend to his daughter or help his wife with some sort of household activity, yet he never missed a beat when answering questions and talking about his connections to brands like Whole Foods. Not only does he personally identify with the brand himself, he even sees his own family in the brand. When asked to describe what Whole Foods might be like as a person, he compares them to his daughter by responding:

I think of my daughter's personality. She can make anybody smile. When you see them [Whole Foods], you feel good being around that kind of person. Yeah, that's probably about the extent of how I would describe Whole Foods - the brand - as a person. -Frank

For another participant, Christopher, family is a fundamental part of his identity and ties directly to his loyalty to Ford automobiles. Christopher's dedication to his own family, and his identity as "family man" were highlighted several times throughout his interview. He is 30 years old and lives in a moderate-sized house west of Columbus, with his wife and three sons. Throughout the interview there were several interruptions by any one of his children, and without skipping a beat he was able to manage their needs while simultaneously staying on task with our conversation. One can tell from the moment they view his interactions with his kids that he loves every bit of being a parent and is proud of his family.

At one point, when discussing Ford's refusal to take government bailout money during the 2008 financial crisis he stated, "If it was my way...I'd have eight kids and my wife would never have to work, and I'd never have to work." Although he admired Ford's ability to survive a tough economy without government help, he admitted to having to rely on government assistance himself. For Christopher, taking money from the government was an undesirable but necessary act in order to maintain his family's happiness and comfort, and it demonstrates his willingness to put his family's needs before his own pride or preferences. As the sole income earner of the household, Christopher has sacrificed a number of personal luxuries for the benefit of his family on a regular basis.

Christopher's dedication to Ford may seem to be based on the functionality and versatility of their products, but many of his comments throughout the interview suggest that he views Ford as a brand that is not dissimilar from himself in personality.

The picture of a person I would conjure up for them would be a family guy with a couple of kids. Just a normal guy that's got jeans and a t-shirt, and kids and a family and stuff. Just a normal guy. -Christopher

By incorporating a brand like Ford into his family's lives, he may be reaffirming his own identity as a regular guy and a family man who puts his wife and kids first.

Both of these examples highlight the importance of family, community, and responsibility as resonant values and dimensions of attachment between the participants and brands. Other examples in the interviews were more subtle, but were shown through participants' viewing their family as a type of brand group. This view bears some overlapping with the second category of the family theme, family as an influencer.

Family as an Influencer

The dimension of family as an influencer was more widespread and prominent throughout the interviews. In some cases, the influence from family was deliberate and direct, with one participant describing his introduction to his favorite brand as a process of being "brainwashed" by his family. Although this idea of being brainwashed was only mentioned by one participant, others described their introduction through receiving gifts and other forms of direct influence.

Less direct influence from family came in the form of examples usually set by parents, or in some cases, grandparents. The strongest illustration of this kind of influence came from Brian, who described himself as loyal to Banana Republic, a high-end clothing brand. Brian's main attraction to Banana Republic revolved around the perceived value that the brand provides (another theme which will be discussed in the next section). For Brian, he did not mind paying a little more for a brand or product, if the quality of that brand or product balances

out the higher price. This emphasis on value comes directly from examples set by his grandfathers and father:

My grandfather told me straight out that he didn't get rich by spending a lot of money. He was a millionaire and he had a Lexus as long as I remember. And he had a 36-foot Tiara yacht on Lake Erie - and a house on Lake Erie - and he had a lot of nice things. He was a member of a lot of different clubs and different things, but he didn't waste money. He bought things that he had done research on and he . . .bought quality. . .My other grandfather was a VP at an electrical corporation in southwest Ohio, so he's another CPA. My father is a CPA and auditor, and these guys kind of instilled that into me: If you spend enough money on something, you should demand quality. -Brian

Throughout the interview, Brian referenced his grandparents and parents several times in a manner similar to the passage above. It is very clear from our conversation that he values his family's opinions and beliefs a lot. Similar sentiments were uncovered during conversations with other participants such as Derek, who mentioned that he has always owned a Mercedes Benz solely because there is a sense of family heritage with the brand. For another participant, Greg, his decision to continue purchasing Justin brand boots was encouraged by his grandfather who had instilled working class ethos in him, and would regularly compliment his boots.

The dimension of family as an influencer stands out from other influencers such as friends or colleagues because it is much more prominent. Although there were some mentions of non-family influences, they were infrequent and unremarkable. The brands that the participants resonated with most, and were able to talk about the most, were the brands they were raised on, or in some way introduced to through their family. Even Christopher's first introduction to Ford was highlighted with the life-stage milestone of learning to drive in his father's Ford. Christopher's relationship with Ford also serves as an example that the categories of "family as identity" and "family as an influencer" are not mutually exclusive.

In both cases – family as identity and family as an influencer – it is clear that the participants in this study see themselves as part of a family in some capacity. Why family is important in the first place may have much to do with their millennial status and age range. All of the participants seemed to be in a liminal stage of separating themselves from their parents or guardians. Most were living in small starter apartments or their first home, and one respondent, Adam, was still living with his parents at the time while he was waiting to close on a new home. While a couple of them had already started the process of starting a new family by having children, for others that possibility was not far off in the future. It may even be that family was a common topic due to expectation.

As twenty- and thirty-something, middle-class, white males coming from households with some sort of classical American family structure, it may be that social and cultural pressures both reinforce the urge to purchase from companies and brands that reinforce the overall idea of family, regardless of its role as identity or influencer. Growing up in a capitalist, consumerist society may play a very prominent role in how these respondents view the relationship between family values and consumption. While some cultures may downplay the importance of material objects as they relate to creating family identity, it appears that for the participants in this study consumption practices indeed do play a positive role in establishing and constructing their concept of family.

Value

The concept of value was also frequently articulated throughout the interviews, as nine out of the ten participants cited value in some form as an influencer of their perceived loyalty

to their favorite brands. Although opinions of value varied slightly with each respondent, there was a clear concept of cost-to-quality balance discussed by them. One respondent went further to give value a dual meaning, defined as both cost-to-quality balance, and the value the brand provides by being honest and trustworthy. Despite his view that these definitions are distinct, it could be argued that in many of the conversations honesty and trustworthiness were all viewed as a part of the bigger picture of quality.

As mentioned in the previous section, one participant - Brian - felt very strongly about the importance of value with regards to the brands that he buys. This theme was apparent early in the conversation with him, as one of items he talked about at length during the tour of his apartment was his Cannondale bicycle. As he explained, "The reason I was going for name branded bikes is just because, honestly, the quality is there and customer service." Cannondale is not a bargain bike company by any stretch, and Brian was shopping for bikes with a \$1,200 budget, but he "went up an extra 300 bucks to have the ability to save money later on, if and when it breaks." Paying more upfront to save more down the road was a key factor in assessing the value of a brand or product.

Brian is 31 years old, and at the time of our interview was currently free-lancing as a marketer while between full-time jobs. His apartment was a minimalist bachelor pad with few possessions in general. Aside from his \$1,500 Cannondale bicycle and a well-stocked kitchen, his living room was noticeably bare. Despite the overall emptiness of the apartment, Brian appeared to be living quite well. The few possessions he had were high quality, such as his leather sofa and brand new flat screen TV, his overall appearance was clean and professional,

and he even mentioned that he was in a new relationship with his girlfriend. It was clear that a number of things were changing in his life recently, but he was adapting well.

When it comes to value and its relation to honesty and trustworthiness, Brian regularly made the argument that when you pay a premium for something, you have also paid for a sort of “right” to demand quality. According to Brian:

There’s nothing that inherently makes \$40 jeans better than \$20 jeans, but you have a little bit more leverage when you go in and say, ‘Listen, I spent hours of my work day working to pay off these pants, and only wore them once and they broke. I want a better set of pants or I want my money back’. -Brian

He reiterates this when discussing the primary brand of the interview, Banana Republic, stating, “The reason why I shop there is the quality of the product.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by Earl during his interview about Apple, where he made the comment, “They’re pricier, but you get what you pay for and everything inside of it is high quality.” Earl’s living situation seemed similar to that of Brian’s. He lived in a small house in an area in Columbus known for its hipster demographic. Recently married, Earl and his wife had just started building their life together and while their house consisted of relatively few personal possessions, the few things that they did have were well known brands such as Whirlpool kitchen accessories and their LG television.

From the conversations with Brian and Earl, it was found that there was a draw to established name brands such as Apple and Banana Republic not because of their recognizable insignia or their role as status symbols, but because they equated those brand names with high quality that was worth the extra cost. This is not too different from one of the topics discussed with Christopher, which was generic and store brand items. Despite the fact that store branded items such as macaroni and cheese may appear to be cheap knock-offs at first glance,

Christopher is convinced that many of these items are exactly the same as their name brand counterparts. In other words, the decision to opt for the store brand items may be based on a previous positive experience with the name brand, balanced by the low cost of the store brand. In a way, he is still connected to Kraft Mac and Cheese in his own mind, because the store brand is exactly the same stuff.

From a monetary perspective, value coincides with the general implication from the participants that they are spending money wisely and not wasting it. Although it is not related directly to the brand we discussed - DC Comics - one of the participants named Henry explained that he would rather wait for individual issues of comics to come out as a collection in the form of an omnibus or trade paperback in order to save money. This is a small example of delayed gratification as value. In the same conversation, however, Henry also explained that he would actively spend more money on comics printed on recycled paper, as he and his wife are trying to recycle more and be more mindful of the environment. By spending the extra money and waiting for collections, Henry reinforces his personal decisions to be a more conscious consumer in this regard.

Throughout all of the discussions about value, however, there was a strong connection with the functionality and overall quality of the brands' products. Integration into the participants' lifestyle coincided with these themes, and many of the participants valued the way that their favorite brands "fit" within their personalities, occupations, and interests. Descriptive labels related to this theme were found throughout the labeling exercises with words and phrases such as "works well", "reliable" and "functional", sometimes even paired with "expensive" or "pricey". Overall, though, the value of a brand was always in the spotlight, as

Greg stated, “If you want a reason to buy a brand, it would be because [of] the value of their product.”

Value, like family, may also be an important trait that is dependent on or at least influenced by cultural factors. Particularly for the participants in this study, the life-stage factor of being out on their own for the first time and the need to be self-sufficient. As illustrated with respondents like Brian and Greg, family expectations also play a role in seeking out products with value and authenticity. Nevertheless, the sheer need for products that will last and not empty the wallet over time may be driven mostly by the economic status of representation here. Similarly, the ethos of hard work and honesty also exuded by Brian and Greg – and to a lesser extent Derek and Christopher – may be indicative of a stronger attachment to money not simply as accumulation of wealth, but as a representation of hard work that shouldn’t be parted with easily. Though the topics of hard work and frugality were not discussed at length with all participants, it should be considered as an important topic for future research as a way to better understand millennials spending habits and the importance of product quality.

Social Signals and Personal Identification

As the title of this project suggests, there was a definite interest in uncovering what kind of social or personal identification - if any - exists among the research participants in regard to the brands they favor. Throughout the interviews and observations, there were definitely personal and social markers of identity that brands provide, however, the degree to which they play in creating and maintaining attachment to brands appears to be subtle.

Some of the noteworthy group influencers came from family, hobbyist groups, occupational groups and simple demographic group associations. When asked if he participated in any groups directly related to Ohio State football, Adam was quick to suggest that his family and fiancé could very well be considered a brand group. When discussing some of his favorite brands such as Micron pens and Apple, Earl described how he showed up for work at a new job recently, and right on his desk was an Apple computer. He noted that he was never asked about what kind of computer he preferred, but rather it was assumed that because he was a designer he should be using Apple. He noted the similar expectations with Micron pens, stating, “A couple other people I work with have them too...They’re just one of the industry things - like Moleskine - everybody has it.”

The discussion of industry and insider brands continued with other participants as well. When talking about Bower and Wilkins, a British audio company, Derek explained, “The brand doesn’t have a lot of name recognition, but it’s been around for a very, very long time,” and that, “It’s kind of like being a part of that club that, if you know what it is you’re like, ‘That guy knows what he’s doing’.” Similar sentiments were expressed by Greg when discussing a couple of brands. He described the Bare Naked brand of granola as the “real hiker’s choice”. When asked what might be considered the “fake” hiker’s choice, he responded that there are a lot of brands that try to “piggy-back” on the multigrain and granola choices in the market, but that they make an inferior product. He implied that while those might be good for a casual hike, the sugar content and other unnecessary ingredients could be a detriment. He then went on further explaining that he had been introduced to the brand through other hikers and friends in the hiking community.

It should not be overlooked that Greg would consider a brand he chooses to be the “real deal”, so-to-speak. Throughout the interview it was clear that he took pride in being an authentic person with strong working-class ethos. What is also noteworthy is how this identity was reinforced by the brand he felt most loyal to, Justin boots. A brand with very little name recognition outside of the skilled labor community, Greg’s attachment to Justin highlights his attachment to that community. Furthermore, his loyalty to Justin also seems to reflect his own perceptions of himself. When asked what his loyalty to Justin’s boots might say to other people, he responded:

Probably that I’ve thought out the boots that I’m wearing. Because they know my lifestyle and I wear them in all occasions, and you can tell by looking at them that I care for them. So they probably just see someone that cares for things - has value for things. I’ve had a lot of people - not just my grandfather - that ask me about my boots.
–Greg

Personal identification with brands was also a notable theme among the interviews with Christopher and Frank. Both participants, when asked to personify their favorite brands described a person incredibly similar to their self. Despite Ford’s muscle car lines and various luxury models, Christopher still described the brand as a, “...family guy, with a couple of kids. Just a normal guy that has got jeans and a t-shirt, and kids and a family and stuff.” Frank echoed similar comparisons between Whole Foods and himself, saying, “To think about Whole Foods as a person, and [with] a personality and those kinds of things, I would probably think of them as somebody my age, probably dressed the same as me...they probably value a lot of - and care for - other people.” These comments run parallel with Frank’s own assessment of himself as a “people pleaser”. Other parallels were found on topics such as responsibility, value, and honesty.

Despite the apparent differences between social and personal identity, the overall theme of identity should not be divided into two discrete categories. The relationship between social identity, personal identity, and brand loyalty is complex. For the participants in this study, social identity and personal identity seem to be a fluid mix of identity overall, rather than two unique constructs of the self. This is best reflected in Brian's interview when he says, "I'm wearing what I believe a 31 year-old should be wearing," only to immediately follow up with, "This 31 year-old". On one hand, many of the participants shared Brian's sentiments regarding their social role based on their age group. On the other hand, the fact that he felt it necessary to distinguish that he is really talking about how he views himself is telling. He goes on to say, "Other people, you wear what you like. But this is cut the way that I want things cut at this point in my life." Once again, there is attention paid to the age-appropriateness of certain styles of dress, but there is also a sense of understanding that there is no right or wrong way for others in his age group to dress. Thus, while the importance of identity on creating attachment to certain brands is noteworthy, it is more subtle than the other dimensions of attachment already mentioned.

Types of Loyalty: Active and Passive

Alluding to the dichotomous concept of escapism versus conformity introduced by Labrecque et al. (2011), I felt that there was a noticeable contrast between active loyalty and passive loyalty to certain brands among my participants. For clarity, these types of loyalty are defined as follows: Active loyalty is loyalty based on engagement with the brand, and active research and participation; and passive loyalty is defined as loyalty based on outside influence,

or familiarity, with minimal research. Unlike Labrecque's model, however, these two types of loyalty are not mutually exclusive with regards to individuals, brands, or even types of brands. Thus, it would be best to categorize the two under one theme related to types of loyalty, and encourage further research in to this model in the future.

In most of the interactions with the participants, it was evident that both active and passive loyalty were at play when it came to deciding the brands they use. For Adam, this is demonstrated by his initial introduction to Ohio State Football as a brand through his family's "brainwashing" him. As he described it, there was no other option but to be loyal to Ohio State, and this was supported through gifts and somewhat forced experiences. While these are generally indicators for passive loyalty – "going with the flow", so-to-speak – Adam also described how he actively maintains his relationship with the brand through online communities and other resources. As a fan, he follows Ohio State Football as an experiential brand that provides entertainment and community, which encourages some active participation, but can also be appreciated with minimal effort.

Similar to Adam was Isaac, who felt a strong identification with Vans footwear, but did not exhibit many behaviors of active loyalty. Isaac explained that he did minimal research when buying new products from Vans and that he usually stuck to quickly checking out reviews on Google when doing any research. He even stated that he has tried competing brands before, but has always come back to Vans. Vans makes shoes with a target market of skateboarders, BMXers, and other action sports enthusiasts in mind.

Isaac is 33 years old, married, with two sons. They live in an older house in Clintonville, Ohio, a neighborhood known for being a gentrified, up-and-coming destination for hipster

millennials. His home décor fits that of a family all interested in extreme sports and art. Not only does he ride BMX and skateboard, both of his sons do as well. In the living room where we did most of the interview was a large, expensive, Apple computer that he used for his work as a graphic designer for a local t-shirt company. The computer was covered with stickers of BMX, skateboard, and clothing brands – including Vans. For Isaac, being a part of the action sports community helps to passively reaffirm his loyalty to Vans as “the shoe” to have. Despite the predominance of passive loyalty among them, Isaac and Adam both illustrate that indicators of active loyalty can still exist among those who are generally passive by participation in brand related groups.

Although most participants demonstrated examples of both active and passive loyalty, two of them did indicate one or the other exclusively. Derek, while discussing all of the brands he chose to label, including his favorite brand, regularly discussed how he put a lot of research in to the brands that he uses. Every item he talked about had a story of comparison and research that led him to choose the brands that he did. When asked how long he had been saving up for his Bower and Wilkins audio equipment, he explained that he had been saving for about 10 years, and that, “When it came down time to actually make the purchase, I spent about 4 months actually researching which models - what was the difference between one series or the other series, you know, what was going to give me the best value.” Clearly, Derek exemplifies what it means to be actively loyal to a brand, and showed no signs of being passive when it came to deciding on important items in his home.

Almost polar opposite to Derek was Joey, a participant who was so passive about the brands he felt the most committed to that he had trouble even deciding on a brand to discuss

for the interview. Ultimately, he did choose to talk about Old Spice, but as the conversation went on it became increasingly clear that Joey had no active connection to the brand at all. He explained that in high school he used Rite Guard deodorant, as it was the popular choice at the time, but that when he got into college he made a change to Old Spice and has never changed since. Function and familiarity seemed to be the driving forces behind Joey's commitment to Old Spice, and he put little importance on any other influencers. Joey's indifference is particularly interesting because while he seems greatly passive toward brands as a whole, he is still a committed consumer of select brands due to familiarity and lack of desire to try new brands.

Discussion of the Themes

A pattern throughout the interviews emphasized family. Both as an influencer and a form of self-identification, the participants interviewed all had something to say about how family played a role in their choices of brand. This is new and noteworthy compared to other research on topics such as ethical consumption, experience, and cause related marketing (McCabe and Malefyt 2010; Bucic et al 2012; Halliday and Astafyeva 2014). Looking into further research on the relationship between millennials and family, revealed a very limited number of articles confronting the subject. Some researchers have reason to believe that there is a strong correlation between a phenomenon known as "helicopter parenting" and negative outlooks on family, and it has been argued that many millennials are products of such parenting (Odenweller et al. 2014). Yet the interviews presented here suggest positive relationships between the participant and their family members. Without knowing exactly what kind of

parenting habits each participant grew up under it is difficult to fairly compare to such studies, but in viewing millennials' inter-familial connections in general, it seems that there may be some contradictory theories worth testing.

Despite a lack of scholarly articles on millennials and their views of family, popular articles from the marketing discipline abound. Many of these articles support the notion that millennials are more family-oriented than previous generations, and encourage marketers to consider this fact when creating campaigns aimed at millennials (Gallup 2016). According to MillennialMarketing.com, some "predictions" about millennials are that "Gen Y will be attentive parents", "Millennials will put their kids ahead of their careers", "Millennials' interest in healthful, locally produced and organic foods will accelerate", and "Millennials will emphasize family experiences over material things" (Millennial Marketing 2009).

That final prediction falls right in line with the findings presented here. The participants in this study all had at least some trouble even choosing what brand they felt most loyal to, and yet, once the conversation developed and the topic of family was brought up, many of them were able to start speaking deeply about their connections with their favorite brands. In other words, while the participants struggled to bridge the gap from the material items they use every day to brand loyalty, once framed within the context of family they were able to do so with ease. Using the context of family with storytelling and personification of brands, many of the participants were able to provide examples of strong connections to brands not dissimilar to those provided by respondents in Moisiso's (2004) study. This reminds us that it is not simply the material object that creates or supports family identity, but the rituals around them and how they are incorporated into the lives of the consumers (Moisiso 2004, 364-365).

Contrasting with the theme of family, the theme of value did fall in line with the initial review of the literature. Bucic et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of price and product quality among millennials, finding that “despite consumers’ willingness to make ethical purchases, ethical product attributes are not the most dominant criteria in their consumption decisions because they care more about price, quality, and value” (127). Oftentimes during the interviews participants suggested that they were more interested in buying brands of high perceived quality, rather than choosing brands that represent a certain cause. However, though cost was a factor, the emphasis was not on *low* cost necessarily, but instead it was on the idea of *fair* cost. This fact differs from the implications of Bucic et al, and suggests something more complex going on with the participants’ decision making.

Value and its link with honesty and authenticity is also an important perspective to consider. As Brown et al. (2003) discuss with regards to Volkswagen’s retro branding of the Beetle, for some consumers the quality and classic can-do ethos the brand attempted to represent made it “easy to find moral standing, even moral brand meaning. . .of the Beetle brand’s Americanesque egalitarianism” (23). Although, value may not always equate with retro branding, there was a common theme with respondents that more of the classic brands (Coke, Ford, Bower and Wilkins, Justin, etc.), or brands with a significant history that they can relate to also carry a certain level of higher quality and value with their products.

The key to that complexity in decision-making may lie in the theme of identity. While the separation of the themes family, value, and social and personal identity in the previous section was necessary for clarity, these themes should actually be viewed as having some overlap with each other. One might imagine a Venn diagram of the three, where the middle

section of all three overlapping is labeled as *reflexive identity*. “Reflexive identity can be defined as the identity that people project to themselves and that contains elements of self-awareness or self-construction that are not wholly public” (Smith 2007, 413). This label is carefully chosen based on the way that some of the participants described themselves and the brands. The role of the “family-man” or the “informed value consumer” archetypes on these themes indicates an interconnected and complex construction of the self that the participants don’t seem to be completely aware of, and may not be at the immediate forefront of their decision making on a purchase-by-purchase basis. Rather than choosing brands to signal certain identities or to fit in with certain social groups, the participants seemed to choose brands that reinforced internal views of self-identity.

These findings are very much in line with Ahuvia’s (2005) regarding demarcating, compromising, and synthesizing. The research here was not intended to evaluate the presence or level of these processes; however, it should be noted that examples of all three were found throughout the interviews. Ahuvia also makes a very important note that “it is often the products that consumers reject that say the most about the consumers’ desired self” (181). This is a very intriguing point, and may be worth notating for future research on brand loyalty – or perhaps brand rejection. Ahuvia’s example of Pam’s rejection of her businesswoman identity may very well be representative an unidentified element that was not explored in this research.

With regards to the theme of active versus passive loyalty, one should find the noticeable similarities to Labrecque et al.’s (2011) article on conformity versus escapism. Specific questions were added to the interview guide to test the ideas presented in their piece.

Particularly, questions were designed to dig deeper in to the idea of blind loyalty versus loyalty based on careful and calculated rationale. According to Labrecque at al., conformity influences brand loyalty based on in-group participation with a brand, and requires little research. Conversely, escapism motivates consumers to break away from the status quo and seek out new brands to try, thus requiring more active participation and research (459-460). Among the other characteristics and indicators of escapism and conformity, the basic concept of research was isolated and participants were asked how much and what kind of research they engaged in regarding their favorite brands. As stated in the previous section, the findings were not dichotomous and suggested a fluid or overlapping relationship between research on brands and loyalty. Furthermore, research in general was regularly practiced, even with brand relationships that Labrecque et al might classify as conformity-influenced.

CHAPTER 5

SURVEY RESULTS

Internet-based surveys were distributed to 62 potential respondents within the researcher's personal, social, and professional networks via email. Emails were initially sent out on December 20, 2015, with a follow up email sent two weeks later. The Survey Monkey questionnaire was then closed to further responses on January 31, 2016. Of those 62 emails, 7 returned messages stating that the address was no longer valid. Of the 55 remaining possible respondents, 19 completed the survey. After reviewing the responses to the survey, it was discovered that some of the respondents were not within the 18 – 35 years-old age group that had been defined for this study. After removing ineligible respondents from the survey data, 11 useable surveys were collected that fit the criteria for this research. The actual age range of these respondents were 25 through 33, and all self-identified as either "white" or "Caucasian".

Occupations of the respondents varied from creative professions such as designers and audio engineers; to government jobs such as military or critical point auditors; to service industry professionals such as physical therapists and customer service representatives (see table 3). This variation of occupations provided a spread of annual incomes ranging from \$30,000 to \$95,000. Generally speaking, most survey respondents listed daily use brands as those that they felt most loyal to (see figure 1). However, there were notable occupation related brands listed, especially with respect to an audio engineer whose list of brands included all music recording related equipment. Both designers listed Apple as one of their top favorite brands, which may be due to the prevalence of Apple computers within the art and design community.

Data that were collected through the surveys were exported from the Survey Monkey website and populated in to an excel file. Each question was analyzed using descriptive statistics, where correlations and other notable statistics were compared to the qualitative themes. Due to the small sample size statistical significance could not be established. Despite this, the quantitative data do provide valuable insight into the themes already discussed and support the qualitative findings.

The first section of the survey asked respondents to list the top five brands they buy on a regular basis. This information is organized with the respondent data, brands, and general categories for those brands in the following table:

Table 3: Survey Data Including Brands and Categories

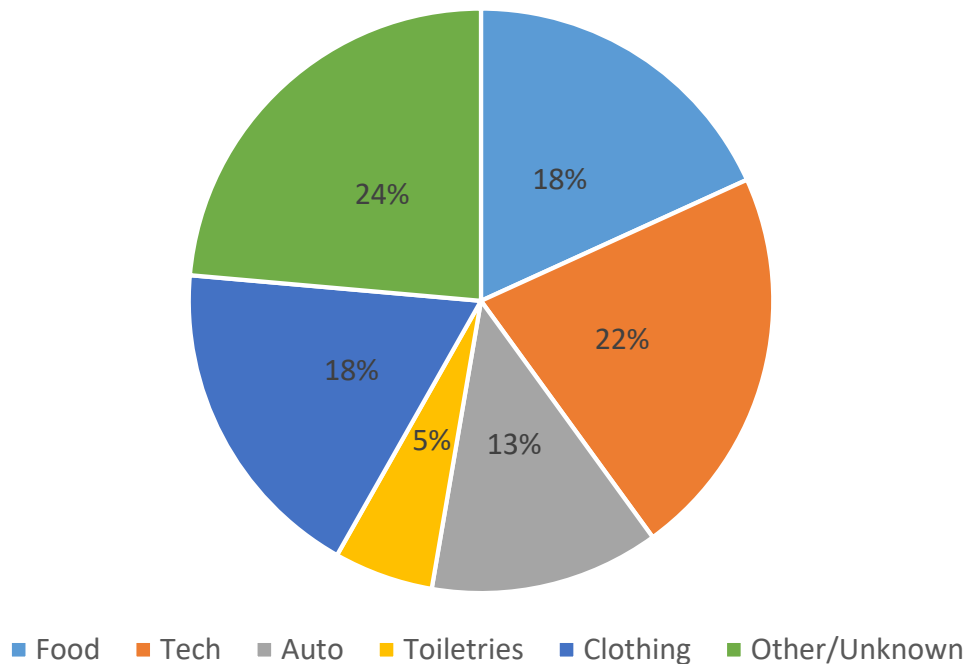
Respondent	Age	Occupation	Top 5 Brands	Categories
1	30	Designer	Apple	Tech
			Coca-Cola	Food
			Google	Tech
			Nissan	Auto
			Orbit Gum	Food
2	28	Customer Service	Homage	Clothing
			Sony	Tech
			Converse	Clothing
			Lacoste	Clothing
			Toyota	Auto
3	33	PT	Mossimo	Clothing
			Old Spice	Toiletries
			Sabra	Food
			Toyota	Auto
			Windex	Other
4	32	Salesman	Samsung	Tech
			Simmons	Other
			BMW	Auto
			Cannondale	Other
			Method	Toiletries
5	25	CPA	Ohio State	Other
			Nike	Clothing

			Purina	Other
			Budweiser	Food
			Sweet Baby Rays	Food
6	30	Financial Advisor	Whole Foods	Food
			Starbucks	Food
			Apple	Tech
			Lexus	Auto
			Penn Mutual	Other
7	29	Scientist	Apple	Tech
			Jeep	Auto
			Sony	Tech
			Blizzard	Unknown
			Treyarch	Tech
8	30	Government Monitor/Auditor and Manager	Saucony	Clothing
			Ford	Auto
			Express/Limited Inc.	Clothing
			Kenneth Cole	Clothing
			GNC	Food
9	32	Associate Design Director	Whole Foods	Food
			Apple	Tech
			Target	Other
			Meijer	Other
			Ava Anderson	Toiletries
10	32	Military Police	Levi	Clothing
			Samsung	Tech
			Yamaha	Unknown
			New Balance	Clothing
			Trident	Food
11	31	Audio Engineer	Dangerous Music	Tech
			Yamaha	Unknown
			API	Unknown
			RME	Tech
			Fender	Other

In total, there were five main categories identified along with categories labeled “Unknown” and “Other”, which have been combined. This combined category of “Unknown/Other” accounted for the largest portion of brands listed in total, at 24%. Right behind this were brands related to technology, such as Google, Sony (which was mentioned

twice along with Samsung), and Apple (which was mentioned by four different respondents). “Food” and “Clothing” both followed closely behind “Tech”, accounting for 18% respectively. “Food” included food products such as Sabra and Trident, restaurants such as Starbucks, and markets such as Whole Foods (listed twice). “Clothing” was similarly defined as both clothing manufacturers such as Levi and Lacoste, and clothing stores such as Express and The Limited. Car brands were categorized as “Auto”, and soap, shaving needs, and other bathroom related items were categorized as “Toiletries”. Anything that could not be confidently identified via a web search was marked as “unknown”, and odds and ends such as Fender guitars were labeled “Other”.

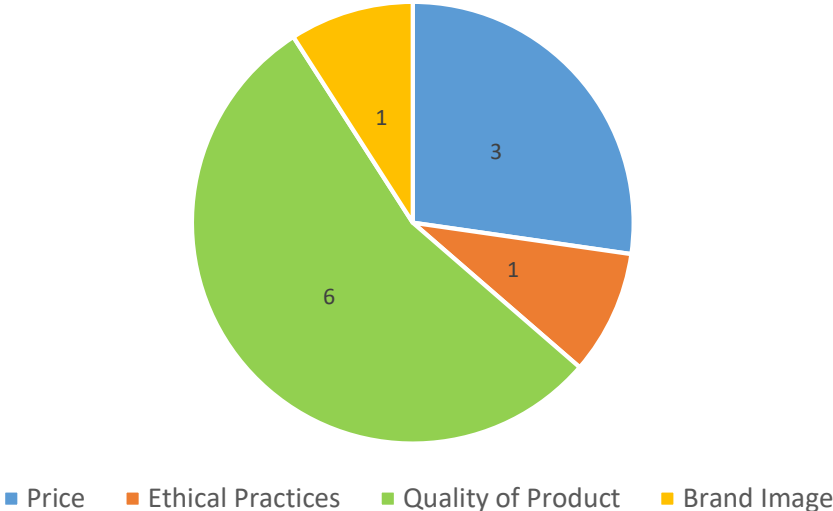
Figure 1: Category Breakdown



The next question on the survey asked the respondent to consider the five brands they had just listed and rank a related list of characteristics in order of importance. The list included

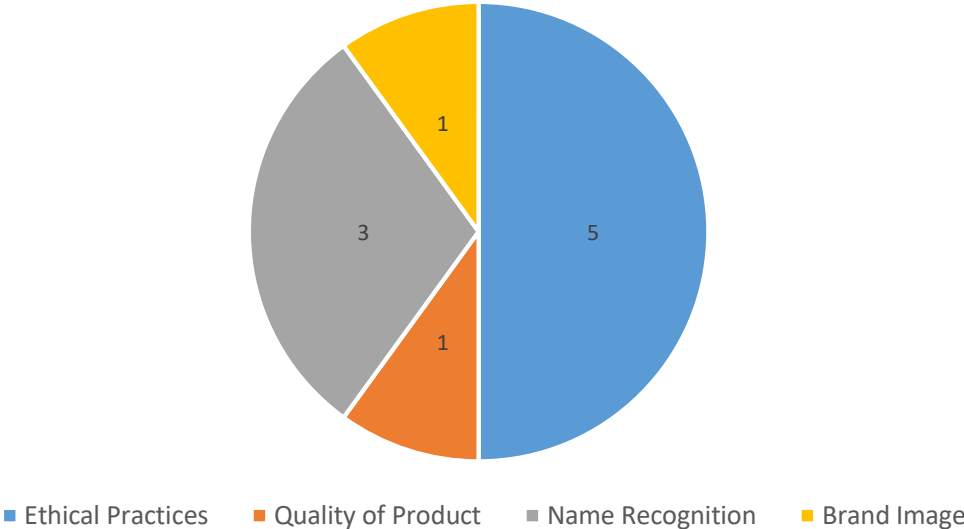
price, ethical practices, quality of product, name recognition, and brand image. The most important characteristic or trait a brand can have, according to respondents, is quality of product; while the least important characteristic is ethical practices.

Figure 2: Traits Ranked as Most Important by Number of Respondents



(Above "Name Recognition" = 0; Below "Price" = 0)

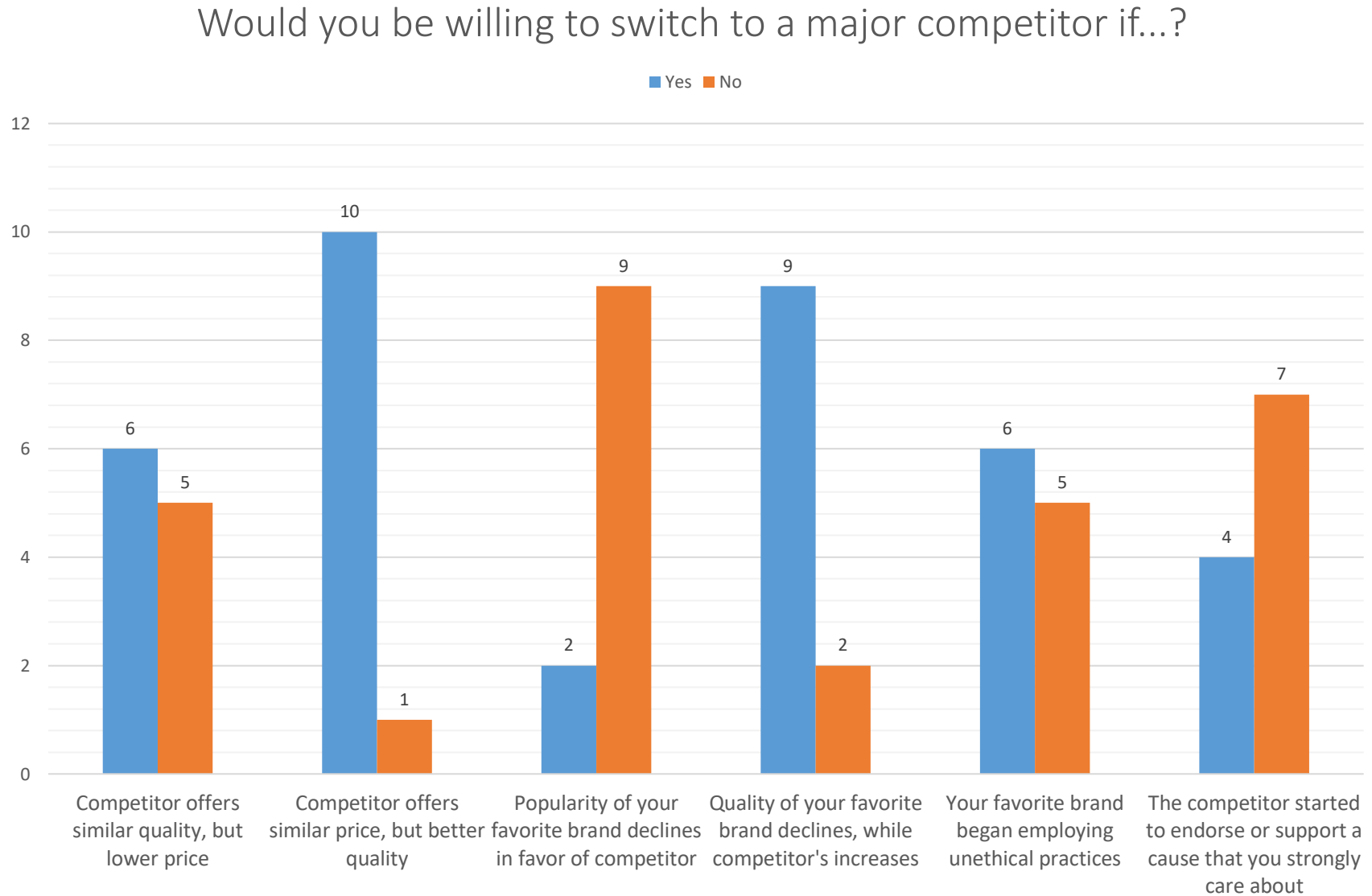
Figure 3: Traits Ranked as Least Important by Number of Respondents



The five categories respondents had to choose from were chosen based on information discovered during the literature review and insights obtained through the interviews. The idea of millennials as “ethical consumers” was discussed earlier in this study, and the topic did come up at times in some interviews. As noted in the qualitative results, the balance between quality of product and price were substantially important to the interview participants. Name recognition and brand image were also chosen based on insights from the qualitative interviews, however these topics were generally regarded as unimportant to interview participants. While these five categories are not exhaustive, they do examine topics and traits that were of particular interest to this study.

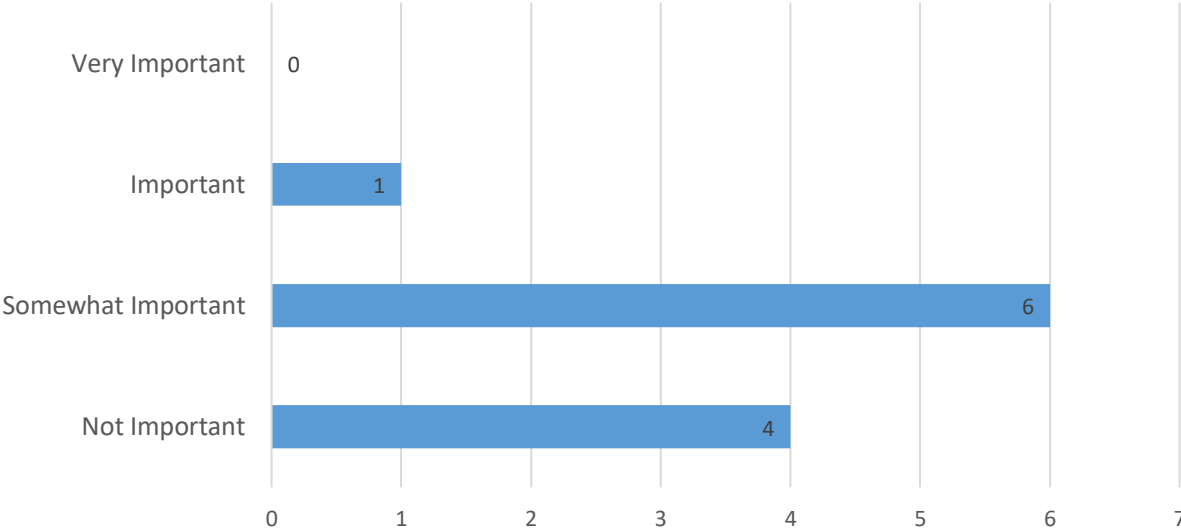
The next question intended to gauge the level of loyalty the respondents felt to their favorite brands. Respondents were asked to choose a brand from their list and consider whether or not they would be willing to switch to a competitor given certain scenarios. The results of this question (figure 4) demonstrate two notable facts. First, the highest rate of willingness to switch brands came from the two scenarios where quality was the major factor (i.e. “Competitor offers similar price, but better quality” and “Quality of your favorite brand declines, while competitor’s increases”). Second, the overall willingness to switch to a competitor suggests that the degree of loyalty among respondents is not very strong. None of the scenarios listed in this question produced a unanimous “No” response among the respondents, and for four out of the six scenarios respondents indicated that they were more likely to switch to a competitor than not.

Figure 4: Willingness to Switch to Competitor



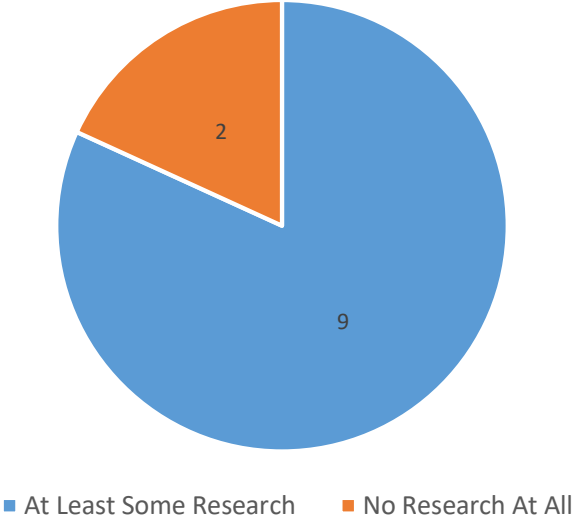
The next question in the survey asked respondents to rank how important it was to them that a brand be recognizable and well known. Respondents were given the options of “very important”, “important”, “somewhat important”, or “not important”. None of the respondents felt that brand recognition was “very important”, and only one even considered it to “important”. The majority of the respondents - six - indicated that recognition was “somewhat important”, while four considered it “not important”. These findings are not surprising based on the responses to one of the scenarios proposed in the previous question, “Would you be willing to switch to a major competitor if popularity of your favorite brand declines in favor of the competitor?”, to which nine of the respondents said “No”. These responses suggest that brand image may be a factor in loyalty, but overall popularity and recognition are not strong influencers of loyalty. Furthermore, lack of popularity or name recognition does not seem to negatively impact continued loyalty.

Figure 5: Importance of Brand Recognition



Researching brands was one of the indicators of active loyalty among the participants of the qualitative interviews. In effort to gain some insight on the presence of active loyalty among survey respondents the survey asked, “How much do you research a brand before buying its products?” Nine of the respondents indicated that they researched brands to some extent. Of those that specified doing research, three marked that they “research brands very little”, four marked simply that they “research brands”, and two marked that they research brands “in great depth”.

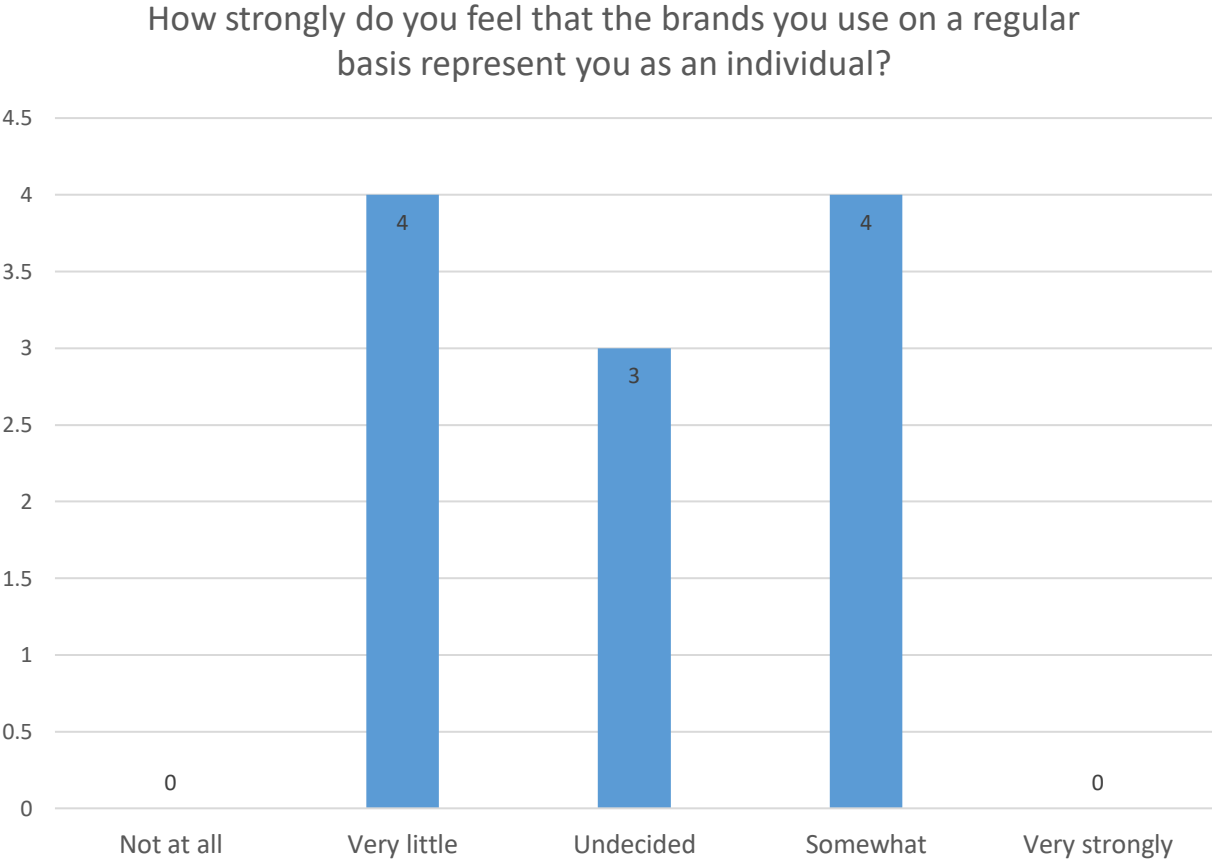
Figure 6: Research on Brands



Identification with brands was another topic investigated in this research, and while the qualitative interviews hinted at the presence of some degree of identification, the survey results highlighted the subtlety of brand identification. The survey asked directly, “How strongly do you feel that the brands you use on a regular basis represent you as an individual?” with the possible responses as “Not at all”, “Very little”, “Undecided”, “Somewhat”, and “Very

strongly”. No one responded with “Not at all” or “Very strongly”, but four responded with “Somewhat” and “Very little” respectively. The remaining three indicated that they were “Undecided”. These responses seem to fit along with the interview data in that the respondents do identify with brands, but not very strongly.

Figure 7: Identification with Brands

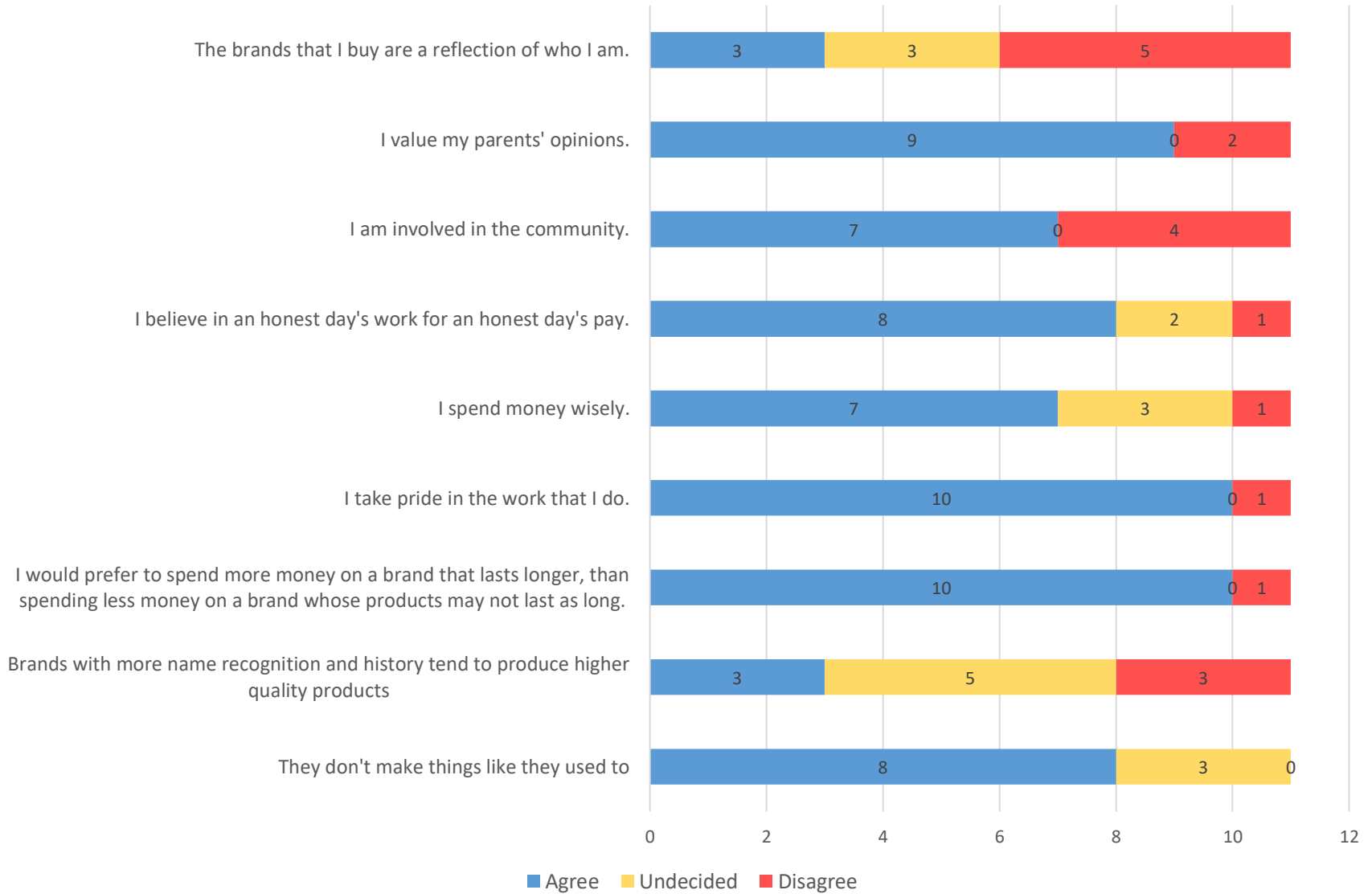


The final question on the survey was designed to gauge some of the themes that were identified early during the qualitative analysis. Respondents were provided a list of statements and asked to indicate which one’s they agreed with, which ones they disagreed with, and were also given the option to mark “Undecided”. The theme of value was gauged through statements such as “I believe in an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay”, “I spend money

wisely”, “I would prefer to spend more money on a brand that lasts longer, than spending less money on a brand whose products may not last as long”, and “They don’t make things like they used to”. The themes of social and individual identity were gauged through statements such as “The brands that I buy are a reflection of who I am”, “I am involved in the community”, and “I take pride in the work that I do”. Finally, the theme of family was gauged with the statement “I value my parents’ opinions”, while the concept of brand image importance was explored with the statement “Brands with name recognition and history tend to produce higher quality products”.

The responses provided to these statements were varied but coincided with many of the themes and concepts presented throughout this study. For example, all of the statements related to the importance of value elicited seven to nine respondents in agreement, with only one disagreeing with three of the four statements. Nine of the respondents agreed with the statement “I value my parents’ opinions”, which corresponds with a number of the participants’ opinions from their interviews. Furthermore, the statements regarding brand image and name recognition, and how brands are a reflection of the respondent’s identity only drew three respondents in agreement, with the rest either disagreeing or undecided.

Figure 8: How strongly do you agree with the following statements?



CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

One of the general assumptions going in to this research was that millennials are not nearly as brand-loyal as previous generations (Gurau 2012, 103). This appeared to be fairly evident immediately in the initial observations. Very few of the men observed at Old Familiar Barber Shop wore or displayed any notable brands. Even some of the shoes, which tend to have heavier use of logos and other trademarks, tended to be somewhat unidentifiable. This suggested early on that for many of these men, signaling identity through clothing brands may not be a very prominent characteristic. Yet, as the interviews were completed it was found that despite the lack of brand display, there were definitely still feelings brand loyalty.

Loyalty

Attachment to brands without the need for signaling was best exemplified by two participants, Brian and Greg, who both discussed their loyalty to clothing brands that utilized minimal branding and logo use (Banana Republic and Justin boots, respectively). Reading through the interviews with these two, it is very apparent that although they weren't directly proclaiming any specific identity simply by wearing these brands, they were indeed choosing brands that were reflective of their internal views of their selves. For Brian, choosing Banana Republic reinforced how he viewed himself with regard to spending money wisely and demanding quality from the products he uses. This was a personal trait he had observed in his father and grandfathers, and he emphasized the importance of these traits throughout the discussion. These observations are supported by the literature.

In her article on brands, though Smith (2007) comments on items that are typically concealed from public view, her sentiments are still applicable when she writes, “This realm of consumption and use is intertwined with human cognition and psychology, because the construction of identity is a process initiated and maintained by the individual prior to and, to some extent, independent of interactions with others” (414). While there certainly may be proxies for brand signaling such as carrying shopping bags from Banana Republic or simply shopping in the store with friends (Smith 2007, 422), the findings of this study reveal that the identification with certain brands has more to do with the multifaceted relationship between brand image, cost, functionality, and self-identification that takes place in the lives of the participants. While Gurau (2012) suggests that the focus on qualities such as price and product features indicates that millennials are more “rationally-oriented” (105), the research participants here demonstrate that rationally-oriented behaviors may yet still be a part of a larger concept of identity.

Greg’s internalization of Justin boots was very similar to Brian’s connection with Banana Republic. He is the kind of person who values hard work and aims for high quality in the labor that he does. To him, Justin boots parallels his work ethic and reinforces his sense of self internally. Also similar to Brian was the role of family in Greg’s loyalty to Justin and his personal dedication to hard work. Although he did not go nearly as in depth as Brian did, Greg made a very strong statement about his grandfather’s approval of his boots, which was clearly an important factor to his opinion that he had chosen quality boots with working-class ethos. These points coincide with the themes of “family” and “value”, but from a slightly different angle than previously discussed. These findings indicate that there are external and practical

influences based on both of those themes, but that those concepts are also a part of how the participants see themselves.

Greg and Brian are perhaps the strongest and clearest examples of this, but all throughout the interviews similar parallels between the concepts of family and value, and self-identification can be found. For Adam, his family was an OSU football brand-group. Christopher saw himself as a family man who wanted the best for his wife and kids, even if that meant sacrificing something he might want. Ford's automobiles helped him strengthen his role as the family-man and keep his household happy, but that also meant that he had to step away from the world of fast cars and customization that he previously was a part of with his Volkswagen. Similar family-man sentiments were displayed by Frank and tied to his devotion to Whole Foods. Although this notion of the family-man seems to be mostly internalized by the participants in this study, Smiler (2006) argues that it is just one of a number of images within the larger concept of masculinity.

Family

Anthropologists have recognized that family has always been important, but this tends to be overlooked at times. As Read (2007) writes, "Kinship studies, though characterizing anthropology from its inception, have currently lost centrality in American cultural anthropological research" (329). Read points out in his article "Kinship Theory: A Paradigm Shift", that there is a shortsighted tendency by some to oversimplify kinship studies to biological relations (330). This point of view is contrary to what anthropologists understand about culture and symbolism, and ignores the fact that kinship can be established in a

multitude of ways, and that it “does not consist of objective ties of filiation or of blood connection between individuals; it exists only in the minds of men as an arbitrary, not an emergent, system of symbols” (Levi-Strauss 1963, 61). In many cases throughout the interviews, participants demonstrated that the brands they prefer had symbolic ties to their perceptions of family, as well as their own identities within their families (Read 2007, 334).

While Halliday and Astafyeva (2014) might view these groups as brand communities in a traditional sense, their examples tend to focus on groups of people organized around “the lifestyle, activities, and ethos of the brand” (125). The findings presented here indicate that the participants’ personal and social identities are the driving force behind their loyalty, and the brands are used to reinforce their perceptions of these identities, rather than the people and communities reinforcing the identity of the brand. With regards to family, it is important to remember that individual perceptions of family may not always be objectively accurate, but may represent idealized beliefs about family (Tarrant 2016, 978). When respondents described their upbringing and the importance of family influence, it should be noted that “[d]welling on the past does not necessarily involve remembering history ‘the way it really was’. Indeed, a nostalgic relationship to the past might be as much based on mythology as lived experience” (Loveday 2014, 732). Whether discussing family as identity, family as an influencer, or more general social brand communities, the present research reinforces the notion that “[c]onsumption therefore, is shaped at least in part through relationships with others” (Reimer and Leslie 2004, 188).

Three informants, Derek, Earl, and Isaac, all discussed their favorite brands in terms of being *the* brand that one goes to when pursuing a specific hobby or occupation. Whether they

were talking about Bower and Wilkins, Apple, or Vans footwear, it was made apparent by these interview participants that these brands represent a high symbolic value within their respective communities, and help affirm their personal identities of an “audiophile”, “graphic designer”, or “BMX rider/skateboarder”. This suggests that “consumers select and utilize brands associated with the particular social groups to which they belong or aspire to belong” (Hirschman 2010, 569). Furthermore, despite their lack of die-hard loyalty to any particular brands, two other participants, Henry and Joey, both expressed at least some brand preference that was based on their perceptions of self as a “new-age nerd” or an early-thirties “guy’s guy”. Without the need for any type of overt brand display or signaling, the participants in this study were still able to connect with their favorite brands on a very personal level.

These findings are in stark contrast with those of Doster (2013), and may suggest that while younger millennials who are still in their teens are more apt to utilize brands for signaling and self-presentation, older millennials such as those in this study may be less inclined to do so. Nevertheless, “modern material-culture studies show that *every* object embodies a symbolic aspect,” and that “symbolic value is created and negotiated by individuals in cultural contexts” (Smith 1999, 116). Yet, as Maguire and Stanway (2008) write, “Self-production is the mundane work of everyday life” (76). In other words, there is an array of social, individual, and cultural pressures that are constantly interacting with consumers like the participants in this study that could not possibly be fully identified. Although the findings presented here demonstrate a lack of obvious and outward signaling through consumption by older millennial males, the literature reminds us that through reflexive identity and symbolic assignment, “Consumer culture makes available a range of techniques of self-production” (Maguire and Stanway 2008, 76).

These findings also suggest that life-stage analysis may be a more accurate tool for segmenting millennials in market research, as “young adults constitute a significant group through which to examine the dynamics of self-production – their liminal position between adolescence and full adulthood, with new experiences and contacts upon leaving the family for higher education or employment, opens up possibility for renegotiation of self-identity” (Maguire and Stanway 2008, 64). While researching generational groups may help guarantee a unified socio-historical context (Pilcher 1994), there is little guarantee of a unified socio-cultural context. Anthropologically speaking, it is difficult to draw any generalized conclusions about an entire generational cohort. Instead, anthropologists might attempt to break millennials down in to segments that are defined by such liminal stages as leaving home, starting college, seeking employment, or starting a family. Furthermore, anthropologists may want to research more into these events as “coming-of-age” transitions (Stein and Stein 2011, 88-89), and explore how branded commodities act as symbolic markers within these transitions.

The ability to connect with brands without needing to prominently display one’s attachment appears to be in line with the survey responses to the question “How strongly do you feel that the brands you use on a regular basis represent you as an individual?” Although 36% answered “somewhat”, the majority of respondents were either undecided or felt that the brands they buy represent them “very little”. This suggests that there may be less importance for individuals to outwardly identify with brands, regardless of the fact that the participants in this study tended to gravitate toward brands that they described as similar to them in their “brand personality”. Referring back to Bucic et al. (2012), it may be that millennials are more likely to buy brands that they personally identify with, and that the balance of price and quality

as an indicator of value may just be a trait that they feel reflects their attitudes and beliefs more than ethics. Such consumption behaviors would be more in line with Smith's (2007) concept of reflexive identity, where consumers may be more interested in the internal affirmation of identity versus the need for social affirmation. As Smith writes, "Private identities are reaffirmed and modified by the individual on the basis of new internal and external inputs, and the process of identity maintenance is a dynamic one" (416).

Limitations

This research had a number of limitations. Due to the restrictions on time and limited resources for data collection and analysis, a small sample size was used for both the qualitative interviews and the quantitative surveys. The small sample was further limited by the regional specificity of central Ohio, and the ethnic background of the respondents as being all white/Caucasian. Finally, the recruitment of only millennial males for this study clearly limits the applicability of the study. However, given the category of products that Revolocity's client – Barbasol – produces, it was deemed an appropriate approach to obtaining preliminary insights in to the broader market of millennial consumers.

Summary of the Findings

The general findings of the research can be summarized as follows:

- Brand loyalty was found to exist among the participants of this research, primarily in the form of perceived attachment to and identification with certain brands.

- The views of loyalty that emerged in this study are not the same as purchase exclusivity.
- The dimensions of attachment presented in this research are subtle.
- Loyalty among the participants in this study may not be strongly signaled due to other identification pathways.
- Brands may be used by some to reaffirm self-identity.
- There is a complex relationship between individual and group identities, but the use of certain brands helps to reaffirm both, internally and externally.
- Value as a balance of cost and quality is an important factor for the participants in this study when it comes to creating and maintaining loyalty to certain brands.

Recommendations to the Client

With regards to the client's concern about brand loyalty among millennials, it should be noted that the initial assumption that millennials are not brand-loyal was shown to be incorrect. The millennial participants in this study all considered themselves to be loyal to certain brands; however, it may be that the way they perceive their loyalty to brands is different than other generations.

In terms of creating brand strategies that can produce strong emotional attachments to brands and drive feelings of loyalty, Revolocity and Barbasol should consider marketing around the themes and dimensions of attachment outlined in this report. Tying brand imagery and advertising to archetypes such as the "family-man" and the "informed value consumer" could promote better connections with consumers who identify with those paradigms. Furthermore,

reviewing how their consumers use their products for social signaling and construction of reflexive identity should be considered by Barbasol. Although this study did not focus specifically on Barbasol products, it did demonstrate that both social and personal identifiers have an interconnected role in creating feelings of attachment to brands, regardless of whether or not the branded products in question are intended to be used in public or private.

When thinking about the concepts of active and passive loyalty (as well as Labrecque's (2011) concepts of conformity and escapism), Revolocity and Barbasol should consider that millennial consumers may find brands through a fusion of active research and passively following their peers' opinions. With an abundance of available options for researching product and service reviews, it is important for brands to have a strong and positive presence in this area. However, with many of these reviews being written and shared by other consumers (rather than professional consumer reporters or product testers), it is also important for brands to create strong and positive communities of consumers who share their experiences. As Malefyt (2000) writes, "people now define themselves less by the quantity and quality of their things and more by the quantity and quality of their experiences" (9). As experiences become increasingly more important, encouraging the sharing of those experiences will become more important as well.

Recommendations for Future Research

The overall goal of this research was two-fold. First, it was an attempt to target a very specific demographic related to Revolocity's client, Barbasol shaving cream. Second, it was an effort to carry out a preliminary study of millennial consumers, which may eventually lead to

future research. Therefore, referring to the limitations just highlighted in the previous section, the first recommendation for future research would be to conduct a similar study of millennials but with a more expanded scope and further segmenting. This would include both males and females – as well as other gender identities, millennials of varying races and ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and varying geographical distribution. Using a similar exploratory approach on a larger and more diverse sample would undoubtedly uncover a number of other themes, and would add to a more thorough picture of what loyalty means to this generational cohort (Sunderland and Denny 2007, 243-245).

It would also be advisable to consider similar exploratory research on other generations, such as baby boomers and generation X. Once again, more themes would surely be discovered, and perhaps those themes could then be cross-analyzed with the millennial themes for comparison and contrasting. The information to be gained from such research could be useful to marketers who are interested in advertising the same product to a number of generations. Whether the goal is to find one marketing campaign that can appeal to multiple generations, or to develop generation-specific marketing, cross-generational research on brand loyalty would be a valuable asset to all marketers.

Looking at the themes already identified in this research, it would be interesting to see some marketing campaigns developed around the archetypes of the “family-man” and the “informed value consumer”, and to test these campaigns. Test markets would be one way to do this, although that would require an investment of time and money to develop such a campaign and attempt to implement it. Another method may be to develop a prototype marketing campaign and to test that with focus groups comprised of members of the original

intended market of Caucasian millennial males. Further marketing tests could also be done by evaluating the same campaigns with other social, geographical, and racial groups of millennials.

Finally, as an anthropologist, I would be remiss if I did not argue for the potential this type of research has to better understand people and consumer culture in general. Further research in to the themes uncovered in this study and possible archetypes mentioned earlier in this section could be beneficial to the fields of anthropology and marketing alike. The human-centric focus this type of research touches on is beneficial to a broad spectrum of interests among academic and professionals alike, and it would be advised to conduct additional research in the same vein.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Although the strength of loyalty exhibited by the millennial consumers in this study toward certain brands may or may not be the same as other generational cohorts, it was clear throughout this research that there still exists some sort of meaningful connection between brands and their millennial customers. On one hand, the initial assumption of a lesser degree of loyalty among millennial consumers (Gurau 2012; Young and Hinesly 2012) was given credence, as the idea of brand exclusivity did not appear to be a component of loyalty among the participants in this study. On the other hand, the findings suggest that the problem of brand loyalty – or “disloyalty” – among millennials may not be a real problem in the first place. What this study indicates is that feelings of loyalty among the participants is not necessarily lacking *per se*, but that the way it is manifested is different than what has been documented in previous research.

Loyalty should no longer imply exclusivity. As Gurau (2012) writes, “In the context of the consumerist society exclusive loyalty should not be considered as an absolute concept, but rather as an option among various patterns of loyalty behavior” (105). The participants in this study made it very obvious that there were certainly functions and characteristics of brands that they felt were important, and that if their favorite brands strayed far enough from those traits, they would indeed seek out other options. In many cases, participants admitted that they had some difficulty even identifying brands that they felt loyal to at first. This had little to do with an actual lack attachment to their favorite brands however, and more to do with the fact that they just didn’t *feel* particularly loyal to any brands. This lack of feeling may be a hint

at even broader issues of millennials' changing and complex attitudes toward capitalism and consumerism in general (Brown 2014).

Notwithstanding such issues, eventually they were all able to identify at least some brands they could comfortably identify as being loyal to. Additionally, once the conversations progressed it was evident that they were far more committed to brands than they had previously thought. As Gurau (2012) thoroughly illustrates in his article there are a number of ways to organize and define brand loyalty and loyalists themselves (104-105), thus it would be limiting to attempt to generalize all loyalty under one definition. It may be that brand planners and marketers will want to rethink the idea of brand *exclusivity*, but they should not completely abandon the idea of brand loyalty when considering millennials. Instead they should focus on how these consumers identify with their brands, and seek to create and establish loyalty through attachment.

Broadly speaking, this research reaffirms some very important notions with regard to symbolic anthropology and material culture studies. First, as Miller (2007) and Malefyt (2000) have argued, there is an important role for anthropologists in the study of contemporary material culture and advertising. Humans are regularly negotiating and renegotiating meaning in the everyday items that they use, and the symbolic assignment of such meaning is a tool employed by consumers not just for the purpose of product selection, but as a means of sharing experience and communicating identity with others (Appadurai 1986).

Through the lens of anthropological theory, the importance of folklore and mythical brand stories should be further evaluated. As Arnould et al. (2017) argue, "[M]agical thought and action, supposed by modernist theory to be in decline, is foundational in marketing

practice” (28). Arnould et al. continue by stating that “[m]arketing magic enacts relations between man and the transcendent, bringing consumer persona ‘to life’ and manifesting luxurious ideals of the beautiful” (32). Furthermore, it would be wise to look deeper into the interactions between people and the branded items themselves, as cultural meaning is transferred to and from those items (McCracken 1986).

Second, the utilization of the findings presented here by anthropologists and marketers alike should not be carried out under the assumption that they are universal in application. As Geertz (1973) wrote, “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (5). This statement echoes Mauss’ sentiment concerning material exchange within society as a whole “entity” worthy of study (1925, 102). As Denny et al. (2005) crucially state, cultural “truths” are really “[n]either false nor true in an epistemological sense, they simply are” (9).

Presented throughout this project are many analogous, yet uniquely diverse explanations of meaning regarding brand preferences and beliefs about loyalty. Still, there was a common theme of deep symbolic meaning given to brands and the products they produce. This complex relationship between brands, material culture, and symbolism “call[s] for an anthropology based not on a single project or author, but a larger communal movement of academics that emulates the global nature of the object of enquiry” (Miller 2007, 336). This research was initiated under the assumption that brands serve a strong functional purpose of unifying groups and identifying individuals within those groups. Although this assumption

cannot be completely ruled out, for the participants in this study brands serve far more as symbols of personal and reflexive identity. The identification, selection, and utilization of certain branded products all assist in an elaborate, and deliberate, construction of the self. While at times this construction is done in the private recesses of their own minds, at other times it is a part of social processes with family, co-workers, or friends. There appears to be more common ground with Smith's (2007) reflexive identity, and Doster's (2013) description of teens who proclaim identity through explicit brand signaling in online social networks, than one might have previously anticipated.

Indeed, brands offer consumers a dual mechanism for both identity creation (both internally and externally), and identity pronouncement through signaling. It should be mentioned that "social positioning is, however, only one element in the construction of identity", and that there is more to be uncovered through "the study of goods as categories, the impact of a single object form in a variety of cultural settings or the analysis of a given domain within the mass market" (Miller 1987, 9). Brand loyalty, I would suggest, may be a manifestation of both group loyalty and loyalty to oneself through the appropriation and use of material culture.

In closing, it should be emphasized once again the need for further research in this area. The overall results of this study indicate that many of the assumptions made by market researchers (including those in the literature review) are neither completely true nor completely false, but are only a small part of the whole picture. It is only reasonable to conclude that the findings here – with such a limited scope – are also only part of a bigger picture. The themes and archetypes discovered throughout the interviews and analysis could

be mere fragments of larger themes that went undiscovered due to their limitations.

Conversely, those themes may also be able to be fragmented themselves, and sub-themes may exist throughout other samples or populations. In conclusion, the initial goal of this research was successfully accomplished. Through the use of applied anthropological methods, a starting point has been obtained for Revolocity to begin to create better marketing strategies for one of their growing target markets.

CHAPTER 8

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Throughout my time in graduate school at the University of North Texas I was able to collaborate on several projects that introduced me to the concept of what applied anthropology really is. I learned a lot in those courses and they helped me immensely when it came time to put together this project for my client. I feel that this was one of the most challenging parts of the process. When I first starting thinking about what I wanted to research for my thesis, I had a number of topics that I really wanted to explore. I quickly realized, however, that what I want to research may not be exactly what my client wants – or needs – me to research. Having learned this lesson early in my coursework helped me to work productively with my client and come up with a proposal that was both intellectually intriguing for me, and applicably valuable for them. It was additionally helpful that my point of contact at Revolocity, David Grzelak, also had a background in anthropology. Having done similar ethnographic studies himself, it was easy to come to agreements about research methods and ideas throughout the early stages of project development.

During the process of conducting this research I learned how important it is to have engaging and opinionated participants. I could not have collected such diverse and enlightening data without their willingness to invite me in to their homes and spend a few hours with me talking about their favorite brands. Not only did I learn a lot from them, but I believe that our conversations also made many of them realize how invested they actually are in some of the products and brands that they buy. It was a fairly regular occurrence that one of my participants would struggle to think of any brands that they felt loyal to. However, by the

end of our interviews many of them were surprised at how easily they could talk about their favorite brands at length. Clearly, consumption behaviors were not the most prominent thoughts on the minds of these participants, and yet, they all found some brand that they were loyal to and have strong connections with.

This thesis is not merely the result of a few semesters of research, nor would it be proper to consider it the product of three years of graduate school. Really, this thesis is the product of nearly nine years of personal growth and development that I have acquired throughout both my undergraduate and graduate careers. After graduating from high school in the bottom five percent of my class, going to college and even earning a degree was far from what I thought I could achieve. Nevertheless, when I found myself in my first anthropology class at Columbus State Community College, I knew that practicing anthropology in some way was what I wanted to pursue.

Working on this project enabled me to pursue that aspiration in a very personal way. Having a general interest in consumption and consumer behavior, being able to design and conduct anthropological research on these topics allowed me to incorporate my interests outside of traditional anthropology. Furthermore, with the focus of this project on millennial males, I feel that I was able to uncover some new insights on a generational cohort that is at the forefront of emerging research in several fields. I hope that the research presented here may be of use to anthropologists, marketers, and other academics and practitioners in the social sciences alike.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW FIELD GUIDE

Interview Overview

Interview should last one to two hours and focus on three main topics revolving around brands: (1) how the respondent views their favorite brands with regards to its history, identity, and practices, (2) motivations for acquiring their favorite brands and their thought process on future purchases from those brands and, (3) the respondent's beliefs about their own identity and the communities they are a part of. Some questions will be sent to the respondent ahead of time in the hopes of getting more thoughtful answers. The interview will be audio recorded, and handwritten notes will be recorded regarding important physical observations. Prior to the interview, the respondent will be asked to give a brief tour of their home and discuss some of the important branded objects they own. This tour will be audio recorded as well.

Part 1: Personal Introductions

Informed consent form will be read and signed by both the interviewer and participant before starting with the tour and interview.

- Explain the purpose of the study:
 - *Today we are going to be talking about your favorite brands and how you incorporate them in to your life. What I am interested in learning about is what really drives you to a particular brand on a level other than the simple functionality of their products. Some of the questions will challenge you to think about brands in the same way you might think about another person. Other questions might require you to make assumptions about certain brands. The purpose of these questions is to get you to think outside of the box, which will hopefully lead to insights that might not be so obvious. I want to stress that there are no 'wrong' answers, and any thoughts you might have on this subject will be beneficial. Do you have any questions at this point?*
 - *For the purpose of maintaining a reliable account of today's conversation I would like to audio record it. All audio is intended for this research only, and will be kept confidential during and after the research process. Do you have any further questions before we start?*

Part 2: Tour of Participant's Home

- Prior to meeting the participant at their home, they will be asked to label a number of items around the house with just a couple of words describing how they perceive the brand/maker of that item. How these should be labeled will be left open ended as to not lead any of the participants to using any particular words or phrases. The goal of this

exercise is to allow the participants to set the tone for how they view branded items with regards to importance, identity, functionality, or anything else that may arise:

- *Before I arrived here today I requested that you label a number of items around your house, and asked you to be ready to walk me through these items and explain how and why you labeled them in such a way. Before starting in to the interview, I would like you to walk me through those items.*
- At this point audio recording should have begun. Walk with the participant throughout their home and allow them to read their labels, and then explain how they came to that specific label.
- General probing is okay, but this time should really be spent allowing the participant to talk.

Part 3: The Brands

When the tour is complete, the interviewer should ask the participant where they would like to sit down for the discussion. It is important that the participant choose somewhere that is comfortable and quiet for the purpose of audio recording.

- The formal interview should begin with discussing the participant's favorite brand and how they came to decide that that particular brand is their favorite:
 - *Along with the labeling exercise I asked you to think about and decide on what your favorite brand was prior to this interview. What brand did you end up deciding on?*
 - *Knowing that there is a large abundance of brands, and a countless number of ways to categorize them and the products they represent, walk me through how you came to defining this one specific brand as your favorite?*
- What does the participant know/believe about the brand:
 - *Tell me the history of the brand, as you understand it? Who founded it? Where was it created? How did it come to be a brand?*
 - *What is the current status of the brand? In other words, if you think of the brand on a timeline from infancy to established – or even old age – where would you put that brand on this timeline?*
- Motivations for brand use:
 - *Tell me a little about how you first discovered this brand. What characteristics lead you to first use any products made by this brand? How much thought did you*

put in to your first few purchases? Did you research the company or the products? Read reviews? Listen to friends recommendations?

- Perceptions of the brand identity:
 - *I want to take the discussion in to a bit of an abstract direction. I want you to try to think of the brand as a person with human-like characteristics such as personality, motivations, social status, etc. As you create this “brand person” in your mind, I want you to describe them, both physically (such as how they dress, groom, etc.) and their personality (attitudes, beliefs, background, etc.)*
 - *Now let’s shift back to the brand as a producer and signifier of products in the market. If you were going to hire someone to be a spokesperson for that brand – sort of like a ‘celebrity endorsement’ – who would you hire? Would you think that someone like yourself could speak for the brand? Why or why not? If not, then what kind of person would be best suited to endorse the brand?*

- What’s important?:
 - *Now I want to expand on some overarching personality traits that I am interested in personally. Thinking about your favorite brand, which one of the following traits would you say best fits with its personality: Ethical, involved in the community, or individualistic? Please describe how it fits in to this category?*
 - *How much does that trait influence your decision to support that brand? If a competitor with a lower set of standards for said trait developed a slightly better product than your favorite brand, would you be more inclined to try the better product despite the brands other shortcomings? Why or why not?*

Part 4: Identity

- Comparing important brand traits to the self:
 - *Although we are going to continuing our discussion with your favorite brand in mind, I would like to talk about you for a bit. I now have three pairs of personality traits that I would like to list off, and I want you to tell me which one you think best describes you: Expressive and independent, service-oriented and cooperative, or honest and dependable? What is it about you that makes you say this (be specific)?*
 - *Why, specifically, would you not choose either of the other two to describe yourself? Do you view these as negative in any way, or just not a best fit?*

- Open ended discussion of the self:
 - *How else would you describe yourself? What roles do you play at home? At work? Among your friends?*

- *What kind of groups – either formal or informal – are you a member of? These can be anything from clubs or unions, to racial or gender groups. The important point is to share what **you** feel is important.*
- *Do you participate in any groups related to the brand we've discussed? Any clubs or online forums? If so, how would you describe the culture of that group? What about that culture appeals to you? What do you find not so appealing?*
- Private identity vs. social identity
 - *We discussed just a minute ago about how you would describe yourself. Thinking about some of these groups you are a part of, how would you compare and contrast how you view yourself with how others might view you? How do you think others view you? What role do you think the brands you buy and the groups you participate with play in shaping how others view you?*

Part 5: Wrap-Up and Conclusion

- Before wrapping up, ask the participant if they would like to add anything regarding either of the major topics discussed.
- Recap the purpose of the research and all confidentiality concerns, and thank the participant for their time.
- Recording of audio should remain until leaving the house.

APPENDIX B
QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

1. Age? _____
2. Sex? M or F (Circle one)
3. Race/Ethnicity? _____
4. Annual Income? _____
5. Occupation? _____
6. List 5 brands that you buy on a regular basis. (Fill in blanks)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

7. Generally speaking, when it comes to the brands listed above, rank the importance of the following characteristics for them to have (1 being most important, and 5 being least important):

- a. Price _____
- b. Ethical Practices _____
- c. Quality of Product _____
- d. Name Recognition _____
- e. Brand Image _____

8. When specifically thinking about the first brand you listed above, would you be willing to switch to a major competitor if:

- a. The competitor offers a product of similar quality, but with a lower price – **Y N**
- b. The competitor offers a product at a similar price, but of better quality – **Y N**

- c. The popularity of the brand you listed declines in favor of the competitor – **Y N**
- d. The quality of the brand you listed declines, while the quality of the competitor’s products increases – **Y N**
- e. The brand listed began to employ unethical practices in its manufacturing – **Y N**
- f. The competitor started to endorse or support a cause that you strongly care about – **Y N**

9. How important is it to you for a brand to be recognizable and well known? (Circle one)

Not important Somewhat Important Important Very Important

10. How much do you research a brand before buying its products? (Circle one)

I do not research brands I research brands very little
I research brands I research brands in great depth

11. How strongly do you feel that the brands you use on a regular basis represent you as an individual? (Circle one)

Not at all Very little Undecided Somewhat Very Strongly

12. How strongly do you agree with the following statements?:

a. They don't make things like they used to.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

b. Brands with more name recognition and history tend to produce higher quality products.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

c. I would prefer to spend more money on a brand that lasts longer, than spending less money on a brand whose products may not last as long.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

d. I take pride in the work that I do.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

e. I spend money wisely.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

f. I believe in an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

g. I am involved in the community.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

h. I value my parents' opinions.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

i. The brands that I buy are a reflection of who I am.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Somewhat agree

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