THE AGE
OF
YOU

Research Report
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Executive Summary

A noticeable shift in consumer-brand behaviour in the fashion and beauty industry became apparent in recent years. Newcomer brands emerged, proving to have a compelling attraction to the millennial generation that resulted in strong, personal bonds between consumer and brand not seen before.

This research aims to explore this phenomenon by analysing the driving forces that influence brand building today and by explaining the click between consumer and brand. By means of the main question 'what are the success factors of millennial brands in the information age? this topic is explored.

The information age is the latest of the three big revolutions in human civilization and its influences are felt through every industry and each person – impacting the role of fashion brands in people's lives. The development of Internet has opened up communication, going from one-to-many to many-to-many; making it easier for people to connect with likeminded.

Millennials are the first generation to have grown up in a digitalized world, so their behaviour towards and usage of technology is fundamentally different than other generations. This generation's beliefs and values are based on authenticity, real relations and being true to themselves.

Brands are an exchange between consumers and a company; but now that the recipient has shifted to a new generation with different attitudes, this change left a void in which millennial brands appeared. They are the answer to a developing change in society.

The main findings of this research suggest that millennial brand success factors are:
1. Placing the consumer at the centre of the brand; mirroring the identity of the consumer the brand wants to attract.
2. Endowing the brand with cultural relevance, by associating the brand with a shift in society.
3. Understanding how to use social media to make a product spread.
4. Being a human brand; authentic and with a recognizable face.

The volatile character of brands shows one predictable development; with every alternation of a generation, the way people want to be approached by brands changes. Luck and a sharp sense of what drives people appear to be valuable in the race of remaining a meaningful brand.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION
"Louis Vuitton Names Virgil Abloh as Its New Menswear Designer" was one of the biggest news in fashion for a long time. The oldest and most iconic French luxury house was taking on streetwear designer and Kanye West protege Virgil Abloh to give their collections more street credit. Street and luxury are two words one would not have seen used together five years ago, but it is clear that the popularity of street- and subcultures has somehow filled in fashion's need for something new. Although Virgil Abloh might not be the most skilled or experienced designer, Louis Vuitton still decided to take him on. This was a shock to many, but no one could deny that design skills might not be the most important aspect to be a creative director anymore. Virgil Abloh showed through his own label that he knows how to trigger a conversation. And what is more important in the time of social media than to stir up a meaningful conversation? Virgil Abloh's rise in fashion is exemplary of a larger phenomenon. Over a little more than five years ago new brands have sprung up and became big, using an approach that had not been shown before. Suddenly, it was not the established brands that drew attention, but it were these new brands that especially spoke to the younger generation of millennials. And what is so surprising about this change was that suddenly people started grouping around these brands and started advocating them - a certain kind of brand loyalty we hadn't seen in fashion for a long time. Internet and social media have been crucial in this development because they have given brands and consumers tools that were unavailable before; it has enabled a two-way conversation, globally. What is remarkable, however, is that there are currently many brands who use the same brand building techniques as ten years ago, while their customer has evolved and leaves the brands following the customers instead of being a step ahead. It is clear that although many researchers look at brand building, I believe there still lacks a constructive review of the contemporary approach to brand building. This research aims to add a new view to the body of research on the topic of brand building techniques and tries to explore what the success factors behind these brands are. This research looks at a new breed of brands, which I define as "Millennial brands". It looks at the context in which these brands have been able to rise, why the customer of this age feels involved with these brands and how these brands have developed. This research starts with a broad view of the driving forces of our time and their influence on culture, then it closes in on the consumer, ending with a close look at these Millennial brands.
1.2 Aim
This research aims to examine the strategy behind brands that are successful at navigating through the digital age to build their brand. The conclusions drawn from this study will be used to set up a manual for brands that have difficulties creating a compelling strategy to connect with the millennial generation. The handbook will consist of a set of directions a brand can engage in to enter the playfield of millennials with credibility.

1.3 Problem definition
Therefore I will research and analyse this new phenomenon in brand building by means of the following main and sub questions.

What are the success factors of millennial brands in the information age?
Sub Q1: What is the information age and what are millennial brands?
Sub Q2: How have brand building strategies developed over time?
Sub Q3: Who is the millennial consumer of today?
Sub Q4: What brand/marketing strategies are millennial brands undertaking?

1.4 Methodology
Sub Q1: to answer this question I collected my data through a literature review, – fashion journals and business websites such as Business of Fashion – and observations. I observed a handful of companies that have had a great impact on the fashion/beauty industry in the last few years and study their strategies and consumers’ reaction to them to get a sense of what makes millennial brands different to ‘normal’ brands.

Sub Q2: to research the development of how brands are built, I consulted academic literature on the topics of, amongst others; “brand management models”, “brand strategy” and “history of branding”. Furthermore I read upon recent opinions of people in the field, such as strategists and marketers to get an overview of what is happening in branding today.

Sub Q3: in order to explore the mind of the millennial consumer of today, relevant trade literature and millennial research have been consulted. Besides that I conducted eight in-depth interviews with millennials in their twenties and questioned them on their interaction with brands, the aim was to explore what millennials value in brands nowadays. Through the results of the interview and secondary sources a discussion was composed.

Sub Q4: by means of conducting a single case study I will try to understand by analyzing the link between what strategies exemplar millennial brand Glossier is undertaking and the effect that has on customers. I made use of observations, my interviews and business journals that wrote about Glossier. Prior to that I have set up an overview of recent trends in brand-building by gathering theories of established scholars.
INTRODUCTION
2.0 THE INFORMATION AGE AND MILLENNIAL BRANDS
2.1 Characteristics of the Information Age

The aim of this research is to understand the new approach of millennial brands in regards to brand building in the digital age. To do so, the research should start broad - looking at the greater phenomenon in which brand building takes place: the information age.

Human civilization has known three big revolutions: the agricultural revolution, industrial revolution and digital revolution. The digital revolution marked the birth of the information age (Rouse, 2014). According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), the information age is defined as "the modern age regarded as a time in which information has become a commodity that is quickly and widely disseminated and easily available especially through the use of computer technology". In other words, people from all over the world are connected and informed through the internet on devices such as computers and mobile phones. The information age took shape in the 1970s, around the same time that the first versions of the internet and personal computer were developed. It has moved through different stages of change and has opened the way for mega trends such as 'digitization', which is "the conversion of text, pictures, or sound into a digital form that can be processed by a computer" (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

The digital age profoundly affects the dynamics of the creative industries in which fashion and beauty companies operate and communicate, both from a consumer and business perspective (PwC, 2015). New technologies have noticeably changed the way conversations are being exchanged, but have also created a much more transparent environment in which speed and instant gratification are the new currency. For this research, the social cultural aspect is of great importance to understand the implications of the shift in access to and exchange in information for (fashion) businesses and consumers.

2.2 Socialcultural Effects of the Information Age

We live in a 'network society', a term coined by sociologist Castells (2014, p. 2) and defined as "a society constructed around personal and organizational networks powered by digital networks and communicated by the internet". Central to the "network society" is the "process of individuation", a movement that is characterized by the focus on individual growth and as a consequence a drop in community as we know it. Castells (2014) notes that this doesn't mean community has become unimportant to the individual, but the role of relationships is shifting towards a community based on the quest for like-minded people on the basis of interests, values and projects, both online and offline. Not long after the world wide web was developed, the first sort of social network sites started popping up - showing that people were immediately drawn to engaging on topics of their interest with like-minded persons. The development of social media gave brands and consumers "a two-way many-to-many communication system" (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2014), changing the power relation between sender and receiver.
Another aspect to this shift, is the revised hierarchy of communication. Due to the internet and social media, people are always in a state of "radical connectivity" that has led to the disruption of big traditional businesses and the empowerment of startups and individual voices (Melle, 2013). Online, all people have the same opportunity to voice their opinion and be heard and thus the information age has "flattened the hierarchies of communication everywhere and completely reshaped the old power relationship between the rulers and masses" (Forbes, 2013, p. 1). Now people have the power to influence what businesses should do with just 140 characters. That means that brands today need to carefully balance a) their identity, b) the identity of the consumer while c) staying relevant and authentic.

Before the digital revolution, gatekeepers were a crucial part in the system of communication in the creative industries. Gatekeepers had the ability to regulate "the travelling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group" (Lewin, 1947, p. 9) and thus make a preselection of the best in music, publishing and fashion to be presented to consumers. However, with the increase of online media the established role of the gatekeeper might not be relevant anymore, as the individual can circumvent the intermediary selection process (Lee, 2012). Through social platforms like Spotify and Instagram, the selection process has been democratized and the consumer is now in charge of directly discovering new artists or brands fitting to their own interests.

2.3 Millennial Brands

Within the above touched upon context, millennial brands have made their entrance around 5 years ago. This phenomenon, that I have taken to call 'millennial brands' since there is no valid definition yet, has taken the fashion and beauty industry by storm and shows a clear rupture with how brands have previously presented themselves and behaved in relation to consumers. To come to a clear understanding of what Millennial brands exactly are, the term will be analyzed below.

These brands are catering to Millennials, people born between 1981 and 1996. They came to age at the time of an economic recession and the proliferation of internet usage (Dimock, 2018) and have been brought up with the notion of "individual empowerment" (Van Den Bergh & Behrer, 2016). These factors have played a significant role in shaping this generation. According to Barton, Koslow and Beauchamp (2014), the generational shift of Millennials is changing consumer marketing as we have practised it due to a shift in values in comparison with Gen-X and Baby Boomers. Millennials treasure personal connections, authenticity, change but also status and being connected. The inward focus of Millennials has forced a power shift from the brand to consumer.

What differentiates 'Millennial brands' from 'regular brands' is mostly their approach in brand building. These brands brought a breath of fresh air within the playing field of fashion incumbents that were slow to react to innovations and seemed too proud to listen to the consumer. Since research has shown that millennials want to identify more personally and emotionally with brands than older generations, but are also more difficult to convince that a brand is relevant to them (Barton et al., 2014) I believe that many did not feel understood by traditional brands. Millennial brands on the contrary, have just like millennials themselves come to exist in the time of constant connectedness. They are not trying to understand and adapt to the millennial, they are like the millennial; they speak the same language. That is expressed among others through feedback loops, incorporating the consumer in the brand story and showing a personality. Henry Davis said at the IAB Annual Leadership Meeting 2018 that millennials want brands to act as their peer and
be "inclusive, real and nice". These brands don't just push refined messages from the top, but try to establish a real "two-way relationship" with their audience (Barton et al., 2014). Millenial brands acknowledge the impact of digital networks and use that to create meaningful connections with their customer, because these brands understand that to be a relevant brand in the 21st-century it means to set the identity of the customer they want to connect with central (Andjelic, 2017).

As a result, these are uncertain times for marketers and brand managers. They have to let go of what used to work and adopt new ways of engaging with their consumers. The 'millenial brands' are those brands that have seemingly understood this paradigm shift in branding - looking at their vast amount of followers and year on year growth - and have successfully implemented new strategies that frame the brand in a contemporary context. Examples of these companies are Glossier, Off-White, Everlane and The Reformation.
3.0 BRAND BUILDING STRATEGIES
3.1 Brand Building
The Chartered Institute of Marketing defines a brand as "the sum of the tangible and intangible benefits provided by a product or service and encompasses the entire customer experience" (as cited in Posner, 2015, p. 139). The intangible benefits are where brand building mostly comes into play, it is a concept that takes place in the grey area between brands and consumers. It is eventually only relevant when the effort of conveying a message is received with positive associations in the mind of the consumer. Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) describes it as "the process by which a company creates or improves customer's knowledge and opinions of a brand". These operations are often carried out by the marketing or branding department of a company, but try to streamline all areas of a brand towards the same direction. There is not one specific process to brand building, which makes it a challenging task that can be done via different routes that all contribute to improving the customer's brand perception such as brand awareness or brand image. Well executed branding practices can create brand equity, support customer brand loyalty and improve profitability for fashion brands (Choi, 2014).

Brand management, in particular, is important for fashion because it encompasses all touchpoints a customer has with a company. The competitive advantage of many fashion companies is based on a strong and distinctive story that people want to belong to, which can only succeed if it is translated to all aspects of the company. Branding, and thus the activities of brand building are in charge of that.

3.2 Branding - Past
Studying the past of a phenomenon can give a clearer insight into the mechanics of the present, or as the American Historical Association (2008) states it: "the past causes the present, and so the future." Therefore, both the past and present of branding will be examined to grasp what Millennial brands are doing that attracts the internet generation.

Over the years, the essence of branding has changed. The proliferation of technology has had an incredible impact on the way communication is being exchanged between brands and consumers. As a result, I divided the development of branding into two eras:
1. Brand in control (past)
2. Consumer in control (present).

The "Consumer Revolution" in the years after WWII signifies the entrance of branding in the business context as we know it now. In this time of intensifying competition Gardner and Levy (1955) advised marketeers to use brands as a symbol of differentiation and thus identification for consumers. Interbrand therefore coined this era the "Age of Identity". A major force pushing branding forward was the growth of media; radio, television and magazines (Bastos & Levy, 2012). This shows the importance of communication channels in branding. It was a time of one to many communication and the brand was at the center of attention, pushing the message with help of associations upon consumers. By the end of the '80s the foundational aspects of great brands - positioning and differentiation through logos and slogans - were well integrated and led the way for brand valuation. Brands were no longer an afterthought, and companies understood that brands were beneficial business assets that could substantially increase among others marketing communication effectiveness and customer loyalty. The rise of the internet "eroded the effectiveness of mass media"; for the first time consumers could choose when, where, how and if they wanted to receive brand communications (Keller, 2009, p. 141). This revolution paved the way for a new approach to brand building; handing over the power from brand to consumer.
3.3 Branding - Present

The media landscape has become more complex than ever and due to an overabundance of communication content, consumers are very selective in reacting to advertisement (Story, 2007). The consumer has become more educated about marketing tactics and the emergence of social media has given the consumer the ability to finally interact with, and voice an opinion about brands. Research shows that Millennials find brands important and believe that brands give meaning to products, more than Gen X or the Baby Boomers do (Ipsos, 2017). It thus seems reasonable to think that brands still have an important place in the lives of consumers if they succeed in creating an honest interaction between both parties.

Digitalization gave people the freedom to find and connect with likeminded people and brands online, but it also made much of the contact more superficial. That is why the branding of today is all about building relationships, and in particular culture and community. Different than before, brands now do not talk about themselves, but give people a network to talk about themselves through brands (Andjelic, 2017). People want to buy brands that share the same values in life. Brands are a way of expressing themselves, so it is of utmost importance that brands clearly share their values, culture and purpose. In doing so, brands create "authentic gatherings of people who share a common identity, interest or passion and who want to meet, interact and build relationships" (Andjelic, 2017, para. 8).

In contrast, Sharp (2010) has written how consumers have a 'polygamous loyalty', meaning that people alternate between competing companies based on availability. This seems a contractionary view on branding in general - but looking at the branding of now, these two views can be merged (especially when looking at fashion and beauty brands). As discussed above, brands are for people a tool to express their identity and as Levy in 1963 (p. 150) already said, marketing is “a process of providing customers with parts of a potential mosaic from which they, as artists of their own lifestyles, can pick and choose to develop the composition that for the time may seem the best”. People can have a loyal relationship to several brands, because these brands together are a translation of the persona the consumer wants to convey and thus brands should not fear being mixed with other brands. What brands should fear though, is not being able to give meaning to their consumer by endowing their products with cultural relevance.

3.4 New Approach to Brand Building

Branding has always been inherently connected to the consumer and the outlets of communication. The latter two have undergone great development in the past 10 years due to the age of information. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore if branding also would benefit from alternative approaches. Branding has always aimed to understand what the consumer wants better than the consumer knows it himself, but the rapid succession of change has made it too hard to keep up in the way we are used to implement branding. Now that consumers have the power, they want a lot from brands: to be surprised, to be understood, to be reliable, to be cool. This makes brand building difficult and without much structure at the moment. What we know for sure is that it needs to adapt to the changing times and that it can do so by looking into the past for what created loyalty in the first place: “intimate, local, one-on-one human connections” (Andjelic, 2017). It is not about what people consume, but how they consume.
4.0 THE MILLENNIAL BRAND CONSUMER
To understand the attraction that newcomer millennial brands have, it is relevant to analyse the receiving part: the customer. Millennial brands cater to a wide group of individuals that gradually shifts from the younger group of the millennials and the older part of Gen Z. These individuals have certain values in common that tie them together in their attraction for these brands. By means of the results of conducted interviews and secondary sources the relation between brands and millennials is explored and discussed. For the full version of the interviews, please refer to the appendix.

The millennial generation covers a huge range of the population born between 1981 and 2000. As a natural consequence, the oldest and youngest are in different life stages. Ipsos MORI (2017) split the Millennials into three groups; 'Original Millennials' (over 30 years old), 'Digital Guinea Pigs' (25 - 30 years old) and the youngest group who are up to 25 year old 'Digital Natives'. This research focuses on the Digital Natives as they are the most online connected group and therefore most likely to feel drawn to the activities of Millennial brands.

When asked to millennials what brands mean to them, more than half said that brands are a tool of identification. Millennials use the associations attached to a brand to show to the outerworld who they 'are'. Purchases have turned into signaling statements. Like Lisa says "I believe that the brands you wear, identify you. Even if something is brandless, it still bears associations derived from other influences, so even in that choice you identify yourself". It seems likely to say that the millennials, because of the freedom that the Internet gave them, are the first generation that is born without a pre-established identity. Therefor they are in charge of moulding their personality and brands seem to help them fill in the gap between the actual and ideal self. Of course it could be argued that previous generations also had the freedom to pick and form their identity, especially in the second half of the 20th century our socio-economic surroundings had increasingly less influence on the course of our lives; we became free to choose who we wanted to be. However, the extent to which it is currently possible to mould our self and specifically show others how we want to be perceived is unparalleled.

Even though my research showed a need for identification through brands, a recent study by Ad Age (2017) suggests that millennials are increasingly buying private-label brands, because national brands fail to impress them. If a brand isn't unique enough, they risk being swapped for a low-cost alternative. This generation is attracted by intangibles like community and purpose that reflect their values - so identification means feeling aligned with brand values and that is not necessarily done through branded goods where the brand logo or name is prominent on the outside. Jules said "I care even more about a brand without distinctive logos because that is a sign that I chose it for its great design or quality." So it appears that millennials choose brands first of all for their personal connection with the brand(values) and then choose their own way of translating that to the world; may it be through obvious logos or more subtly by design; both are a statement.
Another aspect that came up in five out of eight interviews was the importance of quality. Many said that they were more interested in product than brand and signaled quality as a reason to buy a brand, be loyal to it or stop liking it if it doesn’t live up to their promise. I was surprised by the fact that many said to find the product/functionality more important than the brand in fashion, because that seems so contradictory to the way people engage with brands nowadays. Andra said that quality is the most important aspect of a brand for her, yet when we started talking about her favourite brand UY studio of which she loves the brand culture, she admitted that their quality was "pretty shitty", but because of the world they stand for she is still attracted to the brand. Even though this can not be generalized, I have a tendency to suggest that Millennials are more conscious of marketing tactics than generations before, which is why they turn to quality as a tool of selection. Yet, even if they don't want to also Millennials are influenced by the stories brands evoke. To illustrate this, Maria mentioned during her interview that quality for her is the only reason to return to a brand. When asked if she believed she could only say that something has quality by trying it, she replied by saying that for some brands "you know they have better quality than others". When I asked her how she knew, she acknowledged this was because of associations she created with certain brands through their marketing activities. So even though quality is an important aspect in brands for Millennials, the idea of quality can be achieved both by experience and creating associations.

One thing all interviewees agreed upon was that brand loyalty is achievable. They admitted it's hard and not restricted to one brand only. Through various answers such as "if brands try their best by showing interest in their target group and try to approach you in a personal way, I believe it's possible" (Demi), "brands should constantly come with something new and relevant" (Lisa) and "loyalty is not only repeat purchases, but also being interested in what a brand is doing" (Andra) it became clear that loyalty in fashion has a lot to do with identifying with a brand on a more humane level. Andra even pointed out that she sees brands as people - this shows how important identity and relevancy of brands have become for Millennials. This almost 'rational' side to choosing brands with whom they are loyal can be linked back to the 2008 economic recession in which millennials came of age. At that time many had a student debt, while it was hard to find work so they experienced the value of money. It triggered millennials to re-evaluate how to spend their hard earned income (Ad Age, 2017) and opened the door for a more conscious relation with brands. Now brands have to speak their language, or there is another option waiting.

The mood a brand conveys was something frequently recurring in the interviews. Many said that, especially on social media, this plays a big role in sparking interest and feeling a connection with a brand. Being able to identify with a brand seems to be a significant aspect for all interviewees and to evaluate this, Millennials turn to visuals and tone of voice of a brand. This is important to them, because millennials are distrustful of the motives of many 'faceless' businesses (Emotive brand, 2016). Whereas before consumers trusted brands' product claims, the Internet has turned consumers into researchers who frequently lookup reviews of peers and are more critical because they can compare. Just like with human relations, millennial consumers now need to know a brand before they can trust it. Therefore millennials are attracted by brands that are transparent and authentic in communicating their personality. Visuals should be be inspirational, yet accessible for a person to relate to a brand. Also pointed out by Viola and Lisa was that they like being taken 'backstage', to see the brand in a more realistic version. "The game changer for me was Instagram stories. When brands started showing their behind
the scenes moments, that was the moment I felt more engaged with them. Because not everything is pretty and perfect, but real with their flaws. It creates a genuine feeling." Viola said. As for offline, Maria stated that a convincing store environment is a trigger to buy something from a new brand, "[...] when I am experimenting it is the decor of the store or the way the whole atmosphere is portrayed that draws my attention." It seems that creating a coherent and distinctive brand identity is still important and key to building relations with the target group. If a brand doesn't clearly communicates its personality, there is no base of trust for the millennial consumer to recognize themself in the brand.

Pushing a product too much, not adapting to the changing times, being inconsistent through all touchpoints: it turns out there are many reasons to dislike a brand for Millennials. A big turn off that Maria, Violette and Viola touched upon is putting out marketing tricks/campaigns that are not genuine by using topics that are 'hot' in society in the hope to benefit from the hype, while there is no relevant link with the brand like the Pepsi activism ad with Kendall Jenner.
5.0 AN ANALYSIS OF MILLENNIAL BRANDS
5.1 Directions of Today
The Millennial brands that lead in the Information Age are the ones that know how to reorganize their brand around the identity of the consumer, that is what all recent literature agrees upon. The modern beauty industry has realized that when a product is decent, its distribution is the most important aspect of the brand-building strategy. In the age of social media, distribution encompasses every experience that will help the product spread; from Instagrammable store environments to dedicated brand communities that can be asked for feedback (Andjelic, 2018).

Communities and culture seem to have a large impact on the success of (new) brands nowadays. Holt (2016) remarks that brands are successful when they break through in culture, but it's time for a new approach since the arrival of social media has transformed the way culture is being exchanged. Social media unites people with the same interests that used to be geographically scattered; the phenomenon of digital groups formed around topics is called "crowdculture" (p. 1). When brands tap into the novel beliefs of the crowdculture they want to engage with, the community can act as an accelerator of fame due to cultural relevance that makes the interactions authentic. It seems likely that the Millennial brands referred to in this research, have been propelled to popularity by among others the supporting followers that felt empowered by the brand message. Cultural branding therefore seems to be a model Millennial brands are using - consciously or not.

5.2 Case study Glossier
Glossier seems to be the brainchild of millennial marketing. The 'fan' loyalty this brand has seemed to achieve is remarkable. Since this case is so unique and impressive, I have chosen to conduct a single case study on Glossier with the aim to single out strategic elements that show a new approach to brand building adapted to the Millennial era.

Glossier is a direct-to-consumer beauty brand founded by Emily Weiss in 2014. Ahead of its creation, Weiss ran the beauty website 'Into the Gloss' (from now: ITG) for which she interviewed hundreds of famous and non-famous women on their beauty routines. Linking the platform to women as Karlie Kloss gave ITG instant credibility. The website became a place of openness, accessibility and fun, where readers could interact and share in the comment section.

Before Glossier was founded many women were fed up with the advertisements of beauty companies portraying the perfect woman: slim, no irregularities and white. It didn't fit with the progress of society on diversity, and was especially important to Millennials. Glossier, at the right time, tapped into this dissatisfaction and used it to its advantage. Other established companies tried doing this as well before, but they missed the right context to make it credible. Glossier on the other hand, had already built a community based on empowering women via ITG, so it had all the right cues to position itself as the brand that embodies diversity and
realness in beauty. It thus established a cultural relevance for its being.

Central to Glossier’s business model is their community of fans. In the time of social media and the wish of millennials to personally connect with brands (Barton et al., 2014) creating a community is a very valuable intangible asset. The community is first of all an effective way of sourcing customer insights and so creating products that people are genuinely waiting for. Glossier frequently asks their consumers for feedback through social media and a dedicated Slack channel, which is met with enormous enthusiasm. Crowdsourcing products make consumers directly feel part of a brand and it seems to play pivotal role in Glossier’s brand attraction. The community also creates a place where the customer stands central and has the ability to interact between them; celebrating and empowering each other. As Andjelic (2017) has mentioned, the identity of a brand is now the consumer. And that might be the company’s biggest marketing asset.

Besides this, Glossier holds a strong brand identity. Their tone of voice is lighthearted and resembles the way girls speak between themselves on social media or their phones. Glossier’s imagery is overloaded with images of ‘real’ girls who take pride in their diversity, cute puppies and the colour ‘millennial pink’; the online world of a Millennial girl. This gives a strong sense of recognition for the consumer, the feeling of ‘they understand me, they speak my language’. This is very important in being able to identify yourself with a brand, which as presented in my interview results is something millennials long for. In my research on millennials it also emerged that millennials like Instagram stories to connect with brands for its non-staged content. Glossier capitalizes on this by showing sneak peaks, asking for feedback, introducing the team and taking the viewer around the office. It makes Glossier the brand you want to be friends with.

Lastly, through my analysis I believe that every decision taken at Glossier is done with the life of their Millennial consumer in mind. They know their consumer spends much time curating their social media accounts online. Therefore Glossier created ‘Instagrammable’ stores and packaging that are too resistible not to share and thus encourage the consumer to do what they do best: take photos and share them online. By looking at things through the eyes of their consumer they have been able to make customers excited for things that fit perfectly in their existing world.
6.0 CONCLUSION
The following conclusions on the success factors of millennial brands have emerged.

The first success factor acknowledged here is putting the consumer central - be it by literally including customers into the company such as Glossier does, or by giving customers something to talk about in their networks. People like to be part of something. What changed from previously is the hierarchy, the subject of these networks should not be the brand itself but it should be the consumer. The degree and intensity of community have shown to be different per brand, as long as the brand gives the consumer something to feel connected to with others.

Something that is recurring for many of the brands that in this research are considered, is that the launch of their brand was an answer to a discontent by a subculture. The brands tapped into the need for change and because of that could count on a stable follower base from the start. Brands have a position in society nowadays, and just like humans, they have an opinion. This is something millennials value highly, because they need to link with a brand on a higher level than a product; they need to feel that they are striving for the same things. So was Vetements founded around an anti-fashion statement that wanted clothing to be something that people would actually wear instead of all the fashion they saw on the catwalk which didn't reflect real life. This was something many people in fashion felt strongly about too and thus used Vetements to show this statement to the world.

An external factor that influences the success of brands is having credible people being associated with, or supporting, the brand. For example, Virgil Abloh was known to be the right hand of Kanye West for a long time before launching Pyrex and Off-White. And Emily Weiss was able to link herself to known artists by photographing and interviewing them on their beauty routines in their bathrooms. Linking a famous person or expert to a brand or product is a common practice in advertising, but especially in the age of social media this seems to really aid a brand. Millennials trust a wide range of influencers (from YouTube stars to musicians) and they are more likely to follow and like a brand that is approved by other ‘stars’.

Another success factor is understanding what will make a product spread, may it be digital or offline. This means taking a millennial perspective in order to become part of their surroundings. Off-White did so by playing with the "quotation marks" that reflect the irony and copy-paste logic of the Internet. It also means creating stores, products, advertisements that are shareable. Millennials love curating their online lives - a brand is there to give them the ingredients to do so.

The change in brand-building signaled here shows one predictable development; with every shift of a generation, the way people want to be approached by brands changes. Brands exist in the mind of the consumer, so the volatile character of them is only natural. The brands looking for a perfect formula to remain competitive throughout their whole existence will have to adjust to the reality that change is the currency of our time and it shows no sign of slowing down.

Long-term success may be reserved for only a few brands. The hype that social media can create because of its enormous connectivity can also wear down very easily. This is a time in which brands should be sharp 24/7. Consumers are smart and if they feel a brand is starting to let go of their promises and values, consumers are quick to let the brand go. Loyalty is fickle, as seen with the Vetements’ declining sales controversy that sparked on Highsnobiety March 2018.
7.0 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The success factors of millennial brands were analysed from a branding point of view, with an emphasis on the relation between brand and consumer because the character of communication has changed drastically. The success of brands can never be fully dedicated towards either the internal activities of a brand or the external forces. Therefore the conclusions from this research don't represent the full view on this new approach to brand building.

Although I was able to find some factors that certainly seem to have an influence on the success of millennial brands, the full success of these brands cannot be explained completely by these tactics. There seems to be a piece of 'magic', of being somewhere at the right time that cannot be explained theoretically. The beauty of success seems to be that it doesn't lay completely in the hands of the maker.
REFERENCE LIST


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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW 1 (01/05/18)
Demi - 21 years old - studies Fashion & Branding

(1) Wat is jouw interesse in brands in het algemeen?
Dat ik wel misschien meer dan gemiddeld geïnteresseerd ben in merken ook vanwege mijn opleiding. Ik denk dat ik wel gevoelig ben voor merken dat het ook steeds meer wordt hoe meer ik er van te weten kom voor mijn opleiding en werk. Hoe meer ik er mee bezig ben dus ja ik het bij interesse voor merken in het algemeen best wel hoog ligt.

(2) Are there certain categories in which you feel more interested/attracted to brands? If yes, which?
Ja, binnen de mode denk ik vooral soort van items waar je wat langer mee doet zoals tassen en schoenen. Ik denk dat merken belangrijker zijn of in ieder geval grote merken belangrijker zijn dan bijvoorbeeld t-shirtjes of dingen die je sneller weggooit. Daarbij maakt het niet zo veel uit. En qua andere categorieën bijvoorbeeld eten enzo. Als ik bijvoorbeeld hagelslag koop dan wil ik dat van de Ruiter hebben. (Waarom wil je dat?) Ja ik weet niet, ik denk het gewoon tussen je oren zit, want het zal niet veel beter zijn dan een ander hagelslag merk. Het is misschien ook al wat ik vroeger ook altrijd at en dat is er in gebleven. Net zoals naar de je boodschappen doen bij Albert Heijn in plaats van de Lidl. Het slaat nergens op, maar toch ga ik naar de Albert Heijn. Het is gewenning, en als je daar in de winkel komt ziet het er allemaal net wat fijner uit. Ik ben gevoelig voor verpakkingen.

(3) What do brands mean to you?
Ik denk dat merken er zijn om een soort van relatie met je op te bouwen. Een merk is er niet voor een product, maar om een identiteit te laten zien. Ze geven iets extra's aan een product. Iets waaraan mensen zich kunnen binden. Merken betekenen in die zin veel voor mij. Het doet iets waarschijnlijk met mij - onbewust. Je kan je herkennen in een bepaalde identiteit.

(4) When following brands on social media, when do you feel a connection with a brand?
Stieglitz bijvoorbeeld, een Amsterdams merk, dat is vooral omdat ik hun content heel leuk vind. Op een on-conventionele manier, niet productgericht, maar inspirationeel niveau. Artworks maken en meer dan alleen campagnebeelden laten zien. Dat vind ik belangrijk. Ik vind het leuk om afmerken zoals Realisation Par, dat hun kleding wordt gedragen door mensen. (Zijn dat dan mensen aan wie jij je op een bepaalde manier kan identificeren?) Dat weet ik niet, het zijn nooit mensen die ik ken, maar het zijn wel meisjes die interessant zijn om te zien. Ze zijn mooi, maar wel toegankelijk. Er wordt dan een wereldje gecreëerd waar je graag bij wilt horen. Dus ik denk dat dat voor mij belangrijk vindt. Ik zoek niet bewust naar merken op Instagram bijvoorbeeld, maar ik denk wel dat het me onbewust wel beïnvloed.

(5) Has the relationship you have with brands changed over time? How?
Ik denk dat mijn relatie met merken over de afgelopen jaren zeker is veranderd. Ik ben nog niet zo oud, maar vroeger stond ik er niet bij stil. Ik kocht alleen wat ik mooi vond, maar nu door mijn opleiding ook, ben ik er achter gekomen dat ik het ook heel interessant vind om meer te weten over de verhalen achter de merken. Ik ben ook wel bewuster geworden van wat merken doen, wat ze willen uitstralen en wat dat met mij doet. (Is het dan ook belangrijk voor jou om merken te dragen die hetzelfde communiceren als dat jij wilt uitstralen?) Ik denk het wel, niet in alles, maar ik denk wel dat je het misschien fijn vindt om een merk te vinden die je fijn vindt die qua gevoel en identiteit bij je past. Helemaal met tassen of zo. (Dus producten die je langer behoudt?) Ja zoals ik eerst zei, producten waar je langer mee doet. Daarbij is het fijn om iets te kopen waarvan je weet dat het persoonlijk ook bij je past. En dat weet je door een merk verhaal.

(6) What does brand loyalty mean to you?
Ik denk dat loyaalheid zeker nog wel bestaat. Er wordt vaak gezegd dat millennials niet meer loyaal zijn en dat dat ook niet meer kan in deze wereld maar ik denk dat het niet zo is. Ik denk dat je misschien wel meer loyaal kunt zijn naar meerdere merken. Dat je je niet meer bindt aan één merk. Maar ik denk zeker dat het nog kan, zeker als merken daar hun best voor doen, zich interesseren in hun doelgroep, contact proberen te maken en je op een persoonlijk manier proberen te benaderen. (Waarom denk je?) Ik denk dat mensen sowieso aan veel meer merken worden blootgesteld tegenwoordig. Dus er is een heel breed spectrum aan merken dat je aandacht wil en ik denk dat
het steeds moeilijker wordt in deze tijd om je daardoor te binden. Ook voelt het natuurlijker om meerdere merken te dragen die jou kunnen representeren, want als mens besta je uit meer dan de opsomming van één merk.

(7) Why do you buy certain brands over others?
Ik denk puur door het merkverhaal, door de identiteit. Maar ook doordat je een merk al kent, dus je weet hoe iets zit en iets voelt, hoe lang iets mee gaat, of verhalen die je van iemand hebt gehoord. (Heb je je gevoel dat die keuze bewust is?) Hmm niet altijd. Maar opzich wel uiteindelijk. Je weet heus wel dat je een shirt van Ganni liever koopt dan een shirt van de Zeeman.

(8) How does having branded products make you feel?
Met dure spullen voel ik me op zich wel goed, dan denk ik wel dat het een mooie eye catcher is die ik met me mee kan dragen en ben ik ook wel blij dat ik het heb kunnen kopen. Daar ben ik dan ook wel een beetje trots op. Ik ben dan het gevoel dat ik iets heb gekocht waarin ook een stukje van mijzelf zit en dat vind ik fijn. Dat draag ik graag bij me.

(9) How do you like to be approached by brands?
Sowieso persoonlijk. Op een eerlijke en echte manier. (Wat is een eerlijke en echte manier voor jou? Hoe onderscheid zich dat?) Vooral niet erg geforceerd over komen. De beelden en teksten moeten toegankelijk zijn, ik moet kunnen denken 'daar kan ik bij horen'. Het moet niet te ver van je weg staan, de communicatie moet transparant zijn. Ik word ook graag benaderd op een inspirationele manier. Ik hoef niet alleen producten te zien, maar ook inspiratie waardoor ik me wil binden aan het merken. Ik vind het belangrijk dat zij hun identiteit communiceren.

(10) To which brands do you feel personally attracted? Why do you like them?
Stieglitz zoals ik al eerder zei, daar voel ik me door aangesproken en daar komt vooral door de manier waarop zij communiceren op social media. (Hoe groot is de rol van het product van Stieglitz bij jou? Als je de afweging tussen communicatie en product maakt?) Ik denk dat communicatie belangrijker is dan product, zij hebben nu ook nog een best exclusief merk en dat spreekt me ook aan. Je wilt bij het wereldje van Stieglitz horen - een insider ding, dat je het 'snapt'. Maar ik vind de producten van Stieglitz ook leuk, ze zijn onderscheidend van andere producten. Love Stories vind ik ook wel een interessant merk, ik denk dat bij Love Stories dat daar wel de grootste rol voor dat merk het naar buiten brengen van de merkidentiteit is. In principe kun je hun lingerie - iets minder mooi - ook vinden bij &Other Stories bijvoorbeeld, maar omdat hun identiteit zo sterk is en dat er goed weten door te trekken naar alle kanalen van online en offline, hun winkels, en alle details; ik denk dat dat mij aantrekt. Dat is voor mij ook een reden om daar iets te kopen.

(11) Which brands do you think are bad in their relationship towards customers? Why?
Lastig - ik let vooral op de goede merken en merken die ik niet goed vind, volg ik niet eens. Maar ik denk dat het neerkomt op merken die vooral productgericht zijn, niet echt duidelijk iets communiceren. Dat vind ik irritant, wanneer het product gepusht wordt en de inhoud plat en oppervlakkig is.

(12) Is there anything you would like to add to this topic?
Niet per se, maar samenvattend denk ik dat er nog altijd merkloyaliteit bestaat en voor mij persoonlijk is het belangrijk dat er een identiteit wordt gecommuniceerd waaraan je jezelf kunt koppelen, toe wilt behoren. Een merk moet een merkverhaal vertellen op een persoonlijke manier naar de consument toe. Het moet niet alleen kopen zijn, maar ook inspiratie halen uit een merk.

INTERVIEW 2 (01/05/2018)
Andra - 24 years old - studies International Fashion & Management

(1) What is your interest in brands in general?
Actually, I think that when it comes to a conscious decision I would like to say no. Because i don't want to be brand dependent. But of course, when I see a certain ad or see a brand on social media with something that I like, then I do care about it. I wouldn't point myself out as someone who into following what brands are up to, but I definitely have my favourites.
Are there certain (product) categories in which you feel more interested/attracted to brands? If yes, which?

There is a difference in aspirational and non aspirational brands. Especially brands like Gucci or Vetements or during Fashion Week that I always like to check out, but I am not their consumer. But looking from a consumer perspective alone, I would say that the emphasis definitely lays on fashion. If I think about the brands I follow on Instagram, it's mainly fashion brands. I am not interested in what Coca Cola is doing. I can't associate myself with that kind of culture. I don't know, fashion is my field, so brands in that category have my interest. It comes down to consumer goods, on brands that can make you happy. From healthy smoothies to lingerie. It comes down to personal preferences.

What do brands mean to you?

I think that they stand for a certain quality, that you can expect. For example I recently bought Doc Martens and I bought them because they are Doc's. I could have chosen to buy similar shoes that are less expensive, but I wanted exactly this style and know that they will last me a long time. When you know what you are going to get with a brand, that is important to me. It's a signalling function for quality. That is the meaning I have with (Do you then also link product quality to a brand?) Yes, this is the way I look to brands. If I think of lingerie and I see something beautiful, I think of Agent Provocateur. If I think about quality and simplicity I think of Triumph. So I connect it with product, but that might also because I, through my education, look behind marketing. Although at the same time, when I buy something nice, I want to show it off on my own social media and tag the brand. So I don't know - I know about the tactics, but I am human so at the end of the day, when a brand does it well, I also am sensitive to what they do.

When following brands on social media, when do you feel a connection with a brand?

I think first of all, good visual content that in a way I find interesting for myself. It depends on my personal preferences of course. The people at Instagram really have worked on their algorithm, because they are showing me new things on my feed and it's working. It starts with sponsored content, but often I really like them. I ended up placing a purchasing order on one brand that I found through sponsored advertisement. (So how do you feel about sponsored content?) I have come across stuff that I quite like and find interesting, which comes down to super good visual communication and the product should be easy to purchase - like a t-shirt or sunglasses. But expensive things or hard to relate to items in terms of fit don't work well in combination with sponsored content I feel.

Has the relationship you have with brands changed over time? How?

I can't really think of a specific example, but something that signifies change is if a brand let's you down quality wise. When you don't get what you expected. I find excellent customer service also very important, like SuitSupply is doing it. That I find a really nice change in in the relationship I have with brands. I think the relationship between brands and consumers has changed, if you look at social media. Brands repost user content, and as a consumer you then want to be the one that that is posted on their channel. It's liking each other back between brand and consumer. And customer service has improved a lot as well, if I have a good experience somewhere at a company, I return. But this is becoming a norm, I expect that my complaint is heard, my voice is take into consideration, so when a brand does not do that, they stand out; in a bad way. It has become a standard to be, I expect to be treated in a certain way as a customer that is definitely different as how it was 30 years ago.

What does brand loyalty mean to you?

From a customer's perspective I think that loyalty means that you have a longer relationship than just one trial product that you purchased from a brand. That doesn't only mean monthly repeat purchases, but also in terms of engagement, being interested in what a brand is doing. If a brand manages to be in a customer's range of interest, and a customer cares about what they are doing and only buys one product every season or year, I think that a company than succeeded in making someone loyal. In a time of brand saturation, one should not expect too much, it's hard to get customers to stay. So I think brands should think about engagement in a wide perspective.

Why do you buy certain brands over others?

I think that probably design and visual communication features are important. They need to speak to me visually. Even if the same product would be at Desigual - which would be one way of VM - and also at Daily Paper, I would obviously go for the one with Daily Paper. I find it easier to identify with their visual communication. (So for you, you would say it comes down to feeling like a brand could represent you somehow?) Yes, that I can relate to it. I don't need to belong to a brand, because there is enough going on in my own life, but if the
message speaks to me, then my interest is sparked. And I don’t ask myself too many questions, I just like it. So it’s pretty much unconscious. I like it? And the quality and service is good? I will return.

(8) How does having branded products make you feel?
Sometimes it does give me a confidence boost. Especially more exclusive, high end brands can give me that feeling. They make me feel special and different on a normal day. I have experienced that if I wear something from a fashion brand that I really like, I really emotionally feel better. (And why do you think that is?) It’s hard to answer, but it’s really strange how it works. I do really feel a little bit more confident towards myself and the outer world. I find it especially funny when certain brands have through marketing shown you how you should feel when wearing something and I feel that way when I wear something of theirs. So it works.

(9) How do you like to be approached by brands?
I don’t appreciate it when someone tries to get my attention in a pushy manner. I see brands as people. If there is a person that desperately wants to be your best friend, you’ll feel a bit attacked and want that person to back off. But if someone comes along quietly and friendly, you’ll be much more willing to be friends. It’s about trust. The same way for brands. I think that I would like to be approached in a subtle way, so that the trust can be build. For me that is very important. If this doesn’t happen - it can be very upsetting. Brands should be honest and trustable. A brand can’t say that they’re sustainable and then it turns out they are not. These kind of things are really important. So transparency is also an important aspect. And these are the same aspects that I value in people.

(10) To which brands do you feel personally attracted? Why do you like them?
I really like UY Studios, which is a small Berlin based brand that taps into the Berghain party culture. Which is not something I do every day, but like to escape to every now and then. When I see the parties they organize and stuff, I would like to take part into that. Then again, their quality is pretty shitty. Because I bought one thing and it’s super expensive for what you get in the end. But the world they stand for, is something I am attracted by. So I still like the brand.

(11) Which brands do you think are bad in their relationship towards customers? Why?
Hmm I really can’t think of something. These brands are not on my radar. The only thing I can think of now is the example of Raf Simons, who left Dior and the fashion industry with the intention to do more with furniture design with the reasoning that the pace in fashion is way too high. Which are a lot of good reasons that no one dared to say up until then, so I was really happy that he had dared to say goodbye to such a big house as Dior. I found it admirable. And then six months he becomes the creative director of Calvin Klein!! One moment you say things I find empowering and inspiring and then you do exactly the opposite because he probably got offered a lot of money? I find that very disappointing. So from now on, whatever Raf Simons designs, he ruined it for me. A move like this can really change everything for me. Same goes for Margiela, I used to be a great fan of the label, but since John Galliano became the creative director I don’t like it anymore. (So would you say that the person who is running the brand, as a known figure, is important for your perception of the brand?) Yes, definitely, especially in the luxury industry it’s super important who is behind the ‘steering wheel’ of a brand, because that person should embody the values of a brand. The added value should be in line with each other, otherwise I could just as well go to H&M and buy myself a black t-shirt. This also show again how important I find honesty of brands.

(12) Is there anything you would like to add to this topic?
I want to note that because I study fashion, I am influenced by the way I see brands.

INTERVIEW 3 (02/05/18)
Lisa - 25 years - Studies Fashion & branding

(1) What is your interest in brands in general?
Ik heb een best grote interesse in merken, dat wil zeggen dat ik binnen ieder segment wel verschillende merken heb waar ik heel veel interesse in toon. Ik heb thuis en bij mijn ouders heel veel boeken; ik vind het heel leuk om achtergrond van merken te onderzoeken en dat is ook wel studiegerelateerd. (Heb je enig idee waarom je dan zo interessant vindt het er maar die achtergrond te ontdekken?) Ja ik denk dat ik in Groningen opgegroeid ben en daar waren niet zo heel merken dus ja toen heb ik eigenlijk samen met mijn broertje al heel vroeg toen
we heel klein waren eigenlijk al zitten zoeken op internet naar de achtergronden van merken omdat dat ons zo interessant leek om iets mee te doen later.

(2) Are there certain categories in which you feel more interested/attracted to brands? If yes, which?

Ook hierin heb ik verschillende merken waarbij ik een goed gevoel heb. Bijvoorbeeld bij watermerken kies ik gauw voor een mooie fles. Het is gewoon water, maar die branding doet me altijd wat. Waar aan denk je dan? Heb je dan ook het idee dat het beter is?) Niet per se dat het product beter is, ik studeer zelf branding dus ik weet hoe het werkt, maar ik vind het leuk om daarin mee te gaan. Ik vind het leuker om een mooie fles water te hebben. Ik koop het natuurlijk niet altijd, maar ik ben er wel gevoelig voor. Zo ook voor beauty, daar is dat ook belangrijk. Ik denk dat als ik een merk heb gevonden dat me bevalt, ik dat ook vaker koop. Maar ik ben ook wel trendgevoelig, dus ik kan ook gauw weer overgaan op een ander merk. Of later weer terug grijpen op oude favorieten. En zo geldt dat ook voor mode. Mijn favoriete merk is wel Ganni voor kleding en voor jeans Levi's. Daar ben ik wel merktrouw aan. Maar als ik in de stad ben en ik zie iets nieuws dan wil ik dat ook heel graag uitproberen.

(3) What do brands mean to you?

Ik denk toch - ze zeggen dat het achterhaald is, maar ik vind dat niet - maar ik denk dat de merken die je draagt, je identificeren. Zelfs iets dat merkloos is, zoals zara, is weer afgeleid van andere merken, dus zelfs in die zin identificeer je jezelf. Dus ik denk toch wel dat de merken en de spullen die je verzamelt om je heen, je wel identificeren. (Zou je zeggen dat zie iets over jou zeggen als persoon?) Ja dat denk ik toch wel, het is niet zo dat als je over straat loopt in Gucci, Prada dat dat per se betekent dat 'kijk wat voor een klasse ik heb'. Maar het zegt wel iets over je creativiteit bijvoorbeeld. Bijvoorbeeld, ik volgde Chiara Ferragni van The Blond Salad vanaf het begin. Toen was ze heel creatief met kleding omdat ze nog niet zo veel kon betalen - toen mixte ze Chanel tassen met high street - maar nu ze geld heeft, draagt ze het alleen maar om merken. En door al die merken bij elkaar, mis ik wel haar eigen creativiteit en insteek. Nu past het niet meer bij haar als persoon, want dit is niet hoe zij zich voorheen liet zien. (Moet het dan een juiste mix van merken zijn? Is het anders fake?) Ja, in het mixen van merken en stijlen komt wel een persoon naar voren.

(4) When following brands on social media, when do you feel a connection with a brand?

Het mag van mij commercieel zijn, maar het hoeft niet overdone te zijn. (Wat versta jij onder commercieel?) Niet alleen maar advertenties, 'buy now' blabla, er moet wel een bepaalde sfeer in zitten. Als we nu Instagram pakken als platform, dan moet het wel inspirerend zijn die pagina's van merken. En het is inspirerend voor mij als er naast eigen beeld (campagnes), ook getoond wordt hoe de ontwikkeling achter een campagne heeft plaatsgevonden. De hele sfeer er om heen. Dat zijn factoren waarom ik me aangetrokken voel door een merk. Ook tone of voice is belangrijk. Hoe ze je persoonlijk proberen aan te spreken, dat werkt wel. Social media is een platform om op te delen te reageren en ik vind dat dat we te weinig doen zelfs. We ‘liken’ allemaal wel, maar een comment plaatsen, dat doe ik zelf ook niet. Wat ik met mijn eigen onderzoek voor Glossier heb ondervonden is dat zij wel een hele hoge engagement rate hebben, doordat zij juist heel persoonlijk maken en mensen uitdagen om een gesprek te beginnen. Ze zijn daarin heel direct, ze vragen letterlijk 'omschrijf jouw favoriete kaars'. Daar komen heel veel comments op. Op zoiets vind ik het ook leuk om te reageren, dus als ik me aangetrokken voel tot een merk wil ik ook wel in gesprek met hun.

(5) Has the relationship you have with brands changed over time? How?


(6) What does brand loyalty mean to you?

Ik denk dat merkloyaliteit nog mogelijk is. Het is zo dat er bepaalde merken zijn waar ik altijd naar terug grijp, maar er komen ook altijd nieuwe merken bij. Dus is er zeker nog brand loyalty, maar het is heel moeilijk om dat als merk voor elkaar te krijgen. Want je kunt ook over veel merken denken dat het een hype is. We kunnen ons nu heel verbonden voelen met een merk, maar hoe houd je je je dan bij je? Hoe hou je het interessant? Dan moet je wel telkens met iets nieuws komen, want onze generatie wil graag iets nieuws. Als ze niet vernieuwen dan wordt het niks. Een voorbeeld daarvan, ik was laatst in Londen in de Victoria's Secret store. En ik werd
echt verdrietig van wat ik daar aantrof, toen ik naar Amerika verhuisde voor een high school year was het echt een geweldig groot merk. Maar ze hebben zich duidelijk niet kunnen aanpassen aan de veranderende tijd. Stilstaan is achteruitgang. Dat is mijn motto. Amerikanen zoals Abercrombie en Victoria's Secret kunnen daarvan leren. Het is ook zo dat het nu een tijd is waarin het om engagement en klantenrelaties draait, maar daardoor zijn de merken die nu pas 4 jaar bestaan ook zo hard groeiende. Zij hebben hele geschiedenis niet met zich mee. Dat maakt verandering zo moeilijk. Het zou goed zo kunnen zijn dat de merken die jij nu onderzoekt, hun beste dagen weer achter zich hebben liggen over 5 jaar.

(7) Why do you buy certain brands over others?
Dat heeft met veel verschillende aspecten te maken. Allereerst kijk ik naar de look, dus wat past bij mij qua stijl. Dat is het allerbelangrijkste. Ik zou graag willen zeggen dat ik graag duurzaam koopt en dat dat het eerste is waar ik naar kijk, maar helaas is dat nog steeds niet zo. Maar ik denk aan welke merken bij mij passen qua stijl. Stijl is voor mij het allerbelangrijkste. En prijs ook wel. Ik vind het niet erg om te investeren in mooie stukken, maar voor basics ga ik graag gewoon naar de H&M. En branding werkt natuurlijk werkt ook mee. Ik koop bijvoorbeeld niet veel bij COS, maar als ik daar koop wordt dat erg mooi ingepakt met een stick en vloeipapier. Dat doet wel goed.

(8) How does having branded products make you feel?
Teruggaand naar water, stel je koopt een flesje water van AH Basic en van Evian. Dan voel ik me toch mooi, het is leuker om te hebben. Ik kan het moeilijk uitleggen, maar het is wel echt het hebben aspect. Van mooie dingen word ik gelukkig in het leven. Ik moet zeggen dat AH Basic verpakkingen ook wel mooier zijn geworden, dus dat doet ook wel iets met me. Misschien is het dan niet eens per se het verhaal dat erachter zit maar vooral de visuele aspecten. Want hoe vaak lezen we nou de verhalen achter een merk als je in een winkel staat? Je leest dan nooit dat bordje met achtergrondinformatie. Bijvoorbeeld dat bubbeltjesplastic etuïje van Glossier, iedereen weet dat dat van hun is. Het is kenmerkend, de kleur, de branding, kun je niet meer loskoppelen van het merk. Net zoals bij IKEA. Off-White doet dat bijvoorbeeld ook heel tof, met aanhalingstekens en tags. Eigenlijk de merken die het goed doen, gebruiken relatief makkelijke tools om dat te bereiken. Noppenplastic of plastic tags, dat is eigenlijk heel simpel maar valt wel op.

(9) How do you like to be approached by brands?
Ten eerste is het natuurlijk hoe word je benaderd? Dat kan via verkoopmedewerkers, via social media. Verschillende kanalen. Wat ik dan fijn vind is een open gesprek, dat je er aan kan deelnemen maar dat het niet hoeft. Als ik bijvoorbeeld in een winkel ben, dan vind ik het fijn als je zeggen 'als ik je kan helpen, dan hoor ik het wel', maar niet 'kan ik je helpen'. Want dan moet ik 'nee' zeggen. Ik hou van de openheid, dat ze je je gangje laten gaan maar dat er wel een mogelijkheid is om een gesprek aan te gaan wanneer ik het zelf wil. Dat zou in alle kanalen moeten worden doorgevoerd.

(10) To which brands do you feel personally attracted? Why do you like them?
Ja sowieso Glossier. Het is een jong merk, ik merk dat ik erg geïnteresseerd ben in die vibrant merken. Tijdens het bekijken van lezingen van Emily Weiss zelf werd ik ook geïnspireerd. Ik leer ook van hun. Apple is ook een all time favorite, ik gebruik hun producten al jaren. Ik hou van hun simple design en makkelijke gebruik. Ik hou denk ik heel erg van simpele dingen. Alles wat je bij Glossier vindt, simpele producten zoals schuim papier en een elastiek maken het heel mooi. Die simpele aspecten trekken mij aan.

(11) Which brands do you think are bad in their relationship towards customers? Why?
Victoria's Secret dus! Dat vind ik echt zonde, dat had nog iets kunnen worden. Maar wat ik me nu bedenk is het volgende: duurzame merken. De reden dat dat nog steeds niet echt aantrekkelijk is omdat zij het niet goed doen qua marketing. Zij zijn veel te erg op het product gericht en op de materialen, vooral in de duurzaamheidssector. Maar dan mist de branding en dan blijft het plat. Het is een kledingsstuk op een hanger en niks meer. Everlane bijvoorbeeld heeft dat dan wel weer heel goed gedaan. Daar zit een verhaal omheen. Een merk dat duurzaam is zonder verhaal, is een leeg merk. Dan is het kleding.

(12) Is there anything you would like to add to this topic?
Kijkend naar jouw hoofdvraag, dan denk ik dat we kunnen concluderen dat succesfactoren het heel belangrijk is om je klanten bij je merk te betrekken. Dat kan dus op veel manieren, veel via social media, maar ook de omslag weer van online naar offline. Mensen willen ook wel graag voelen. Ik vind het belangrijk dat een merk mijn taal spreekt, ze voelen aan wat ik leuk en grappig vindt. Dan voel ik meeteen: wij begrijpen elkaar. De aesthetics moet aansluiten op wat ik leuk vind, het moet toegankelijk zijn. Zoals wij op onze telefoon commu-
niceren. Als je een kleur aan je merk koppelt, dat is zo herkenbaar. Het is goed kijken naar wat jongeren willen tegenwoordig. Ik denk dat de merken die jij nu onderzocht, dat goed begrepen hebben. Zij infilteren gewoon en begrijpen wat wij willen.

INTERVIEW 4 (03/05/18)
Demir - 25 years - Retail

(1) What is your interest in brands in general?
Als het gaat om merken, gaat het vooral om kleding, technologie en eten. Bij eten kijk ik ook graag naar merken. De nadruk ligt wel vooral op het product, de associaties die een merk heeft met de producten. (En waarom vind je merken belangrijk in die categorieën?) Omdat ik veel geef om eten en kleding. Technologie minder, maar het is meer dat ik daar minder van af weet, dus ik vertrouw op uiterlijke kenmerken van een merk.

(2) Are there certain categories in which you feel more interested/attracted to brands? If yes, which?
Zoals net gezegd is dat bij mij eten, kleding en technologie. (Kun je uitleggen waarom?) Ja dit zijn dingen waar ik veel geld aan uitgeef en dingen waar ik in geïnteresseerd ben. Bijvoorbeeld waarom vind ik het belangrijk om chips van Lays te kopen en niet van de Lidl? Dat is belangrijk voor mij. Dat heeft veel te maken met de smaak, maar daar kan het niet alleen aan liggen.

(3) What do brands mean to you?
Merken bieden een bepaalde context voor een product. Dus bijvoorbeeld, een merk is heel breed: een bank kan je interessant vinden, maar als je weet door wie die is gemaakt kan je daar op een andere manier naar kijken dan wanneer je dat niet weet. Dus wat mij aantrekt in merken is het verhaal erachter. (Wat betekent een merk voor jou?) Een merk geeft zingeving. Het voegt waarde toe. Merken bieden waarde aan producten, kunstobjecten, want ik denk dat een kunstenaar ook een merk is bijvoorbeeld. Een merk is iets heel breeds. Het is allang niet meer alleen een logo. Een merk vertelt een verhaal.

(4) When following brands on social media, when do you feel a connection with a brand?
Ik ben geïnteresseerd wanneer een merk iets nieuws doet, wanneer ze je iets nieuws laten ontdekken. Van grappige plaatjes tot schilderijen. Het gaat om het verhaal. Mijn antwoord op deze vraag slaat aan op mijn antwoord van de vorige vraag, want wat een merk interessant maakt is wanneer het jou een verhaal vertelt dat je boeit. Dat relevant is. (Wanneer heb jij het gevoel dat een verhaal jou boeit?) Wanneer het nieuw is, maar tegelijk niet volledig onbekend. Het moet ergens naar refereren, waarbij je als mens een weerklink bij vindt. Herkenning is belangrijk, maar door een nieuwe blik.

(5) Has the relationship you have with brands changed over time? How?
Ik denk dat die relatie veel directer is geworden, want ik kan me herinneren toen ik een tiener was dat er merken waren die cool waren. Maar wat je toen deed, je ging naar de website en ging letterlijk kijken naar de t-shirts die ze hadden en wat je wilde kopen. Voor mijn gevoel is het nu veel meer gerelateerd aan directe beelden of informatie. Ik weet niet eens meer wanneer ik voor het laatste naar een website van een merk ben gegaan en heb gekeken wat ze verkopen alleen om dat te weten, het gaat nu meer om het totale plaatje van hoe een merk zich presenteert.

(6) What does brand loyalty mean to you?
Ik denk dat merkloyaliteit heel moeilijk gaat. Maar op een bepaalde manier ook weer wel, want er zijn natuurlijk wel merken waar ik vaker kleding van koop. Dus als het om kleding gaat wel. Maar stel een merk dat je leuk vindt, en zij veranderen helemaal, dan kan ik me voorstellen dat ik makkelijk zou afhaken met een merk volgen. Dus in die zin vraag ik me af of loyaliteit duurzaam kan zijn. Er zijn namelijk ook maar weinig merken die altijd hetzelfde blijven. Wel als je naar eten kijkt, daar blijft natuur chips al jarenlang hetzelfde. Dus daar bestaat die loyaliteit wel. Net zoals bij de Ikea. (Maar Ikea komt ook met nieuwe producten?) Ja natuurlijk maar je blijft toch ongeveer hetzelfde kopen bij de Ikea. Maar ik geloof wel dat loyaliteit op langere tijd nog wel kan blijven bestaan (Wanneer denk jij dat die kan bestaan?) Als het product relevant blijft.

(7) Why do you buy certain brands over others?
Ik denk dat er verschillende aspecten zijn, waarvan kwaliteit er een is. Ik gaf net het voorbeeld van chips, daar kun je dat bijvoorbeeld erg bij toepassen. Ik vind het de lekkerste chips, maar ik ben me ervan bewust dat het
(8) How does having branded products make you feel?
Of you feel good, or if you feel anxious by. As the one product is not the one, but the one that you want to buy, the desire to buy. (What would you say is important?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (What would you say is important?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (Why would you say this?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (What would you say is important?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (Why would you say this?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (What would you say is important?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (Why would you say this?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (What would you say is important?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (Why would you say this?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (What would you say is important?) I think it's important that you feel good about it. (Why would you say this?) 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(2) Are there certain categories in which you feel more interested/attracted to brands? If yes, which? Lingerie. It has been an big interest for the last few years, in big and small brands. Normally, as I said above big brands themselves are the innovators, but funnily enough in lingerie it's really the smaller brands that are pushing innovation in terms of customer involvement or design, materials.

(3) What do brands mean to you? For me they are mainly tools of identification. That can be status related or you want to be connected to certain values that that brand stands for. I think a brand says a lot about how you want to show yourself. (Is that important to you?) To me personally not, unless i really feel like today I want to be the Adidas original girl. Then it's nice to wear a sweater with logo's on, but for me per se using brands or their name is not something I use to present myself with. (Even if a product is not branded on the outside?) No then I do care about it more, because then I know for myself that it stands out for its quality or by the design features or i had a really nice experience buying it. That for me is very nice. But that is not necessarily something I want to show to the outside.

(4) When following brands on social media, when do you feel a connection with a brand? (Do you follow brands on social media?) Yeah, I do, mostly lingerie brands or big luxury players like Vetements. (When do you feel a connection with a brand on social media?) Well when I hear a lots of people talk about a brand or saw a collection somewhere that blew my mind. Then I know that I want to receive more news from them and be updated on what they are doing. So for me it is mainly a reason to stay up to date with what they are doing.

(5) Has the relationship you have with brands changed over time? How? I guess that depends on the brand. The connection with a brand is different for every brand. In general i could observe with myself that I used to be very brand focused, in terms of identification, i wanted to see logos of brands on my clothing. While now I don't have that anymore. I feel that is outdated in our society. (So you do it as a trend following thing in fact?) While I guess unconsciously. (Would you say that social media did change the way interact with brands?) Hmm.. No not really. Also on social media, even if I follow them, for me it's just collecting information. It's not that I interact with them more. (Why don't you want to interact?) I guess I don't care about it enough to comment. (Even for those lingerie brands you say you are interested in?) No, for me it's only gathering information or seeking ideas or inspiration that i can use for myself. It's not for the company or the brand itself.

(6) What does brand loyalty mean to you? I think it still exists. For me brand loyalty plays a big role when it comes to quality. Because for instance if I buy something from a brand that I like for the brand's sake and then I see that the quality is also great, I will definitely come back to that brand over the next few years. So for me it's mainly quality related. (So do you mean that when you like a brand, the first thing you see and are attracted by are the visuals and that is the reason why you would first buy it and then the loyalty comes when the quality is right, when the ideas you had about the brand are confirmed?) Yes, exactly.

(7) Why do you buy certain brands over others? Well that again depends very much on the product itself. (Think about lingerie, I guess there are a lot of brands that might do the same things?) I only buy from the ones that are really innovative in their designs. In that category that is why I buy certain brands over others. (And why do you think some brands are innovative and others not?) Well their visuals are very different from the 'normal' conventional lingerie photography. But also the shapes, the material, the product itself stands out a lot. It is not 'beautiful' in the Victoria's Secret kind of style, it's a bit odd and has something intriguing, something i have never seen before. (Would you say that product is more important to you than marketing?) No I think that they both are at the same level. Because marketing is what gets you attracted to something.

(8) How does having branded products make you feel? It gives me this feeling of wearing something special, because I always like to buy for the quality or because I really identify with the values. So I behave differently, because for example I know it's an expensive fabric, so I cannot bike with it. I need to behave differently and that changes something in your inner conscious I would say.
(9) How do you like to be approached by brands?
I find it a little difficult when brands really try to approach me personally. So my preferred way would be for a brand to be extremely present in their specific segment and then be interesting enough to get the customer come to you. Not literally come to you, but by visiting the homepage, subscribing to a newsletter, following the social media. Then you can approach a little bit more as a brand. That for me would be the best way to be approached by a brand.

(10) To which brands do you feel personally attracted? Why do you like them?
I would say Prada, because I really like this anti-fashion statement that they've had for so many years. I mean it's not like I buy a lot from them, but I am definitely loyal to them. Belgium lingerie brand La Fille d'O, because they are portraying the woman's body in a different way, they have this body positive aspect going on that I find very inspiring. Vetements and Balenciaga because they are making fashion so much fun again. Those are a few examples of why I feel attracted to different brands for totally different reasons. (Are these brands a reflection of how you would like to dress?) Well partly, I would never put on a full look, but also because I find it interesting that certain brands manage to disrupt existing ideals or ideas of how things should be done, so I find it extremely cool when there is suddenly this new brand that wants to do things differently. (Is the narrative behind brands important to you?) Yes definitely. The storytelling comes with which models do you pick, how do you communicate, which are the words, where do you present yourself, which is all part of a narrative. I guess I see that because I study fashion, so we can connect the dots.

(11) Which brands do you think are bad in their relationship towards customers? Why?
The first thing that comes to my mind is Abercrombie & Fitch. They wanted their customer to be such a specific person, that it was too exclusive and discriminating to anybody else. That for me reaches a level that is not okay anymore. So as a brand you should of course communicate your values and have a aspirational customer, but if you say we only want to have and be worn by this person. That to me, clearly goes into the direction of discrimination and that to me you can't do as a brand. (So a brand should have an identity, but up until a certain level?) Yes.

(12) Is there anything you would like to add to this topic?
Well I guess the topic is very broad and it depends heavily on the brand itself and the category they are in. There are big differences between jewelry, fashion, and beauty. And also of course in terms of pricing, now we talk mostly about luxury brands, but for example also H&M is a brand. So for them I think being perceived as a brand is something completely different than what we just talked about.

INTERVIEW 6 (05/05/18)
Violette / 24 years old / studies Fashion & Branding

(1) What is your interest in brands in general?
Yes, I am interested because I study fashion and branding.

(2) Are there certain categories in which you feel more interested/attracted to brands? If yes, which?
Fashion, food, cosmetics. (Do you have any ideas why you prefer these categories?) Yes, because it falls under my interests. I am not interested in sportswear, because I don't do sports. I don't know anything about the swimwear market because I am never on the beach. So it's logical outcome.

(3) What do brands mean to you?
For me it's more about the product than the brand.

(4) When following brands on social media, when do you feel a connection with a brand?
Yes, glossier for example. (Why do you like Glossier?) I like their tone of voice. Gucci because i like to see what they are up to, their visual style. Rent the Runway, Prada, Apple, AirBnb. (What is it that attracts you in these brands on social media?) Because they put out interesting content that goes beyond being an advertisement, it is about their community, places. (Do you like interacting with brands?) So I don't engage; I don't comment on posts or I would not reach out to a brand unless I have a specific question for customer support. But I would talk about it with other friends that are interested in fashion.
Has the relationship you have with brands changed over time? How?

No, I think that when I was 15 I was a bit more status driven. When I was 10 I really wanted pants with the Dior monogram all over, I would not want that today. Today for me is about the product over the brand. The quality of the product, its functionalities, except for Apple. I will literally never switch to anything else. (Is that only about the product?) No, also about the status that Apple represents. I'd rather kill myself than being seen with a Microsoft laptop. But now we are talking about such a huge brand that it is a bit of an exception as well. But today is all about logomania as well. I would never get a Balenciaga logo all over written tee, but if you would ask Rumen, he would love that for sure. He loves logo's. So it's very different for everyone.

What does brand loyalty mean to you?

Yeah I don't know, I don't buy a lot of products. I am not brand loyal. (You said that you really like product for their quality, would you then still not buy a product again?) Well, in cosmetics for example I always buy the same things. The switching costs would be really high for me to change my foundation for example. But in fashion I like to be adventurous and change, so I could totally buy something from somewhere else. But I am also paying more attention to what I am buying since 6 months. So I am also buying less and I buy a lot second hand actually. (Why are you buying less?) Because of child labour. I am really trying to be more conscious and buy thing that last instead of impulses.

Why do you buy certain brands over others?

That's like Apple - why do you buy an iPhone when there is a Samsung phone? That is because what it means. Because you want to be part of that tribe and I think it is about where you want to place yourself as a person. (Is that something you are conscious about?) Yes definitely, because I study fashion branding. I have more insight than most people on this topic.

How does having branded products make you feel?

I don't own branded products, if you are talking about big brands. I have an Apple phone and computer, but I don't have shoes from designers or any designer clothing. But I can think of fur, when wearing that I feel freaking empowered and majestic. But I am not a brand fanatic. You should talk to Rumen, he really saves up for a Gucci belt or Balenciaga bag.

How do you like to be approached by brands?

Well, I don't like it. In an ideal world I would live without advertisement and publicity. But you know, we use Facebook and Instagram so that is kind of contradictionary. Advertisement is full of it there and we actually engage into it ourselves by following brands voluntarily which is basically an advertising. I follow advertising, because I am interested in fashion. So I want to see how it works - as I work in advertising myself. Hyper-personalized content is a plus. (Why is it a plus for you?) Because you always want to have personalized content that fits you rather than receiving an add for pregnant women. So it needs to be contextualized, hyper-personalized it needs to be tailored to what you already follow. All of this is what brands are actually already doing through social media platforms with targeted advertising. I like to see messages that resonate, campaigns that are more than product, I like to see something that surprises me, delights me, inspires me, rather than just seeing a product with a call to action 'buy now'. (Earlier you said you like a brand for their product, but now in the way you like to be approached, you say you do like the context of a brand right?) It is about two different things: aspirational brands and brands that you actually buy, from brands that I buy the product is actually the most important, but for aspirational brands I want to be sold a story because I can't buy the product anyway. (Would you try to save up for a product of these aspirational brands if you like their story?) Of course I want to have Gucci shoes with my first big paycheck. But no, I would not save up right now because I find it a bit ridiculous and there are more meaningful things that I can engage in. (What are more meaningful things to you?) Experiences. Why would I save up for 600 euro loafers from Gucci if it will be out of trend in two seasons, when I for the same money buy my plane ticket to New York? (So it is about prioritising as well for you?) Yes, you know it's just stuff in the end. Memories and experiences last forever.

To which brands do you feel personally attracted? Why do you like them?

My favorite brands are non-fashion brands like Airbnb, Spotify, WeTransfer, Apple, Shazam. (So you are interested in service brands, why?) Because they are actually creating value and because the interface is the brand in tech and they have managed to always make their experience evolve. Fashion brands are static. Of course it is not the same playground, so it doesn't work the same way, but for example on Spotify I think 'oh this doesn't work, I wish there was an option for that. Next month they fixed it.' They evolve all the time with us and add value to our lives. I can't imagine my life without Spotify. (So in fact you like brands that are very customer
centric? That try to serve their customers better? What is adding value to you?) It's creating, giving me access to something I normally couldn't have. Whereas a fashion brand is just taking my money for me to possess stuff. Whilst with Spotify I can access music, discover stuff. It gives me something better than owning something. You I could tell you brands I like because I like their collection, which is Proenza Schouler, but at the end of the day, this doesn't resonate with me. This doesn't add value to my life. Because it's just products that I find beautiful and that one day I am hoping to buy. But the brands that I am really in contact with everyday, that shape my world, are brands like Uber, Airbnb, Spotify. That's the brands that Millennials really like and that is why fashion brands also collaborate with them. That is where the leverage is. Tinder is a great brand. They are adding value, they are making you meet people and create experiences. You don't say we met on a dating app, you say we met on Tinder. That is why the brand is huge. It ends up in common language, that is when you know that a brand made it. Another brand I like is Rouje by Jeanne Damas, I like it because it's pretty, the products are cute, I can see myself in them. But at the end of the day, it doesn't resonate with my life day to day, so a brand like Spotify does one million times more.

(11) Which brands do you think are bad in their relationship towards customers? Why?
Off-White, Balenciaga, all the hype streetwear brands I find really empty. (Why?) It is so trend based and people are sheeps, they buy what others tell them to. It will be over in 2-3 years, it is just white noise and people become so driven by that. I find it ridiculous, but it is the economy of this industry. A brand I also really dislike is Suitsupply. Because they objectify women, they are putting marketing tricks out of their book just to feel relevant. Of course I dislike Zara, because they are just copying independent designers. I dislike Ralph Lauren because he is completely irrelevant. But I mean I don't hate them, there is something for anyone out there.

(12) Is there anything you would like to add to this topic?
People obviously define themselves through brands and of course I will rather buy Albert Heijn huismerk than a white label, because I am sensitive to design. So if something is distinctive, that plays a huge role for me. In fashion it is always to have something that is unique, that is my personality. If I see everyone with Gucci shoes, I very quickly don't want it anymore. What has changed is the cycles of me wanting something; through social media things spread faster so actually my desire for it dies much quicker than before. Even if I think something is cool, I see it on everyone and I think: I don't want this anymore. That is why I buy a lot of second hand stuff. I keep it longer, because the fabrics are better quality and it is something distinctive, that fits my style. I am not a brand fanatic in fashion, but in tech and service way more.

INTERVIEW 7 (07/05/18)
Maria / 22 years old / studies Fashion & Management

(1) What is your interest in brands in general?
I would say that I am rather product focused. I try to hunt for pieces I like, not so much for the brand in terms of do I know. I don't really follow brands in terms of Instagram, who is the new designer, these things don't interest me. (You said that you look for certain products even if the collection has past already, is that often for the same brands?) I try to stick to the same kind of brands yes. Which I first research, so I try to look for brands I like and than very naturally I discovered a lot of them. Once I find a couple of these brands of which the quality is also really good, I just stick to them and try to see what they do and what is new.

(2) Are there certain categories in which you feel more interested/attracted to brands? If yes, which?
I am not into tech brands. The categories of brands I am most interested in are clothes. But also when it comes to design, I really like the design field. (Why these categories?) What is a matter of personal taste. I am naturally attracted to fashion brands. I mean I am influenced by my studies, we learn about the quality, how something is made. Most often it is the more you know, the more you tend to appreciate it. When it comes to design, I think it is something I have natural taste for. I always liked natural wood, heavy materials, how it works, how it gets into shape. So I would say it is something I have always been attracted to.

(3) What do brands mean to you?
Not much to be honest, I do like to analyse them. I do like to look at the way they work, the message they have, because I find it fascinating to see how they can communicate with their target consumer. But I believe that I am not the perfect target for them, because I am very relentless to get into the communication loop. I try to be on social media as little as I can, I have because of my studies a critical point of view on campaigns. Before I
interact with a brand, I have the tendency to analyse what’s their goal and marketing strategy. I am interested in the functioning of a brand, but not in a personal connection.

(4) When following brands on social media, when do you feel a connection with a brand? I do on Instagram, but I see that I am not so interested in them. I see that I am more interested by accounts which are artsy. Even though they show a brand, it is more shown from a photography perspective, or it is a beautiful picture, or it is an extravagant piece of clothing, or its design or architecture. So more from that point of view. I just unfollowed Jacquemus because he started to irritate me. That the kind of Instagram account I can’t stand. Him constantly showing off who he is, what the brand stands for. I am not interested in that. I am interested in the visual aspect, and in what I can do with it. But I am not so interested in a brand telling me what they stand for and what they can give me, when I follow them.

(5) Has the relationship you have with brands changed over time? How? I think so, I think I now have a much more critical point of view because of my studies. Before I would not understand what was happening, so I was more involved. Even though I have always been a bit of an outsider. But I think I took even more distance.

(6) What does brand loyalty mean to you? There are a couple of brands that I am really loyal to. I tend to believe I have a traditional relationship with brands, because I don’t follow that branding, communication perspective of brands. I am not so interested in that. I believe that is why I can have more of a loyal relationship. I pay attention to the quality, I like certain structures of clothes. I really like quality and have a very defined taste. That is what I like and this is what I don’t like. And I think it is really hard once you have such a clear idea of the kind of clothes you want to use to dress yourself with, it’s very hard to just move to a different brand. Because if you are that specific, there is only a small category of brands that can provide you with what you want. Also there is a price category, because I cannot afford everything I want, I need to stick to this small category of brands. So yes that is why I think to a certain extent I am loyal. If you look for example on my history of the Outnet or Yoox, you can see that the brands I search for are always the same. I am not interested in everything, I want this and I stick to that. (Is it really only that you are interested in their product? Because since you say that you repeatedly look for these brands, is it then also not the case that you are interested in what they are communicating?) I am interested in their developments. I find it very funny, Solace, which I really like, I discovered them only 2 years are their start. So it’s very interesting to follow their message changes, the materials, the shapes, the pricing. But I am not so interesting in reading what they stand for, the message they want to convey. (Can you think back about the first time you came across Solace?) I saw them in a store, because I was interested in the clothes. (Why were you interested in these clothes? What did you associate them with?) I think there are different ways of communication through clothing. I think that what is important is that you have the same piece of clothing, but then depending on the way you wear it, you can communicate your identity through the way you wear it. Or you can do it via brands. I prefer the first. I’d rather incorporate a design into my own identity than the identity of a brand. I want to portray that I am part of the creative industries, I want to show through my clothes that I am not mainstream or part of the corporate environment. I want to show that it is more free, more creativity involved.

(7) Why do you buy certain brands over others? The fabric, the fit. That is the main reason. The first time when I am experimenting I would find the decor of the store interesting, or the way the whole atmosphere it portrayed. But if I would buy a shirt and get disappointed in that brand, I would never go back. But that first trigger can happens through a store. For example Scotch & Soda. If you walk in there, you are surrounded by their clear brand identity. That kind of environment may trigger you into a very positive vibe, but then I bought a couple of items of which I was not satisfied. So I never bought anything else since then. But in other cases you might have the same triggers and you buy a product and that product happens to fit your silhouette, the product can even be good. Once it suits you, you go back. (For you, can you only say something has quality when you tried it?) Not necessarily, there are certain brands of which you know they have better quality than others. (How?) because you tried. But I think you also naturally have assumptions. When I would see a Dior t-shirt, without ever trying it before, I believe the quality is good because I have certain connotations. I think there is a message that is being conveyed from one person to the other and eventually that message becomes a general assumption. When Dior shares video’s of dresses being made by hand, I will apply that aspect of quality to more things of them.

APPENDIX

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How does having branded products make you feel?
I think it always consciously adds a little feeling of satisfaction and distinctiveness. For example the earrings I am wearing that are from Shaune Leene. I first got attracted to them because of their shape, but later I found out that he was a designer that worked with Alexander McQueen. That he collaborated with McQueen for all his jewelry. So once I knew that, I definitely felt they were more precious, because Alexander McQueen stands for something big. Once you know, it can make a product even better.

How do you like to be approached by brands?
I don't like to be approached by brands, I like to choose them. I like to have the freedom to choose whether I want to communicate with them or not. I don't want them to enter in contact with me. Mostly from a data perspective. To me, when a brand approaches me, I immediately think 'what do you know about me?'. There immediately that feeling of don't get too close.

To which brands do you feel personally attracted? Why do you like them?
Solace London, MM6, all have a very particular style. Not necessarily what I buy. (Why do you like them?) The shapes. I like to play with hiding and accentuating certain styles of my body and I think that these brands do that very well. They suit my body.

Which brands do you think are bad in their relationship towards customers? Why?
When I see the campaign is not genuine, but is more a response towards what's happening in society. Then they are really trying to market too much. For example Ace and Tate had this campaign 'me, myself and I' in which they tried to show the identity of many different people such as transgender people. Which an sich is a good topic, but looking from the brand, I've never seen them doing this before. So it's a little bit of a radical change of which I wonder if it was really within the brand and they couldn't uncover it, or if it was just a radical change because they found out that they don't fit in the market enough so they take up such a strategy. When there is too much of a change in the strategy of a brand, I start thinking what is going on. (So identity is very important to you?) Oh yes, they need to be very consistent. (Do you like Ace & Tate less now?) I am not sure, I would say I would still consider them, but would go for a different brand. It is not only due to that, I also discovered that the quality is not as good as I thought. They brand that they stand for high quality, what I disagree with so for me that is a false branding. They don't stand for really good quality, they stand for an acceptable quality for that price. That kind of false advertisement I dislike. Same with sustainability. I think there is a false belief of what sustainability stands for. You have this brand Matt & Natt that brand themselves as a sustainable brand. Once I looked at the composition of their brands, I saw that the outside was made of polyester, so plastic. The only thing recycled was the lining on the inside. These kind of approaches is a strict no. I would never go for this brand, even though I need a new brand and I like their designs. Because there is false branding involved. The decision should be mine, based on transparency.

Is there anything you would like to add to this topic?
What I think that is important for you to know is that fashion is a field which is very responsive, so there is a lot of intuition going on. It can not always be measured. Some things just can't be explained. A lot comes down to luck.

INTERVIEW 8
Viola / 24 years old / studies Fashion & Branding

What is your interest in brands in general?
Actually, in the last year or two I'm becoming more conscious. So I guess also AMFI helped me. But I am paying more attention to the brand identity, if they are transparent or not. What they stand for, fairtrade, what manufacturers they work with etc. (Why do you find it important to be conscious about the brands you interact with?) Because branding in general is really fucking up people's minds and it is terrible what brands are doing. When I started realizing that, I thought fuck that shit I am really going to pay attention to this. It is not that I am interested in sustainability, but I care for the future. I am really impressed how generation Z is so smart and making a change already.

Are there certain categories in which you feel more interested/attracted to brands? If yes, which?
I think food in terms of restaurants. I like experiences, even though I say I dislike marketing. But that is the
contradiction everyone has I guess. There is one restaurant in Amsterdam that uses food that Albert Heijn throws away and turns into nice meals. That kind of concepts I find brilliant. There is another brand that is making food out of clothes, they use wool and make vegetables. Another category is clothes, because I need to wear something.

(9) What do brands mean to you?
Marketing! How people can consume more and more. And spreading their message. If a brand can make a difference - even though I know this is marketing again - by spreading a message of their identity or what they stand for, that is valuable. The problem is that being authentic is also marketing, they have to find a way to not straightforward market. For example Obey gives a part of the money they make on merchandising to charity. That is marketing, but with a good meaning behind it. So that is through a genuine value behind it.

(4) When following brands on social media, when do you feel a connection with a brand?
I follow brands for education, not for private reasons. The game changer for me was Instastories. When brands started showing their behind the scenes moments, then I feel more engaged with them. Because not everything is pretty and perfect, but real with their flaws. It creates a genuine feeling. (What kind of brands do that?) Everlane, they have the best instastories and being super transparent.

(5) Has the relationship you have with brands changed over time? How?
It depends on what brands. In the beginning some brands are super niche and then you like them, but then they become really commercial and you dislike them. Experience for me is still value, so if something is happening in a retail space or they are rebranding themselves, I can like them again.

(6) What does brand loyalty mean to you?
Being honest, if they stand for something. I think I can be loyal when I am into it. Because if you build a strong brand identity, you create also this community. And I definitely like a few brand communities. Do you know the brand 'Things I like, Things I love'? That was the first brand I really thought of 'hey... I want to be part of this group'. (Why?) Because they are selling second hand clothes, so I thought they are genuine. But they actually started to extend themselves to homewear as well. And I was really into their style, I loved their plates, their forks and I bought it all. So then I realized I really like this brand. They understand me.

(7) Why do you buy certain brands over others?
Material is very important to me. Material changes so much. So touch and feel is very important. Quality and material over the brand in my opinion.

(8) How does having branded products make you feel?
Amazing when there is no logo. Then a brand really succeeded in translating their identity even without branding and naming their products. That is really strong and powerful. (Why do you feel good when you wear something branded?) To be honest, for me it doesn't matter. I don't even know which brand dress I am wearing now. I never pay attention. I never shop at one brand. I never check brands, I just look at what I like design wise and materials.

(9) How do you like to be approached by brands?
Not straightforward. I like to be surprised. (Can you give an example of that?) Well I am definitely not a social media person - I barely spend my time on there. But as a consumer it is hard for me to say what I am attracted to. It is physiological. I feel I am into unexpected places. If there is something weird, special, that I should question. I like that. Really detailed, small things make a change.

(10) To which brands do you feel personally attracted? Why do you like them?
Things I like, Things I love. Waterlooplein market. The Reformation (Why?) Because they are the most affordable sustainable brand at the moment. (Is that the reason you like them? That they are purely sustainable?) Not only, it adds value of course. But it also the designs and the way they present themselves, that is more or less what I like. (How do they present themselves?) Classy/edgy, different combinations. A classical gown with an edgy girl in it. That is what I like, contrasting things. And that is also that I think I am, contrasting. I also like vintage shops, because they have nice materials and make me feel as I am doing the right thing. I am not a superbrand person, I never go to Kalverstraat. I do really like online shopping on Asos. Or exchanging clothing on Facebook. It is pointless to spend so much money on something that I'll wear three times, so it's better to just swap.
Which brands do you think are bad in their relationship towards customers? Why?
I dislike brands that make stupid campaigns. Like Pepsi selling activism with Kendall Jenner. Brands that don't understand their place in culture. For example in the US there is a big issue with gun violence and then there was this Asian influencer who wore a t-shirt embroidered with a gun and a saying in the realms of 'I don't give what they say' and she didn't mean it. It was just a t-shirt she was promoting. But she didn't realize that in the US it is such a big issue that a lot of people care about.

Is there anything you would like to add to this topic?