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# Niche Brands: Understanding how niche fashion startups connect with Millennials

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate and understand how niche fashion startups brand toward Millennials. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are becoming an important segment of the global population. Specifically, this study is designed to investigate if niche fashion brands successfully target and brand to Millennials consumers compared to mass-market brands on the following brand traits: brand self-congruency, perceived quality, brand prestige, brand loyalty, brand tribalism, and brand user image congruency.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Two online surveys were conducted to compare Gap (mass- retailer) and Everlane (niche brand) on the seven brand components, and 46 valid surveys were collected.

**Findings** – The study revealed that Everlane performed better than Gap on three branding elements (brand tribalism, brand user image congruency, and brand prestige suggesting that not only the Integrated Marketing Communications efforts taken by Everlane are targeting Millennials, but that through IMC, Everlane is crafting brand equity among the cohort. This study provides a model to study other Millennials and analyze the company against a comparable mass-market competitor.

**Research limitations/implications** – Limitations for this study come from three sources: (1) the representativeness of the sample, (2) limited sampled brands, and (3) influence of other factors. Implications for brand managers, marketers, and retailers focus on strategies that influence the social and self-motivation for luxury consumption and level of brand consciousness.

**Originality/value** – This research is unique and significant because it focuses on understanding the consumer behavior of Millennial consumers, an important segment in the market that is growing in market power. The study is the first to analyze new startups coined as ‘niche brands’ that are targeting Millennials and compare them to mass-market retailers.

## **Keywords**

Millennials, Generation Y consumers, fashion, Brand consciousness, Consumption motivation, Brand influence, Brand loyalty, Niche brands

## **Disciplines**

Business

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Understanding how niche fashion startups  
connect with Millennials

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WH 399

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Joseph Wharton Scholar Senior Thesis

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## Introduction

This paper examines the rise of niche fashion startups, defined as up and coming brands that craft their business, marketing, and growth strategy around their unique selling proposition, and their ability to respond to the needs of Millennials. Some examples of niche fashion startups include Bow & Drape, a retailer that makes customized fashion that is designed by their customers. The company describes itself: “We are the brand that inspires smart, stylish women to make a statement. We celebrate self-expression and provide our community easy-to-use tools to play with fashion like no other brand” (2013). Another niche brand, Glossier, started to build its loyal customer base through social media before launching a makeup and skincare line sold online. Glossier hopes to not only build a beauty movement, but redefine shopping for beauty, because “beauty should be fun, easy, imperfect, and personal” (2014). Mansur Gavriel is another niche brand known for their bucket bags and other leathered goods and credited for creating the “First Post-Recession It Bag” (Sherman, 2015).

Bow & Drape, Glossier, and Mansur Gavriel have gained much publicity in the fashion community over the last couple of years for their large social media following, strong brand personality, very specific point of differentiation, and growing popularity among young fashion shoppers. The brands’ loyal customer base includes Millennials, or Generation Y, who are the demographic cohort after Generation X that represent the largest generation since the Baby Boomers (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennials, unlike their parents’ generation, are highly brand conscious (Fernandez, 2009) and display a high level of brand-signaling importance (Loro and Helgeson, 2013) and status consumption (Eastman and Liu, 2012). However, they are not as brand loyal as older generations (Little, 2012).

As the generation moves forward into the workforce, Millennials are gaining economic power, estimated at approximately \$600 billion annually (Kennedy, 2001). Marketers in the retailing industry have been realizing the economic power of this generation, and thus are allocating more spending towards market research to understand this consumer segment and adjusting their marketing budgets to target the generation's specific consumer needs (Lazarevic, 2011). Currently, there is much research on the traits and consumer behavior of Millennials and there is a growing amount of studies that examine marketing strategies that marketers can utilize to market to the cohort. In the marketing and retailing literature, there is much research on the increasing need for niche marketing in a crowded fashion industry. However, the existing research does not examine examples of brands that target Millennials based on the strategies that work based on empirical research. Additionally, there is no research that studies new companies that target only the young consumers and examines their success in the market.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the new group of fashion brands, niche brands, follow the empirical models for marketing and branding toward Millennials and utilize it to better brand to the cohort compared to mass-market retailers. This research study will further the discussion on consumer shopping behavior of Millennials and the marketing strategies firms can utilize to target them. Additionally, it will continue the existing research that explains how marketers can target this consumer segment as well as provide an explanation for the success of brands that currently target Millennials.

## Review of Literature

This literature review will cover two subjects: Millennials and branding. The first section will review the research on branding, specifically niche marketing, digital marketing, brand personality, and brand loyalty. In the second section, there will be an exploration of research defining Millennials and their consumer behavior, and then examine the marketing approaches that have been identified that specifically target this segment.

## **Branding**

Davis (1992) argues that a retailer's brand should perform four functions: (1) the ability to differentiate, (2) command a price premium, (3) have a separate existence to the corporation, and (4) provide a form of psychic value to consumers. In a crowded market, branding is critical for differentiating retailers from their competitors. There are many established definitions for brand orientation. Balmer (2013) defines brand orientation as "a category of institution in which the corporate brand specifically acts as the cornerstone - and, moreover, the centripetal force - that informs and guides the organization, especially in relation to its core philosophy and culture." Urde defines brand orientation as "an approach in which the processes of the organization revolve around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers with the aim of achieving lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands (Urde, 1999).

Bridson and Evans further conceptualize brand orientation by defining it as "the degree to which the organization values brands and its practices are oriented towards building brand capabilities". The four capabilities that create brand orientation are distinctiveness, functionality, value adding, and symbolic (Bridson and Evans, 2004). Birtwistle and Freathy (1998) suggest that for fashion retailers to maintain a competitive advantage they need to translate their core



values into a coherent brand strategy. The more brand-oriented the fashion retailer, the greater its retail offer advantage over competitors (Bridson & Evans, 2004). The brand orientation may enable retailers to have various advantages including trading format advantage, customer communication advantage, customer service advantage, and merchandise advantage (Bridson & Evans, 2004).

Consumers are increasingly seeking products that differ from the mainstream, thus companies regard niche markets as a promising opportunity beyond saturated mass markets (Schaefers, 2014). Niche brands represent a clear point of differentiation because these brands “embody a specific product philosophy and thus attract particular consumer groups” (Hendarwan, 2002). Toften and Hammervoil (2010) examined how niche marketing also creates strong strategic capabilities. The strategic capabilities of niche firms focus on three aspects of the value chain: inbound logistics, production, and marketing and sales. The study also highlighted the importance of access to and high-quality materials to enable niche firms to deliver high quality products to customers as well as the importance of a “close” and “personal friendship” with customers that enables a long-term relationship fostered on “trust, reliability, honesty, alliance, and commitment” (Toften and Hammervoil, 2010).

Another potential source of competitive advantage for retailers are the fashion communities that surrounds style and brands. Marketers, consumers, and bloggers together form a community that shape the brand and its perceptions, and thus marketers should manage these communities (Pihl, 2014). The more brand-oriented the fashion retailer, the greater its retail offer advantage over competitors (Bridson & Evans, 2004). Gromark and Frans (2011) looked to understand the impact of brand orientation on financial performance. Their findings provide

empirical evidence of a significant positive relationship between brand orientation and profitability, showing that the most brand-oriented companies in this study have almost doubled the profitability of the least brand-oriented companies. The real value of a corporate brand comes from the customers and other stakeholders who possess emotional ownership toward the corporate brand (Balmer, 2013). In order to maintain a strong brand orientation, Balmer outlines three responsibilities of the organization: custodianship, or managing the brand, credibility, living and releasing the brand, and calibration, sustaining and evaluating the brand (2013). Marketers should constantly manage their brand personality and brand image due to the importance of user image congruity and usage image congruity are strong indicators of brand loyalty (Liu et al., 2012). Brand loyalty is thus the “final dimension of consumer brand resonance symbolizing the consumer’s ultimate relationship with a brand (Erdoğan & Budeyri-Turan, 2012). Brand loyalty is an important dimension in the fashion industry and is heavily studied because it is essential to obtain competitive advantage and ensure profitability in such a competitive industry.

## **Millennials**

William Strauss and Neil Howe authored a book titled *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, and are widely credited with naming the Millennials (Horowitz, 2012). They are unlike any other cohort; Strauss and Howe describe the members of the generation as “more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse” (2000). Many scholars define different parameters for the birth years of Millennials, however Strauss and Howe define

Millennials as individuals born between 1982 and 2000, comprising the second-largest generation cohort in the United States.

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are in their 20s and 30s, are young and establishing themselves in the workforce, the cohorts have been labeled as representing the next largest generation in terms of size and purchasing power (Paul, 2001). Generation Y are young, socially active people who keep up with the trends, and are excited toward life (Erdoğan and Budeyri-Turan, 2012). Millennials, who also tend to be more fashion conscious compared to other generations, are grabbing much attention to corporations. Bakewell et al. note that not only do they have a large purchasing power, two-thirds of which goes to purchasing clothing (2006). Thus retail managers want to understand this highly valued consumer segment in order to build products and marketing strategies to fulfill their attitudes and needs.

There is much research on the marketing considerations when targeting Millennials. Marketers are interested in understanding Generation Y as they are resistant to traditional marketing efforts and difficult to capture and retain as loyal consumers (Lazarevic, 2011). Erdoğan and Budeyri-Turan (2012) examined the role of functional (perceived quality) and symbolic brand associations (personality congruence and brand prestige) in creating brand loyalty in the ready-to-wear sector from the perspective of Generation Y consumers. The findings reveal that perceived quality has a direct positive effect on brand loyalty, suggesting appearance and product quality perception are critical in the preferences of Generation Y consumers, while personality congruence and brand prestige have an indirect positive effect on brand loyalty. Thus managers should focus on “the appearance quality together with product

quality, and construct a high quality and prestigious brand image with the personality traits of sincerity, competence, and excitement” (Erdoğan & Budeyri-Turan, 2012).

When it comes to media usage, Millennials enjoy using the internet, social media, and other digital channels. According to studies by eMarketer, nearly all millennials are internet users, and about nine in ten online millennials use social networks (Baron et. al., 2015).

Millennials’ social media usage has also been increasing: 34% of the 18- to 22-year-olds reported spending more time at it than a year earlier, vs. 19% spending less (Baron et. al., 2015). While marketers are eager to tap into these social networks to connect with young consumers, it is no sure thing that a millennial shopper will be greatly influenced by what transpires there (Baron et. al. 2015). The implications of these findings is that marketers must form a concrete online relationship with Millennials to have influence on their buying behavior (Taken Smith ,2012). Forming a relationship with Millennials also leads to brand loyalty according to Lazarevic (2012). She relies on generational and branding theory to propose a brand loyalty model that highlights the importance of integrated marketing communications theory, branding and celebrity endorsement to build a relationship between the generation Y consumer and the brand, thus leading to increased brand loyalty.

Successful branding requires strong bonds with consumers. The current literature offers conceptualization on corporate branding and brand orientation, as well as defines frameworks for developing and managing a brand toward consumer segments, including the growing Millennial generation. However, there is a void in current research that examines whether there are brands that exist in the market that target Millennials based on the frameworks identified and analyze their capabilities to create brand loyalty. The hypothesis for a future study will propose that

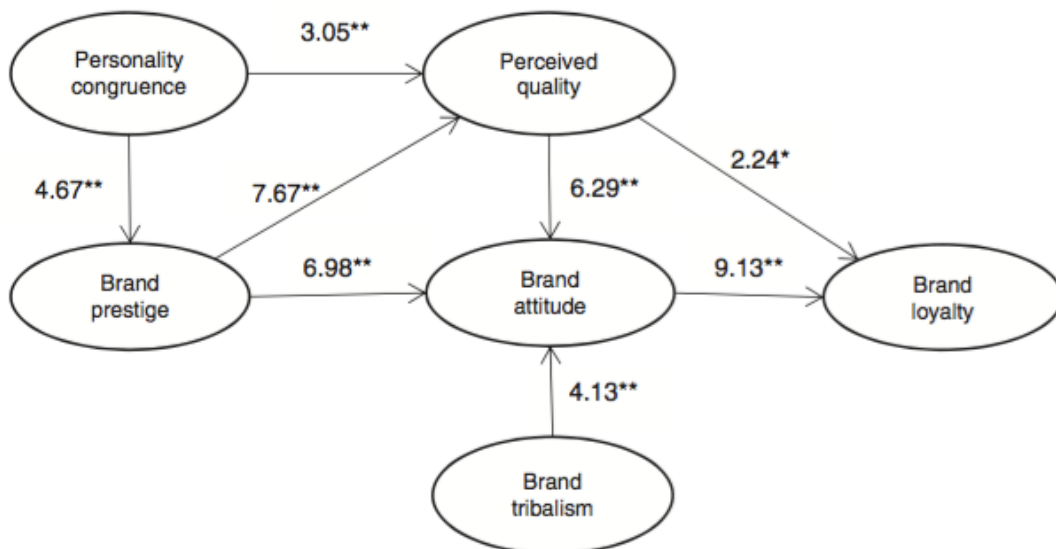
niche fashion labels startups with strong brand personalities, large online presence, and unique selling proposition target Millennials.

## Hypothesis Development

### Research Models

The research model used is presented in Esmailpour (2015), which the researchers developed based on the previous research by Kim et al. (2009), Sirgy (1982b), Moisescu (2009) and Baldinger and Rubinson (1996). This model presents personality congruence, perceived quality and brand prestige as independent factors that affect Generation Y's brand attitude and brand loyalty as dependent variables for niche fashion brands. The model also includes personality congruence, perceived quality, and brand prestige concepts are correlated to each other. The proposed model was adjusted after research was conducted and resulted in all of their hypotheses being supported or partially supported, however the interrelationships between branding elements were different than assumed.

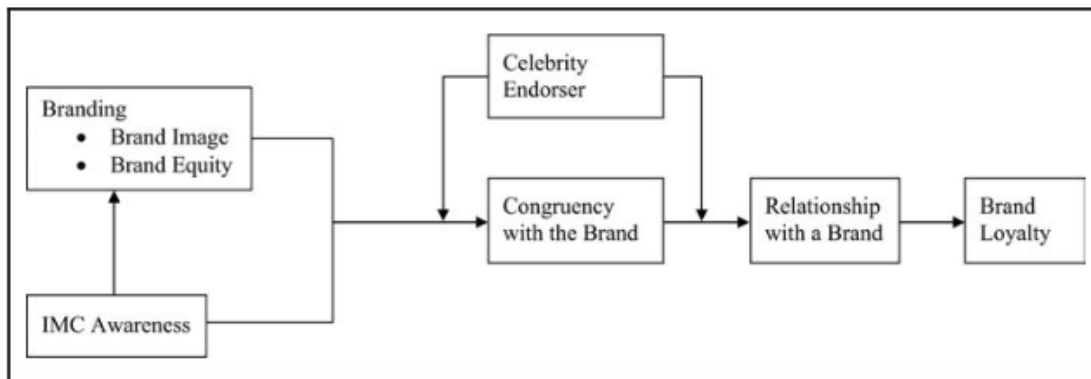
**Exhibit 1:** Brand Loyalty Model- Esmailpour (2015)



The methods in which brands create brand loyalty is identified through the brand loyalty model constructed by Violet Lazarevic (2011). This model identifies the marketing tools in which marketers can increase brand loyalty among Millennials.

**Exhibit 2:** Proposed Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) Model

Lazarevic (2011)



Based on these models and previous research the following hypotheses have been developed that will be tested in this study. These hypotheses are developed directly from the many examples found in the review of literature.

**Hypotheses**

Brand attitudes are defined as consumers' overall evaluations of a brand. Brand attitudes are important because they often form the basis for consumer behavior (Keller, 1993). The positive influence of attitude towards the brand on brand loyalty is empirically proved (Eren-Erdogmus and Budeyri-Turan, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Esmaeilpour, 2015). Thus:

H1. Brand attitude among Millennial consumers is higher for niche fashion brands compared to mass-market retailers.

Perceived quality is one of the key dimensions of brand equity (Aaker, 1996) and is defined as the consumer's judgement about the superiority or excellence of a product (Zeithaml, 1988). Aaker and Keller "believed perceived quality in the branding context can be both the customer's perception of overall quality and an intangible, overall feeling about the brand" (Hsu et al., 2012, Esmailpour, 2015). The positive influence of perceived quality towards the brand on brand loyalty is empirically proved (Eren-Erdogmus and Budeyri-Turan, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Esmailpour, 2015). Thus:

H2. Perceived quality among Millennial consumers is higher for niche fashion brands compared to mass-market retailers.

User image is defined as "the set of human characteristics or traits associated with the typical user of a brand" (Aaker, 1997). Self-congruence theory in consumer behavior research suggests that a relationship exists between the personality congruence (consumer's self – product image congruency) and consumer choice (Sirgy, 1982). Much research has shown that consumers like, prefer, and become loyal to brands and products that are congruent with their actual or ideal self-concepts (Dolich, 1969; Landon, 1974; Cowart et al., 2007;). The positive influence of perceived quality towards the brand on brand loyalty is empirically proved (Eren-Erdogmus and Budeyri-Turan, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Esmailpour, 2015). Thus:

H3. Measured brand user image congruency among Millennial consumers is higher for niche fashion brands compared to mass-market retailers.

H4. Measured brand prestige among Millennial consumers is higher for niche fashion brands compared to mass-market retailers.

Brand communities and consumer brand relationships both are meant by their commonalities. The internet has encouraged the formation of brand consumer the idea that brands can create consumer communities (Cova and White, 2010). Strong brand relationships are known as tribes. A tribe is a social network of heterogeneous individuals who linked together by shared emotion (Taute and Sierra, 2014). Tribalism “creates belonging, identity, family, community, teams, and nations” (Dixon, 2005). Prior studies has shown that identification with a particular brand community has positive effect on loyalty to that brand (Cova and White, 2010). Brand tribe is positively related to the consumer brand relationship which can explain consumers’ thoughts and feelings about the brand. The positive influence of brand tribalism towards the brand on brand loyalty is empirically proved (Eren-Erdogmus and Budeyri-Turan, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Esmaeilpour, 2015). Thus:

H5. Brand tribalism among Millennial consumers is higher for niche fashion brands compared to mass-market retailers.

The positive influence of the aforementioned branding elements towards the brand on brand loyalty is empirically proved (Eren-Erdogmus and Budeyri-Turan, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Esmaeilpour, 2015). Thus:

H6. Brand loyalty among Millennial consumers is higher for niche fashion brands compared to mass-market retailers.



The Lazarevic model identifies the marketing tools in which marketers can increase brand loyalty among Millennials (2011). IMC is defined as “integrating a variety of convincing messages across various forms to communicate with and develop relationships with customers” (Eagle et al., 2007). According to Lazarevic, IMC can be used to increase brand loyalty, but the approach needs to be unique for the distinctive Millennials (2011). For this cohort, in particular, marketing communications are essential for making consumers Y familiar with the brand and what it stands for and conveying the relevance to them (Wood, 2004). “When generation Y consumers have cognitively assessed a product as better than the market alternatives then, they develop a perception of high quality and brand equity” (Zeithaml, 1988) which is needed to appeal to success values of generation Y consumers. Thus:

P1. Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) can increase the awareness of the brand among Millennials and convey brand messages which are crucial for the brand to be able to consistently express the identity of the generation Millennials to others.

P2. IMC is used to convey a consistent brand image and build up brand equity to achieve a match of values between the Millennials and the brand.

These hypotheses were not tested directly, but helped to shape the research design and how to analyze the niche brands.

## Methodology

### **Research Design**

Two questionnaires (see **Exhibit 1** and **Exhibit 2** in Appendix) were constructed to collect data: one survey to measure branding components on a niche brand, Everlane, and one survey to measure branding components on a ‘mass-market retailer’, Gap. Everlane, launched in 2011, is known for their niche products - modern basics for men and women. As an e-commerce retailer, the brand is seen as a “disruptor” in the crowded market for high-end basic clothing (Lieber, 2015). Its point of differentiation is not only selling modern basics, but their openness with customers, what its founder refers to “Radical Transparency” (Lieber, 2015). The company also does not engage in paid marketing, and solely relies on social media and public relations (Burke, 2015). Everlane was selected for the research for being a more well-known startup, characterized as “one of the most interesting, innovative companies in the industry” (Avins, 2016). Everlane’s marketing philosophy and business model fit the niche brand definition and suited the study.

The other study used Gap as the mass-market retailer, which can be defined as a “a company that sells affordably priced products that appeal to a wide variety of consumers” (Investopedia, 2014). The American retailer sells American classics and basics for men, women, and children. The brand sells through brick and mortar stores as well as an ecommerce platform, and the company uses a wide range of marketing channels to reach consumers (Traxler, 2013). Gap’s mass appeal and popularity fit the mass-retailer definition and suited the study. Gap and Everlane were selected as the two retailers because both serve an overlapping market and sell basics for both men and women. The broad merchandise for both genders allowed for a higher likelihood to be popular with a wide range of respondents, or the ability to be seen as attractive among respondents who were not familiar with the brands. This

was important because a selection of retailers who have a smaller marketed would have limited the target population for this study as the respondents should match the target market.

The surveys were created using Google Forms. The surveys were sent out to U.S. university students that are part of the Millennial cohort. The relative homogeneity of students in terms of their age, intelligence and income (Liu et al., 2012) is one reason for choosing university students as sample in this study. However, there are other definitions of Millennials that includes a broader age range of 18 to 35, depending on the study (Eastman and Liu, 2012; Strauss and Howe, 2000).

### **Survey Instrument**

The surveys were estimated to take 10-15 minutes for a thorough completion. The first part of the survey included multiple-choice demographic questions on gender and age. These questions were included to ensure the desired target population was sampled. Respondents outside of the age range were forwarded to the end of the survey. The following section of the the survey provided information about the selected retailer. The information included the founding story, point of differentiation, print ads, social media posts, and distribution information about the retailer. This information was taken directly from the company websites, social media channels, or interviews with the founders. The respondents were asked to read the information. A link to the company website was also provided for respondents to learn more. The marketing and business strategy information was provided to indicate the type of retailer respondents would be asked about and to also be to make judgements on the retailers branding. It was important to provide a wide range of unbiased information, but not too much to overwhelm the respondents.

The following section asked respondents whether they considered themselves fashion-conscious, and whether they were familiar with the selected brand.

The final section and the bulk of the survey were 22 likert scale questions adopted from previous research. The items were adopted from Eren-Erdogmus and Budeyri-Turan (2012) who measured perceived quality, brand prestige, brand attitude, and brand loyalty. The measurements of user imagery congruence, and brand tribalism is adopted from Esmaeilpour (2015). The questions were narrowed down to keep the section under 25 questions and to eliminate questions that were not as relevant. Respondents were asked to rank the items on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A potential problem that was avoided in the design of the survey was having respondents be unaware of the selected brand. This was avoided by including information about the retailer prior to likert-scale questions so that respondents could become familiar with the brand. Additionally the length of the questionnaire was managed to not make it too lengthy for respondents.

## **Data Analysis**

A total of 46 completed and valid responses were collected, 23 for the Gap questionnaire, and 22 for the Everlane questionnaire. The responses were uploaded to JMP software. Confirmatory factor analysis was completed, and two sample t-test was used to analyze the data.

## **Results**

### **Sample Profile**

A descriptive analysis of the results showed the general demographic information of the sample (Table I). The final sample consisted of disproportionate gender ratio, with 91.3% female respondents for the Gap questionnaire and 77.27% female respondents for the Everlane questionnaire. The age specifications were well met for the sample with 100% being between the ages of 18-24.

**Table I:** Sample Characteristics

	Gap	Everlane	Total
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	2(8.7%)	5 (22.73%)	7 (15.56%)
Female	21(91.3%)	17 (77.27%)	38 (84.4%)
<b>Age</b>			
18-24	23 (100%)	22 (100%)	45 (100%)

Descriptive analyses of the key constructs (Table II) indicated that on all variables measured, Everlane had a higher average rating among the sample on all variables except brand loyalty. There is a close margin for brand loyalty with Everlane (3.181) scoring slightly higher than Gap (3.196). Gap ranked low on elements of brand tribalism (2.185), brand user image congruency (2.246), and slightly higher on brand prestige (2.809). Respondents rated Everlane with a moderate rating of brand tribalism (3.102) and brand user image congruency (2.939) as well as a high rating of brand prestige (3.627). Responders rated Gap moderately on perceived quality (3.188) and brand attitude (3.116), but was still lower than how respondents rated Everlane on perceived quality (3.333) and brand attitude (3.485).

**Table II.:** Descriptive results for the key constructs

Variable Measured	Average Rating (on a five-point scale)	
	Everlane	Gap
Perceived Quality	3.333	3.188
Brand Prestige	3.627	2.809
Brand Attitude	3.485	3.116
Brand Loyalty	3.181	3.196
Brand Tribalism	3.102	2.130
Brand User Image Congruency	2.939	2.246

### Measurement model

A factor analysis (FA) was conducted to confirm the variable loads and correlation between specific items. After removing one item with poor loading, the FA results revealed satisfactory goodness of fit indices with Chi-square value of 133.606 and  $P=0.001$ . Table III depicts the items with factor loadings.

**Table III.:** Measurement Items with Factors Loadings

Item	Item Loading
<b>Perceived Quality</b>	
Products having this brand's name are of good quality	0.9948
Its products are flawless	0.9557
Its products are reliable	0.5851
<b>Brand Prestige</b>	

Item	Item Loading
The brand represents the latest lifestyles	0.7958
This brand is prestigious	0.7158
It tells something about one's social status	0.5123
It is associated with wealth	0.4788
The brand is attractive	0.7856
<b>Brand Attitude</b>	
My opinion of this brand is very favorable	0.9689
I think this brand is a very desirable product	0.6794
I think this brand is a very good product	0.6111
<b>Brand Loyalty</b>	
I would recommend this brand to other people	0.5492
I would repurchase this brand	0.8511
I intend to buy this brand in the near future	0.7242
I would actively search for this brand in order to buy it	0.6242
<b>Brand Tribalism</b>	
Owners or users of this brand have a bond	0.8742
People who own or use this brand differentiate themselves from non-owners or non-users of this brand	0.7195
I see myself as part of this brand community	0.6057

Item	Item Loading
People who use this brand are much more like me than people who use other brands	0.5219
<b>Brand User Image Congruency</b>	
I can identify with those people who prefer this brand over other brands	0.7064
The image of the user of this brand is highly consistent with how I see myself	0.7111
I am very much like the typical person who prefers to use this brand rather than other brands	0.9811

### Hypothesis Testing

A two-sample t-test was conducted to compare the ratings for Everlane and Gap. As proposed by Hypotheses 3, 4 and 5, consumers responded for higher on elements on brand prestige, brand user image congruency, and brand tribalism for Everlane than for Gap, ( $t=4.47$   $p=0.001$ ,  $t=4.405$   $p=0.001$ ,  $t=2.367$   $p=0.024$ , respectively.) Although the average ratings for perceived quality and brand attitude were higher for Everlane, it was not statistically significant ( $t=1.24$   $p=0.223$ ,  $t=1.36$   $p=0.182$  and thus Hypotheses 1 and 2 were inconclusive. Hypothesis 6 was not supported as brand loyalty was rated higher for Gap among the respondents and it was not statistically significant ( $t=-0.05$   $p=0.959$ ).

**Table IV:** Hypotheses Test Results

Variable Measured	Brand Rated Higher	T Ratio (P)
Perceived Quality	Everlane	1.24 (P=0.223)
Brand Prestige	Everlane	4.47 (P=0.001)
Brand Attitude	Everlane	1.36 (P=0.182)



Variable Measured	Brand Rated Higher	T Ratio (P)
Brand Loyalty	Gap	-0.05 (P=0.959)
Brand Tribalism	Everlane	4.41 (P=0.001)
Brand User Image Congruency	Everlane	2.367 (P=0.024)

## Discussion & Implications

Millennials are growing in economic power across the world, and marketers are looking to understand the consumer behavior behind this cohort in order to target them through new products, services, and marketing campaigns. Concurrently, new startups are entering the retail market that are attempting to target Millennials. This study continues the study of Generation Y by analyzing the customer behavior of the cohort and examining the success of the new niche brands' ability to attract them compared to mass-market retailers. Among the branding elements mentioned, only brand prestige, brand tribalism, and brand user image congruency were rated higher for Everlane and was statistically significant.

Everlane's higher average rating on perceived quality was not statistically significant. This was surprising as Everlane highlights in the marketing the quality of their product and articulates it through their point of differentiation, 'Radical Transparency'. However, Gap has a longer history of providing quality clothing to consumers; this may have been a non-measured factor that affected the respondents' views of the retailer compared to Everlane. The brand attitude hypothesis was also not statistically significant.

Everlane had performed better on brand prestige. Millennials consider a brand prestigious when they expect it to be a higher quality (Esmaeilpour, 2015). Thus through the marketing

communications Everlane utilizes, the retailer has crafted a prestigious image. Everlane also performed better on brand user image congruency compared to Gap. Everlane has conducted much research on its target customer and Millennials have been identified as its target customer (Lieber, 2015). This research helps Everlane to craft a brand personality that is congruent with its consumers which emphasized through its public relations (Esmailpour, 2015). Brand tribalism was higher for Everlane, a company that addresses customers in marketing as “us” and creates a motivated feeling to join the brand tribe. Additionally, the various positive public relations articles written about Everlane helped to create and approve the brand tribe (Lieber, 2015; Avins, 2016; Hoffman, 2016).

This study also helped to demonstrate the predictions identified in the hypotheses from the Lazarevic research. Over 63 percent of the respondents who took the Everlane survey were unfamiliar with the Everlane brand, and thus the respondents were able to gather brand awareness and understand the brand from the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) selected and depicted in the survey, demonstrating the first prediction. Although the second prediction was not incorporated into the research design, it is important to note that consistent language is articulated in Everlane’s marketing materials. Continued research should be conducted to test these predictions in regards to niche brands such as Everlane.

## Conclusion

This study is significant as it furthers the discussion on consumer shopping behavior of Millennials and the marketing and branding strategies firms can utilize to target them as well as provide empirical research that explains the success of brands that currently target Millennials. Thus this study contributes to literature on branding, Generation Y, and the retailing industry. The

implications of this paper will impact the work of marketers, brand managers, and retailers who are interested in targeting this customer segment or who are trying to reach them through more effective marketing campaigns and marketing strategies. By confirming the models used by Lazarevic and Esmailpour, managers will be able to develop a more concrete model to determine how to allocate marketing spend toward building brand loyalty among Millennials.

This study also examines and defines niche brands, emerging startups that craft their business, marketing, and growth strategy around their unique selling proposition, and their ability to respond to the needs of Millennials. As many of these brands have seen much success and publicity, more startups and establish retailers will copy their model to target Millennials. This research helped to define the relationship between the niche brands' IMC and their brand loyalty among Generation Y, which will be influential in capturing the growing economic power of the cohort.

### Limitations and Further Research

The findings contribute to the field of consumer behavior as well as marketing. However there are a number of limitations to the research. The first limitation comes from the sample of the study. With less than 50 responses, the sample size is very small. Further research should be conducted that expands the sample size to at least 150 responses. Additionally, the sample is not representative of both genders and may or not be representative of the Millennial generation. Additional demographic information can be collected to understand the respondents and control the representatives of the sample.

This research used Gap and Everlane as the two retailers used to compare results. A limitation of this approach is that this represents only one pair of retailers and may not be representative of other niche brands and mass-market retailers. Further research should be conducted to measure the branding components for various retailers. Studies should also be conducted that asks respondents to select their favorite or most familiar retailer from a list of niche brands and mass-market retailers. This research design would reduce the bias from the researchers' selection of retailers.

A third limitation is that other factors may be affecting how respondents view the selected retailers, and thus affecting their responses. Some of these factors include but are not limited to brand's reputation, brand's credibility, limited information, and other sources of respondent perceptual bias. However, this limitation is difficult to limit as the branding and marketing efforts are sources of the biases. Additional open-ended questions could be added to understand what respondents perceive of the brands and what channels they have used to gather information to form an opinion of the brands. The inclusion of the open-ended questions is a way to pinpoint the sources of the bias rather than attempting to eliminate the bias from the study.

Finally, this research, combined with the findings of the previous research of Lazarevic, Erdoğmuş, and Büdeyri-Turan identify the branding elements that can be manipulated to attract and market to Millennials. However, branding and marketing are subjective topics; specific marketing tactics are not identified, but are necessary to be able to carry out the marketing objectives. Additionally, Both retailers had social conscious policies and branding that could be studied as a branding element that influences brand loyalty. Further research and case studies of startups like Everlane should be conducted to reveal specific integrated marketing

communications tactics and strategies that new and established companies can utilize to market to Millennials.

## Appendix

Exhibit 1: Everlane Questionnaire

# Millennial Branding Survey

Thank you for filling out this survey! This will be used for my thesis research. The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please reach out to me.

\* Required

## Demographic Questions

### 1. Age \*

Mark only one oval.

- under 18      *After the last question in this section, skip to "Thank You."*
- 18-24
- 25-32
- 33-39
- over 39      *After the last question in this section, skip to "Thank You."*

### 2. Gender \*

Mark only one oval.

- Male
- Female

Please read the following information about Everlane, an e-commerce startup selling men and women's modern basics. Everlane relies only on social media rather than traditional marketing and has no brick-and-mortar stores.

# EVERLANE

## Founding Story

---

In the fall of 2010, a then 25-year-old Michael Preysman left his job in venture capital to start his own business.

He never expected to work in fashion, but a passion for great design and frustration with the lack of innovation in the retail space, led him to build Everlane. He hasn't looked back.

"We've set out to challenge the system and offer designer-quality essentials at great and honest

prices. No tricks. No middlemen taking their cut. No crazy brand markups. Just a new collection of essentials launched each month at half the typical cost. No exceptions."



 **everlane**  
Everlane FOLLOW

2,244 likes 1w

**everlane** The first ever physical showroom is here. When are you coming to visit? First showing this Friday. Details via the link in our profile.

Designed by [@brookandlyn](#). Head to their account to learn about all the details that went into making this a reality.

[#SFOpenOffice](#)

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[hannahkatkov @ricardoxcamargo](#)

[brookandlyn](#) Thanks for being so awesome!

[belardiostroy](#) Beautifully deigned showroom! Please Check out our latest post featuring [@everlane](#)

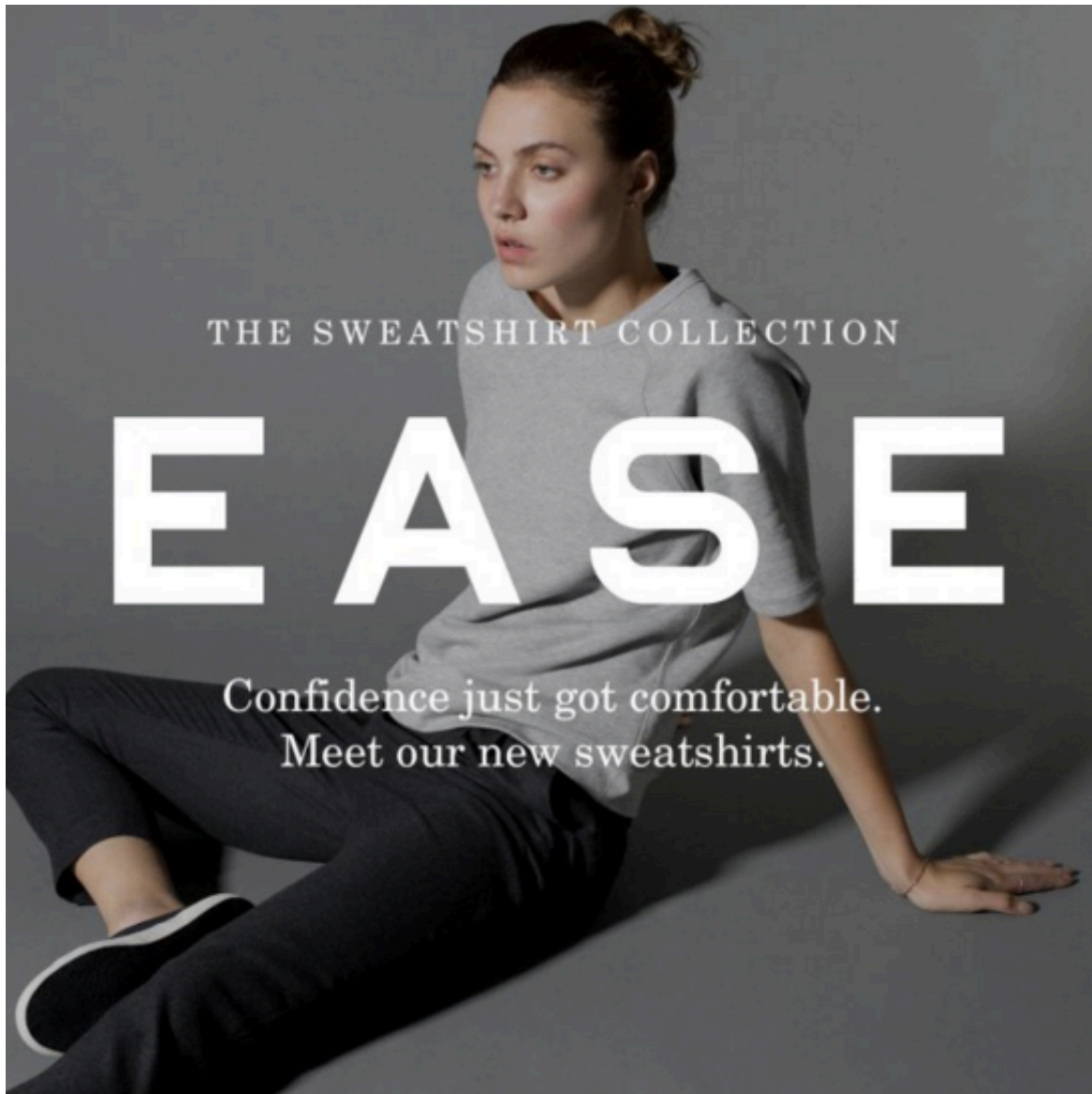
[lifestylebyps @its\\_iam\\_mr](#)

[ivyleaguesaur @everlane](#) are physical

 Add a comment... ⋮







# Radical Transparency

Know your factories. Know your costs.  
Always ask why.



## Point of Differentiation

**KNOW YOUR FACTORIES** -We spend months finding the best factories around the world—the very same ones that produce your favorite designer labels. We visit them often, and build strong personal relationships with the owners.

**KNOW YOUR COSTS**-We believe customers have the right to know what their products cost to make. At Everlane we reveal our true costs, and then we show you our markup.

**ALWAYS ASK WHY**-We constantly challenge the status quo. Nothing is worse than complacency, and as a brand our culture is to dissect every single decision we make at every level of the company.

We know our customers are also rule breakers and questioners, so we hope this philosophy is palpable in the products and choices we make. And by all means, challenge us too.

For more information, visit their website: <https://www.everlane.com/>.

**3. Do you consider yourself fashion conscious?***Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No

**4. Are you familiar with this brand? \****Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No

## Untitled Section

Please answer the following questions about Everlane.

**5. The brand is attractive \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**6. Products having this brand's name are of good quality \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**7. Its products are flawless \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**8. Its products are reliable \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**9. The brand represents the latest lifestyles \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**10. This brand is prestigious \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**11. It tells something about one's social status \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**12. It is associated with wealth \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**13. I think this brand is a very good product \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**14. My opinion of this brand is very favorable \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

15. **I think this brand is a very desirable product \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

## Untitled Section

16. **I would recommend this brand to other people \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

17. **I would repurchase this brand \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

18. **I intend to buy this brand in the near future \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

19. **I would actively search for this brand in order to buy it \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

20. **Owners or users of this brand have a bond \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

21. **People who own or use this brand differentiate themselves from non-owners or non-users of this brand \***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

22. **I see myself as part of this brand community \***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

23. **People who use this brand are much more like me than people who use other brands \***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

24. **I can identify with those people who prefer this brand over other brands \***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

25. **I am very much like the typical person who prefers to use this brand rather than other brands \***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

26. **The image of the user of this brand is highly consistent with how I see myself \***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

*Stop filling out this form.*

## **Thank You**

Thank you for filling out this survey. Unfortunately you did not fit the target market for this research. I appreciate your time filling out this survey.

---

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## Exhibit 2: Gap Questionnaire

# Millennial Branding Survey

Thank you for filling out this survey! This will be used for my thesis research. The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please reach out to me.

\* Required

## Demographic Questions

### 1. Age \*

Mark only one oval.

- under 18      *After the last question in this section, skip to "Thank You."*
- 18-24
- 25-32
- 33-39
- over 39      *After the last question in this section, skip to "Thank You."*

### 2. Gender \*

Mark only one oval.

- Male
- Female

Please read the following information about Gap, the largest American speciality retailer selling children, men and women's American classic clothing. Gap utilizes traditional media such as print ads and commercials and sell through their brick and mortar stores and e-commerce channels.





## Founding Story

---

Doris and Don Fisher opened the first Gap store in 1969 with a simple idea — to make it easier to find a pair of jeans and a commitment to do more.

"American Optimism is our attitude. Casual style is our aesthetic. Clean and confident, comfortable and accessible, classic and modern. It's the quintessential expression of Gap brought to life through iconic clothing. Our collections are a modern interpretation of our denim roots and signature pieces that are a staple for every wardrobe. Gap embraces a youthful, infectious spirit and the freedom to express individual style."





# Born To **Fit Together**



**Gap 1969**  
Premium Jeans  
+Jackets+Shirts+Vests





<http://youtube.com/watch?v=YKjnuR1ILfY>

## Point of Differentiation

---

The Gap is the mainstream brand targeted at the broadest audience: classically styled, high quality, casual apparel at moderate price points.

"...Our points of differentiation, like a founder's story, [is] our American heritage, and the way that we develop product. We leaned on the values that we've had for years, things like sustainability, our belief in all our employees...in using our scale for good and creating a social message that is incredibly authentic."

### 3. Do you consider yourself fashion conscious?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

### 4. Are you familiar with this brand? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

## Untitled Section

Please answer the following questions about Gap.

### 5. The brand is attractive \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

### 6. Products having this brand's name are of good quality \*

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**7. Its products are flawless \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**8. Its products are reliable \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**9. The brand represents the latest lifestyles \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**10. This brand is prestigious \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**11. It tells something about one's social status \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

**12. It is associated with wealth \****Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

13. **I think this brand is a very good product \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

14. **My opinion of this brand is very favorable \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

15. **I think this brand is a very desirable product \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

16. **I would recommend this brand to other people \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

17. **I would repurchase this brand \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

18. **I intend to buy this brand in the near future \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

## Untitled Section

19. **I would actively search for this brand in order to buy it \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

20. **Owners or users of this brand have a bond \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

21. **People who own or use this brand differentiate themselves from non-owners or non-users of this brand \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

22. **I see myself as part of this brand community \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

23. **People who use this brand are much more like me than people who use other brands \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

24. **I can identify with those people who prefer this brand over other brands \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree



25. **I am very much like the typical person who prefers to use this brand rather than other brands \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

26. **The image of the user of this brand is highly consistent with how I see myself \***

*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

*Stop filling out this form.*

## Thank You

Thank you for filling out this survey. Unfortunately you did not fit the target market for this research. I appreciate your time filling out this survey.

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