

**Interviews
Patagonia, Inc.**

Group 4 | Woah! Communications

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Background

Our client is Patagonia, Inc., an American clothing company who primarily sells outdoor apparel and gear. Patagonia prides themselves on being sustainable and environmentally-friendly and has incorporated these ideologies into their core mission. A part of how they do this is through cause marketing, a type of corporate responsibility tactic where a company aligns itself with a cause to produce profitable and societal benefits. In this case, Patagonia's promotional material has a dual purpose of increasing profitability while also bettering society. Woah! Communications is attempting to answer the research question of how cause marketing strategies impact consumer behavior among the young adult demographic.

Method

My research included conducting three interviews with subjects who fit the young adult demographic. The first interviewee, Alexis Ard, is a 20-year-old female while my second interviewee, Ryan Johnson, is a 20-year-old male and my third interviewee was Natalia Aquino-Torres, a 21-year-old female. All are college students attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Ard studies advertising and public relations and is doing research specifically on fast fashion and sustainability, making her a perfect candidate to be interviewed about cause marketing strategies and its effects since she is familiar with existing related issues and consumer behavior. Our interview took place in the Freedom Forum while the room was very full and loud. We sat at a table somewhat separated by other people on the perimeter of the room. The interview started at approximately 3:55 p.m. on October 9 and lasted for 22 minutes. It was helpful that she interviewed me first so that we had already developed somewhat of a rapport.

I decided to do two longer dyadic interviews to capture demographics that may be related to the subject in separate facets. For a subject to connect with our client and research question, they would have an affinity for outdoor activities or interest in sustainability.

Johnson is an outdoor enthusiast who frequently goes on hikes or camping trips. Our interview took place at his kitchen table at his Chapel Hill residence on October 17 at around 5 o'clock. I interviewed Aquino-Torres on October 18 around noon, also at her Chapel Hill home's kitchen table. She is someone concerned with sustainability efforts and practices. Johnson and Aquino-Torres were also able to feel comfortable during the interview since they took place in their homes. Both of these interviews lasted for approximately 25 to 30 minutes.

The questions began more generally, asking about the interviewee's knowledge about companies' cause marketing strategies and sustainability practices. They then got more specific asking about their thoughts and behaviors. The full interview guide is in a separate document.

Results

"Anyone can say why you should buy a product," said Ard.

The other interviewees also echoed the same sentiment. A key takeaway would be that the key demographic wants to know more information about the initiatives of a company or the long-lasting impact of the product rather than the company simply saying to buy the product.

"When an advertisement goes beyond the surface level and actually tells me why they believe in their product, I'm definitely more confident in my purchase," Johnson explained.

This is helpful for Patagonia because it seems to support the validity of their current strategies in focusing on their mission and not necessarily the product features. However, all interviewees also seemed to view sustainability and environmental-friendliness as an added benefit and not a core aspect to consider when purchasing a product. They don't go out looking for companies with a genuine mission but are pleased when they come across one.

A significant finding was that while purchasing, all of the interviewees have sometimes found themselves on a website's "mission" tab if there was one that existed. They also all cited that they would visit a company's website first when researching a company, but generally look to online reviews and opinions of friends first when planning a purchase.

Johnson said that "it makes [him] feel good that [he's] buying something from a good company that actually cares about something," but that it's more of an afterthought.

Ard agrees, mentioning that after she hears that a company she was looking at has a sustainable mission, her response is that she thinks it's cool but she "wouldn't necessarily buy [from the company] more often."

This connects to a theme that emerged. Price is a primary factor in everyone's purchasing decisions and companies with a similar mission to Patagonia tend to cost more. This led to a surprising discovery from Aquino-Torres, someone who identifies as environmentally conscious.

She said that "having environmentally-friendly practices is extremely important to me, but I'm not going to overstep my budget, maybe when I'm older I can dedicate more money to good causes."

"I recycle, reuse plastics so they aren't single-use and also limit the amount of water and electricity I use."

Ard also partakes in similar lifestyle changes but describes it as "more of a money thing than an environmental thing."

Although another theme that emerged that media and news content about sustainability and environmental-friendliness is increasing. All interviewees believe that younger generations are much more knowledgeable about sustainability and environmental impact of industry than older generations.

But since not every company has a clear or sustainable mission, "not having one isn't a deal-breaker," says Johnson.

After listing various cause marketing strategies, all interviewees said that they are most responsive to donations with purchases, saying it's nice to help someone directly and that it seems more realistic.

Analysis/Discussion

The process was helpful in not only affirming preexisting ideas, but also giving more insight as to why the beliefs we heard are common among the young adult demographic. I think the interview questions were worded and ordered in a way that incited the interviewees to think about them more deeply. All interviewees were willing to talk, but as the interview reached the last questions, they often reused phrases and ideas that they mentioned toward the beginning and middle of our conversations. If the interviews could be redone, I may change the wording of some questions to push answers to not be more original. I would also avoid explicitly mentioning cause marketing because it may have confused those not familiar and also directed them to think too much into the marketing process, possibly contorting how they would naturally respond. I would rather them be focused on their personal thoughts and consumer behavior. The interviews had very similar findings to the focus group, with the most insightful theme being that price is the most important factor when it comes to making purchases, but that the younger demographic appreciates a brand with a solid cause, especially one that supports sustainability and the environment. Possible survey questions could explore how consumers balance supporting important causes with their spending and budgets.