Managing brand personality for young generation

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(Keynote spealer)

Abstract

Understanding a brand personality helps to differentiate brand and to add a human feelings to marketing methods. Young generation is so much different from others in some way. Knowing how do they make purchasing decisions enables brands to adjust their marketing activities. The key assumption of the study is that brand personality issues differ from segment to segment. Author bases the research on youth brands personality testing in Russia. The purpose of the study is to uncover insights for brands that are tending to build connection with young audience. Young generation brand relationships is an evolving area of study. As a main objectives of the research we consider the following:

- Examine the key lifestyle aspects of the "Millenials"
- Research an influence of social media on brand perception
- Investigate the influence of friends, family, social media and other mass-media channels on brand preferences and product decision-making process
- Analyze the intent of youngsters towards main different brand archetypes

Evolving of young generation customers

A great debates have been exposed about young generation marketing. Since 1993 we have passed through era of "baby-boomers", "generation X" and finally (so far) reached "generation Y" or "Millenials". In this article we try to shed some light on how do companies should connect the "Millenials" and what are their typical features.

Opinions of young generation have been significantly formed by their surroundings, classmates, parents, friends, mass-media and social media. There is an evidence that this generation is quite different from others in some ways. Some researches show that young generation demonstrates lower rate of brand loyalty comparing with "baby-boomers" generation and generation "X".

This study tries to investigate young consumers' behavior in terms of society, lifestyle and influence of social media channels. An empirical study focusing on brand perceptions among consumers in the age range 15 to 25 years in emerging economy of Russia. Data were collected from respondents in Moscow (Russia) through an online-survey based on questionnaire administrated by researcher.

Young generation brand relationships is an evolving area of study. As a main objectives of the research we consider the following:

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Why they are different?

There is an evidence that until 15 years of age, the influence of parents over their children is significant. In that sense children can only request parents for the product they want. During our research and according to literature review we can see that parents continue to influence on the purchase decisions of teenagers. Young consumers tend to behave differently from the older consumers. Older consumers are termed as laggards in adoption; they are negatively associated with adoption of technology and are low users (Gilly and Zeithaml, 1985).

Positive	Negative
• Sochi Olimpics 2014 • Apple innovation • Emerging young subcultures • Crimea issue	• Georgian conflict 2008 • Terrorist attacts in Volgograd (Russia) • Ukranian conflict • Michael Jackson death

Table 1 Social and political impacts on young generation

What does it mean for branding?

Scholars are now examining the emotional dimensions of brand evaluation and consumption and its impact on loyalty (Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence, 2008). We explore the presumption that younger consumers are less loyal to brands and more willing than older consumers to try new brands.

There is an opinion that teenagers tend to get influenced by reference groups for a large number of products. However, our research shows that this hypotheses should not be considered in a straight-forward way. For marketers, it is very important to keep in mind the impact of these factors on brand relationships and brand switching intentions. Youngsters tend to behave as individuals but with a reference to their friends and classmates. They do not often pay attention on celebrities and trendsetters. But at the same moment they used to choose their own trendsetters among their subculture and peers.

Technologies impact almost all product categories. BrandZ by MillwardBrown reports that brands across many product categories used technology to add customer benefits and to differentiate. It is even more important among young generation buyers that are normally considered as an early-adopters. Apparel sport brands like Adidas and Nike tend to be at the edge of product innovations that are so valuable my "Millenials". Adidas introduced a new shoe cushioning innovation it calls Boost technology while Nike's leadership in wearable technology included FuelBand, a bracelet that monitor exercise and fitness activity (BrandZ Top100 Valuable brands report, 2014).

Young consumers' concern with health tends to challenge brands in a way they demonstrate their efforts towards "green" components and vitamin adds. According to statistics In soft drinks, CSD (carbonated soft drinks) consumption continued to decline. In our ranking the first place is occupied by Nestea which is also not a traditional "cola-style" beverage. Moreover Tropicana juice is relatively close to challenge Sprite position which also brings evidence to healthy issues among youngsters.
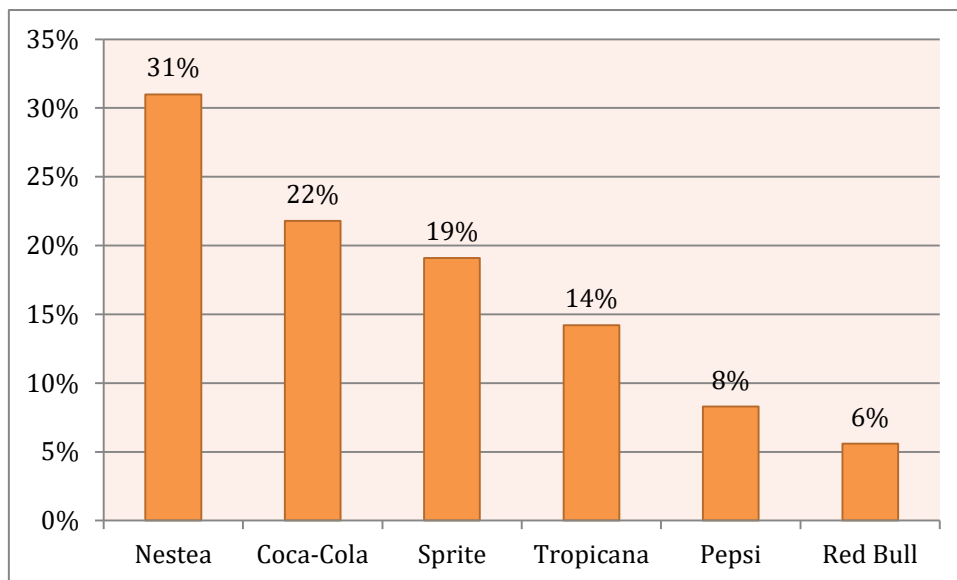
What is your favorite beverage?

Figure 1 Favorite soft-drink brands

McDonald's position is still strong, but Starbucks reached the 2nd place in our ranking. Both brands met the consumers desire for a fast food experience where the meal is tasty but healthier.
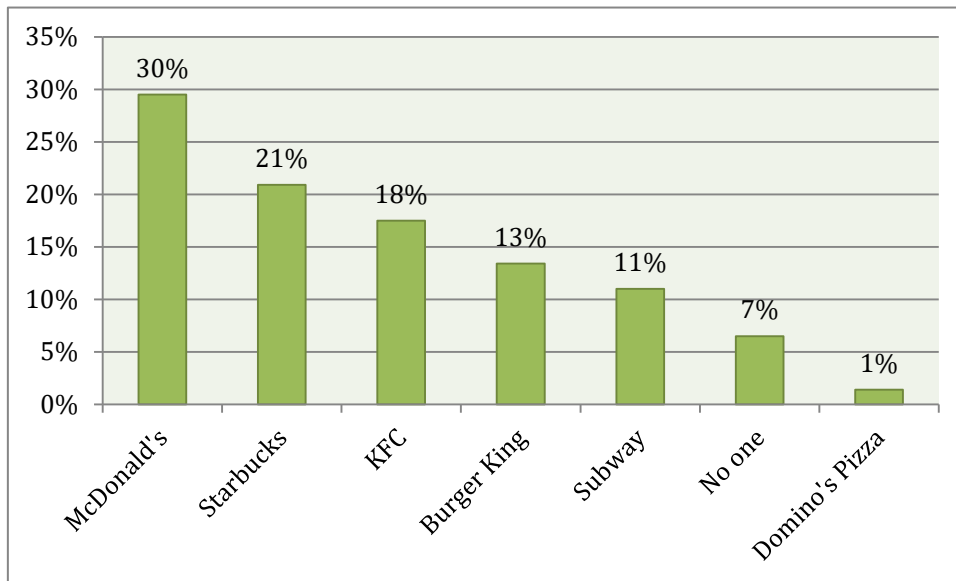
What is your favorite fast-food restaurant?

Figure 2 Most popular fast-food restaurants among youngsters

In our quantitative research we explored 3 brand categories that are so popular among youngsters: apparel, personal care, fast-food, soft drinks. We tried to investigate their brand preferences and made a short-list of brands which consists of names included in global BrandZ rankings. Market data provided by up-to-date research shows that apparel led the categories in brand value appreciation. Mostly with top raisers Uniqlo, Nike and Adidas. The key category trend is the convergence of apparel and technology into smart materials and wearables. However our survey demonstrates that ZARA, H&M stays the most popular apparel brand for Millenials

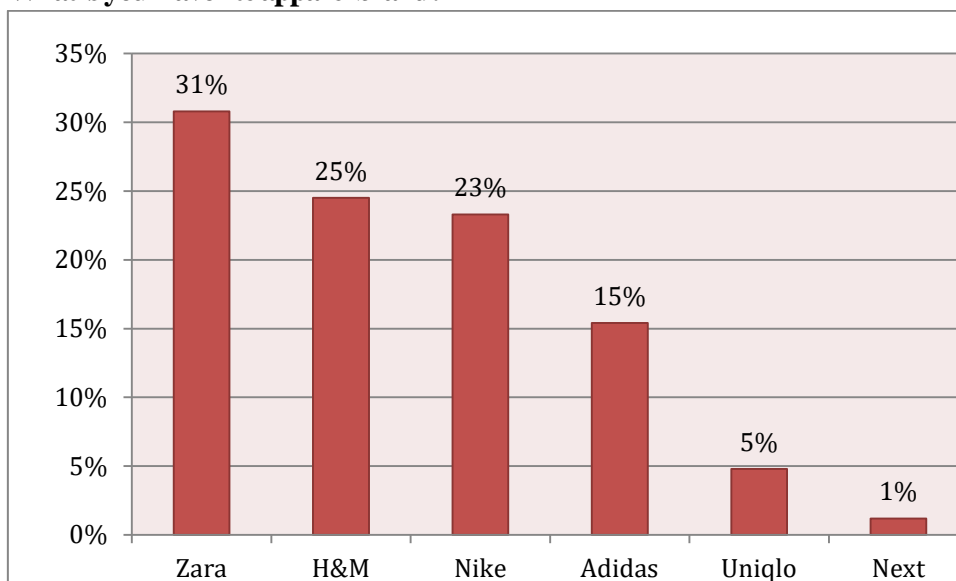**What is your favorite apparel brand?**

Figure 3 Most popular apparel brands for young generation

Personal care category is presented by several popular brands that are highly valuable for an audience. Taking into consideration that the majoroty of sample size were presented by female respondents it is obvious why L'Oreal gains the first position. Nevertheless a strong competition accures between Nivea, Dove, Colgate and Gillette. Millward Brown experts argue that more personalized products, men's grooming and innovations combining cosmetics and pharmacology drove sales in a crowded category.
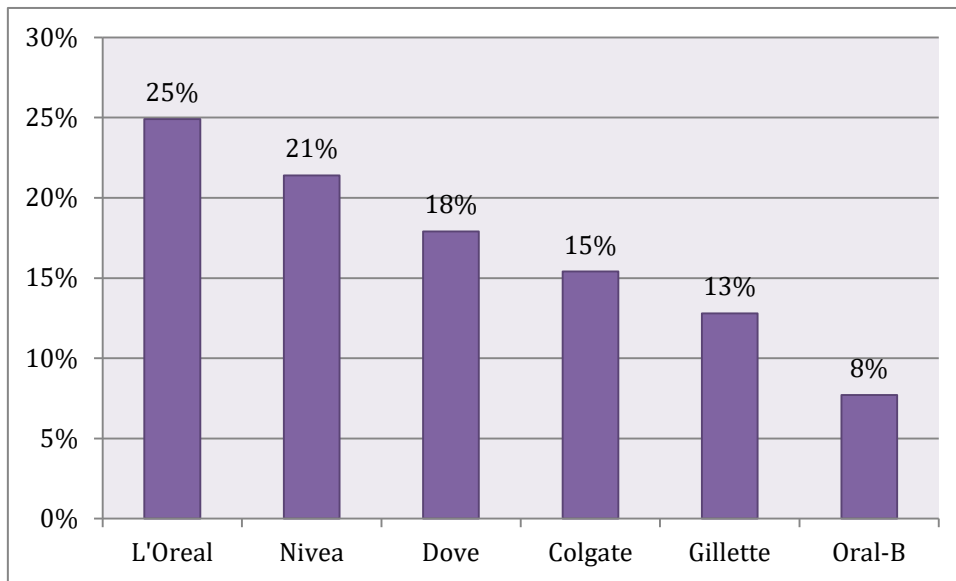
What is your favorite personal care brand?

Figure 4 Most popular personal care brands for young generation

Many reports about young generation say the purchasing power of "Millenials" has significantly increased, both, in terms of salary and pocket money. But our research has uncovered that most youngsters still have low monthly income and spend around 10 US dollars per day for their day-to-day expenses.

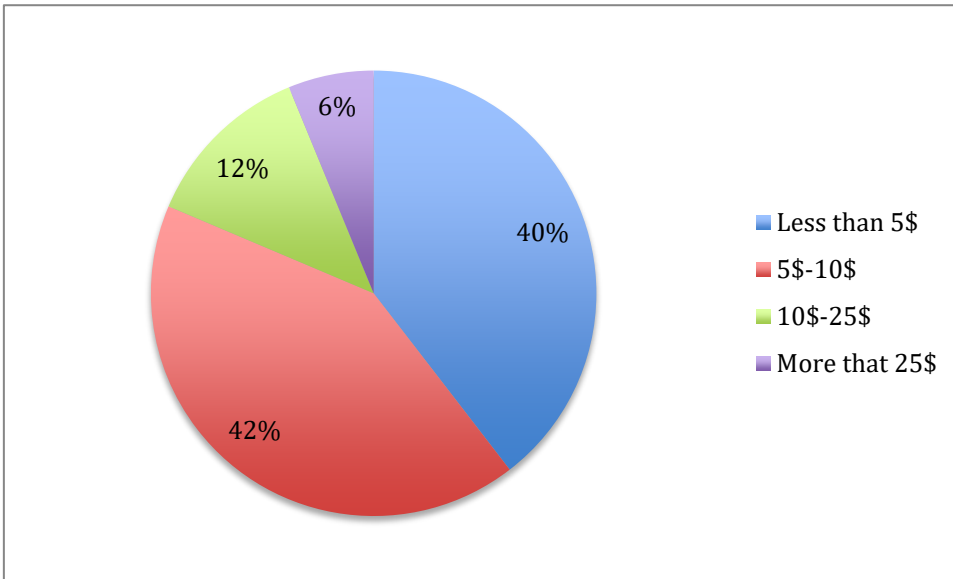**How much money do you normally spend per day for you own expenses?**

Figure 5 Every day expences for students

What is your monthly income including money provided by parents?
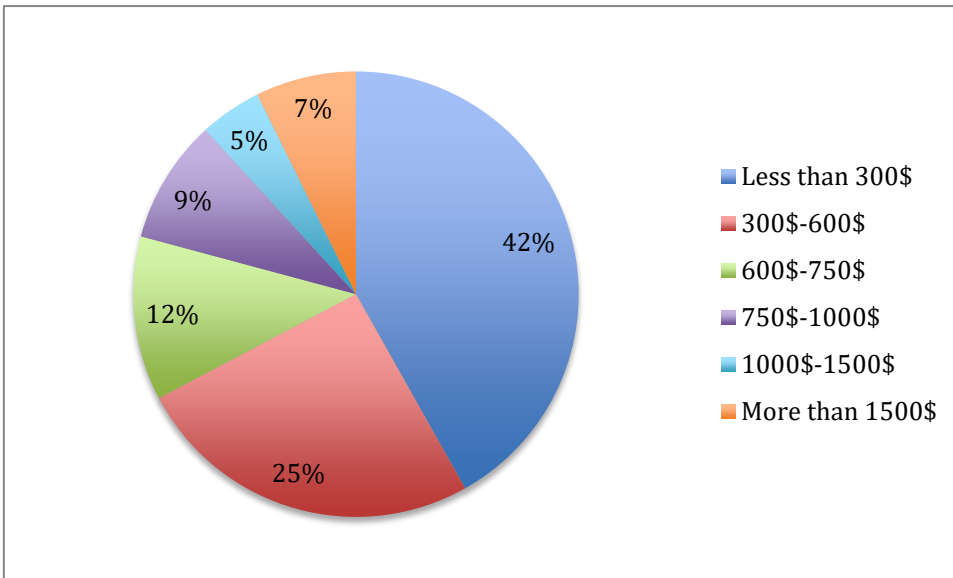

Figure 6 "Millenials" monthly income

How young customers see the brand

It is observed that youngsters adopt rational consumption skills from their parents; this influence varies across the situations, product categories, and the stages in consumer decision-making process (Moschis, 1985).

A study done on high-school and university students revealed that family influence starts decreasing with the amount of time the youngster is out of home and that influential position is transferred to the peers (Feltham, 1998).

The influence of parents progressively decreases over the teen years; teenagers start associating themselves more with their peers that with the family; they consume certain objects to affiliate themselves to a particular social group (Auty and Elliott, 2001).

However, once teenagers cross this age group, they get into the segment of young adults (20-25 years old) who frame their own lifestyle and concepts to follow. Young adults are likely to have greater financial independence and are known to gain competence in buying complex consumer products (Gronhoj, 2007).

It is interesting that while brands carry a personal meaning to the young consumers, there are different identity issues that can be identified across youngsters. They purchase products that convey meaning as opposed to just product utility (Sahay, Sharma, 2010).

Many authors say that the greater the desire to belong to a peer group, the lower the brand switching intention. Consumers evaluate functional products for their tangible, performance-related directions, while symbolic products serve to fulfill consumer needs by association with desired group, role, or self-image.

Young consumers start consuming and developing relationships with the new brands they get exposed to, the impact of the brand exposure from their families is likely to be strong. At first period youngsters are likely to give first preference to use and purchase of brands that are consumed in the family. But later we see that trendsetters are changing. Teenagers feel insecure about their transition from childhood to teen period (Sahay, Sharma, 2010). In such case, they start looking up to their friends and start behaving in the same manner.

"Millenials" tend to follow their own voice while purchasing decision making process or connect to their friends. But the celebrity effect does not work as it is supposed to be among older customers. Most of the respondents mentioned that famous trendsetters do not influence them in a serious way.
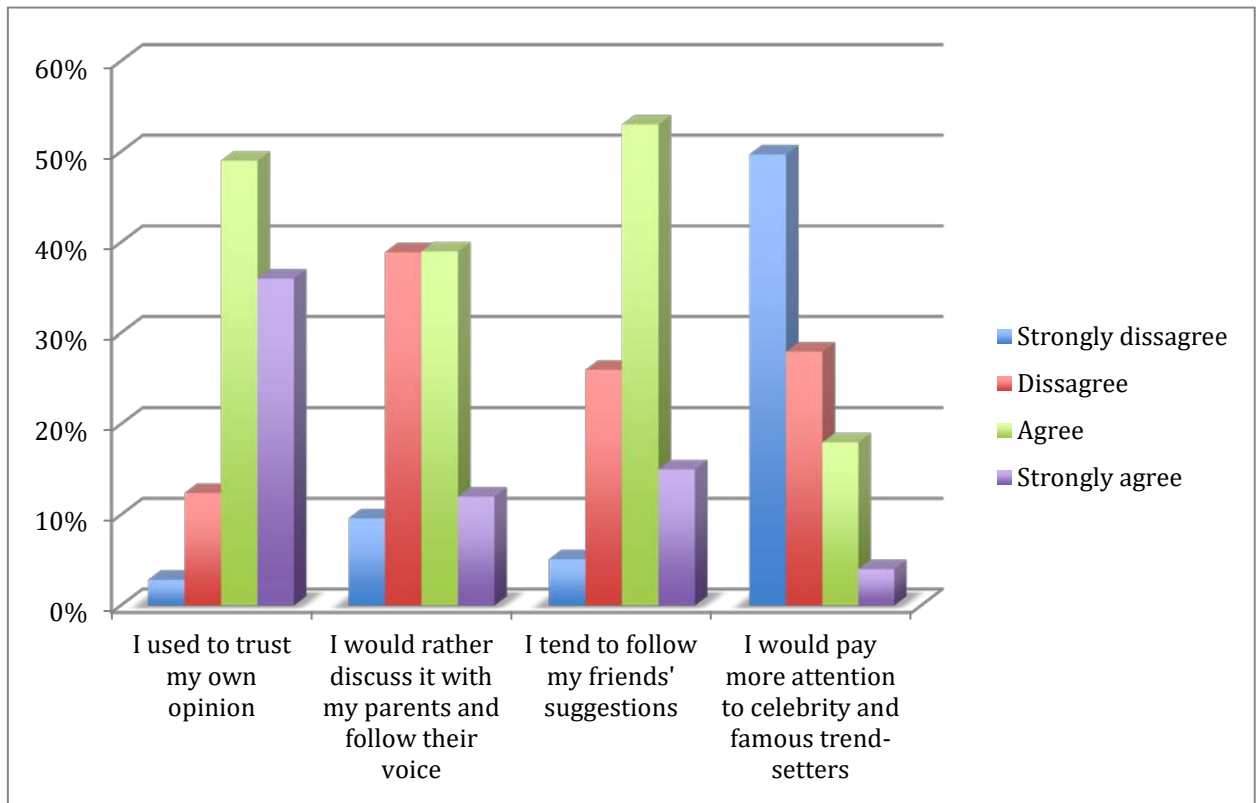
The influence of brand personality

Generation Y has always lived in a digital and online world. They used to deploy many personal devices and enjoy social media. They tend to tweet, like, comment and share. They see themselves as broadcasters, letting friends know through social media where to go, and they take these cues from their friends (Mr Youth report). With over 1/3 of all respondents have more than 200 friends on Vkontakte (the most popular Russian social media network).

30% have more than 200 friends in social network	40% have a friend-list represented by actual contacts	50% see official web-pages of a brand as an important decision factor

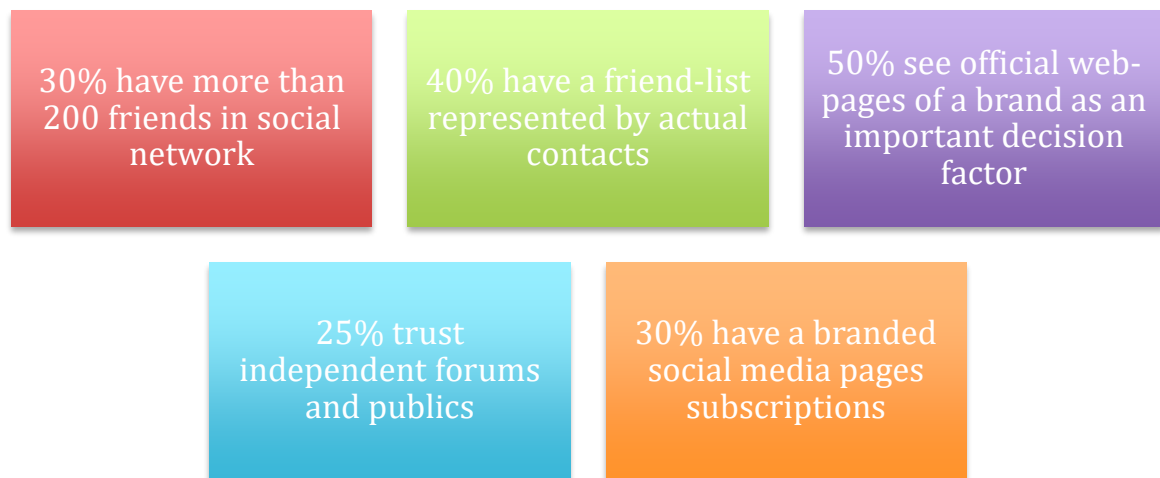| 25% trust independent forums and publics	30% have a branded social media pages subscriptions

Figure 8 Young consumers' behavior in social media

Recently, there has been a boost in brand personality research, in particular after Aaker's (1997) article, in which a general measurement scale of brand personality was developed and tested (Maehle and Supphellen, 2011).

Brand personalities help marketers compete by providing more complete value propositions beyond functional benefits, thus allowing them to extend the brand to new products. Faced with a landscape where brand personalities have permeated the marketplace, consumers now need to understand products in terms of brand personalities. As a consequence, consumers could think of brand as categories and may use brand personalities as the basis for considering category membership. Customers that are brand loyal are known to be less price-sensitive. According to Maehle and Supphellen (2011) the list includes 14 possible sources of brand personality: company's employees, company's managing director or CEO, endorsers, typical brand user, product attributes, own experience, brand name, brand logo, advertising style, price, retail store, country of origin and company's moral values. Direct sources are represented by the people associated with a brand, such as company's employees, company's managing director or CEO, endorsers, typical brand user. Indirect sources include the entire marketing mix of the brand.

An archetype is a prototype on which a brand character or personification is done and accepted universally (Siraj, Kumari, 2011). In current research we attempt to explore the lifestyle attitudes of young customers and try to associate them with archetypes of those brands that they prefer. We selected a few basic lifestyle profiles that reflect youngsters' typical portraits.

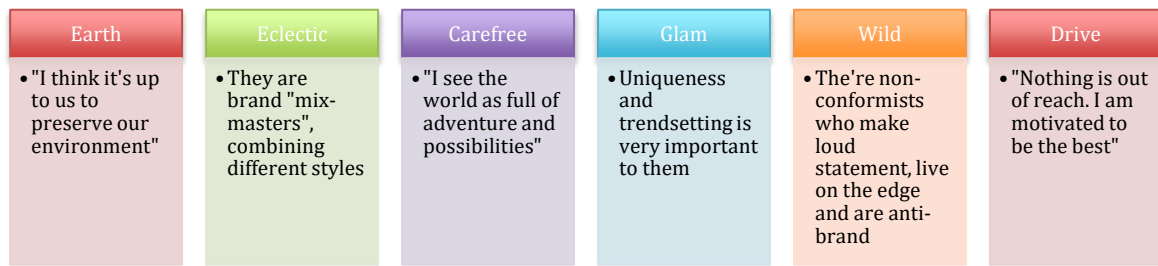| Earth	Eclectic	Carefree	Glam	Wild	Drive
• "I think it's up to us to preserve our environment"	• They are brand "mix-masters", combining different styles	• "I see the world as full of adventure and possibilities"	• Uniqueness and trendsetting is very important to them	• The're non-conformists who make loud statement, live on the edge and are anti-brand	• "Nothing is out of reach. I am motivated to be the best"

Figure 9 Life-style portraits

Our results suggest that the categorization level for consumers' lifestyle preferences varies across individuals. This is not to say that all types of personalities are mutually exclusive. In our research we try to explore young consumers' attitude towards different life triggers and styles. For instance, respondents could evaluate different profiles in terms of personal preferences. It means that respondents were asked to rate their attitudes towards every lifestyle profile. Numbers indicate the percentage of respondents that support chosen typology.

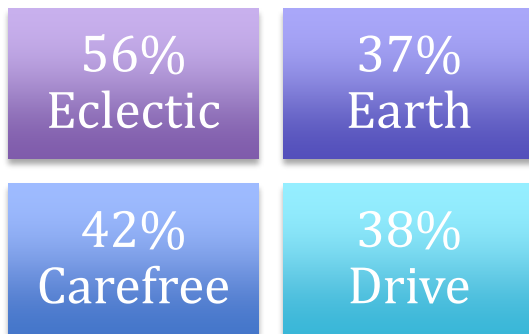| 56% Eclectic	37% Earth
42% Carefree	38% Drive

Figure 10 Life-style distribution among young customers

Earlier studies have assumed that brand personalities are inferred from the characteristics of people associated the brand (Aaker, 1997) or the brand's marketing activities (Batra et al., 1993). This implies the assumption of whether every brand ahs a personality or that young respondents should articulate personality even for those brands that could hardly be thought of having personalities.

In some product categories like consumer electronics or other high-involvement products younger age group loves their brands and is more passionate about them. For instance: Nike, Apple, Converse, RayBan, Swatch are highly valuable brands among "Millenials".In this research we decided to test how different typical brand archetypes would distribute among youngsters and compare results with lifestyles that we have explored before.

Categorizing eight basic archetypes allows us to observe how students perceive them.

Attitude towards brands	Archetype	Brands
12%	Innocent	Johnson and Johnson, Diet Coke, The Body Shop, Kleenex
33%	Explorer	National Geographic, Ford, Levi's, Swatch
9%	Caregiver	MotherCare, Hallmark cards, Pampers, Colgate
24%	Hero	Nike, Sony, Nokia, DHL
34%	Lover	Victoria's Secret, Ferrero Rocher, Nespresso, Georgio Armani
22%	Outlaw	Diesel, Harley-Davidson, Axe Effect, Discovery
16%	Ruler	General Electric, Microsoft, CityBank, Shell
58%	Creator	Canon, Apple, Disney, Adobe

Table 2 Distribution of preferences among brand archetypes

Implications, limitations and future research

"Echo boomers", the "millennium generation" or the "generation why". They seek to explore boundaries, push limits and experiment in the name of self-awareness, independence and self-expression. To conclude, we make an interesting contribution to examining how young consumers shape their brand perceptions and what are their influential drivers in decision making process. Our results not only demonstrate that "Millenials" are mostly non-conformists and they can easily switch between brands. In some particular product categories they used to rely on their own opinion and do not pay so much attention on what is written on their label. We invite marketing researchers to continue investigation in this topic. In order to create a desirable brand personality, brand managers need to focus on specific dimensions rather than on irresponsible public relations.

The participants in the study were mainly students and high-school teenagers. While they demonstrated that they were able to generate meaningful results for the product classes, types, and brands used in this case study, we cannot rule out the possibility that results from a student sample may be a weak extrapolation towards a non-student population. Future work in this area could extend the sample size and bring an international aspect in this work by attracting young customers from different countries.

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