

Masters Project

MSc International Innovation Management

Humanising Brands:

Exploring Individual Dynamics in
Shaping Brand Perception within the
Outdoor Industry

By Sara Ladd.

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University of Wales Trinity Saint David

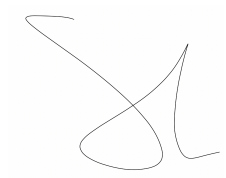
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Lecturer: Alan Mumby

Declaration Statement

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any other degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any other degree. This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by a smaller 'L'.

Signed

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Date

31st January 2024

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate and elucidate the dynamics of brand perception within the outdoor industry, with a particular focus on the intricate interplay of individual influence in shaping brands. In a world where diverse definitions of a brand coexist, this research refines and consolidates pivotal insights, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the factors that underpin a successful brand in the context of outdoor apparel. Emphasising the pivotal role of individuals, from both internal employees and external consumers, this study seeks to unravel the complexities of brand purpose and values. Through an exploration of loyalty, culture, and taste elements, the research provides insights into customer behaviour, advancing existing knowledge in the field.

Beyond the conventional metrics of financial performance, this study shifts the focus to the human dimension, delving into the intricate elements influencing customers' decisions and the factors that contribute to the success of outdoor brands. By researching established and emerging players in the outdoor industry, the study distinguishes whether the perceived brand identity aligns with customer and employee perspectives. Additionally, this research offers valuable insights applicable across diverse industries, providing businesses with a clearer understanding of employee relationships, brand culture, and customer needs and satisfaction. Ultimately, the purpose is to contribute to the collective knowledge base and guide businesses in navigating the complexities of the contemporary brand landscape.

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Abbreviations

AI -	Artificial Intelligence
CEO -	Chief Executive Officer
Gen Z -	Generation Z
LEAF -	Law Enforcement and Armed Forces
NFT -	Non-Fungible Tokens
NGO -	Non-Governmental Organisation
USD -	United States Dollar

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Purpose

In the realm of a brand, where multiple definitions coexist, a brand is essentially a collective embodiment of people. The triumph of a brand hinges on the individuals associated with it, defined by their identity and values (Stengel, 2011). Hollis (2010) delineates the distinctness of individual perceptions regarding a brand, emphasising that no two people hold the same perception.

This study emphasises the significance of individuals in shaping a brand, encompassing both internal employees and external consumers. This collective influence plays a crucial role in steering and determining the success of a brand. The exploration will focus on brand purpose and values, offering insights into their significance with a primary focus on examining case studies within the outdoor industry. Typically, when assessing the success of a brand, the metric considered is often financial performance or the incremental growth achieved by a business. However, this study moves away from the conventional approach and centres its focus on the human dimension. Specifically, it delves into the intricate elements influencing customers' decisions to invest in a product or align with a brand.

What we wear is a manifestation of identity, symbolising an extension of ourselves and serving as an important source in establishing identity and values, or an opportunity for creative expression (Thanhauser, 2022; Atkin 2004), from how or where it is worn, to what it is used for, and why it contributes significantly to identity formation. The exploration of loyalty, culture, and taste elements aims to widen the research of the intricacies of customers' purchasing behaviour.

Taste in the context of fashion, allows the consumer to express their aesthetic preferences, satisfy the 'social-psychological' need of individuation and share a collective taste with others, or distance oneself from others (Gronow, 1993). Amidst an era of information abundance from brands, consumer purchasing decisions are broken down into select elements. The limbic brain is used when following your gut instinct, which often leads to swift, instinctual, and high-quality decisions based on what "feels right" (Sinek, 2009), a crucial aspect inherent within the realm of taste.

The exploration undertaken in this study encompasses a variety of outdoor brands, spanning both established entities and emerging players, all characterised by a clear purpose and a dedicated customer base. This sector is renowned for its distinct and robust brand recognition. The outdoor apparel market, valued at USD 15.7 billion in

2022 and anticipated to experience a growth rate exceeding 5.5% over the next decade (GM Insights, 2023), which underscores the industry's significance.

A noticeable trend is the evolving landscape within the outdoor industry, manifesting in shifts across environmental, social, and stylistic aspects. This transformation extends beyond niche preferences, resulting in becoming mainstream and where brands are removed from their original contexts of purpose. Now brands are being used to build on consumers' social identity, culture, and belonging. Notably, 77% of respondents agree that outdoor products must seamlessly integrate into everyday life, resonating both aesthetically and functionally, whether in an urban setting or on rugged terrain, emphasising their purposeful design (Highsnobiety, 2023).

This study endeavours to advance existing research by consolidating pivotal insights, contributing to a clear understanding of the factors that underpin a successful brand within the outdoor industry. While the focus of this research is directed towards outdoor brands, its insights hold relevance and applicability across all industries. This study offers valuable insights for any business aiming to enhance its knowledge of employee relationships and brand culture. Additionally, businesses catering to customers will benefit by gaining a deeper understanding of customer needs and satisfaction through the findings presented in this research. Delving in to see if the perception of what the brands say they are is true from a customer and employee perspective will allow the author to strengthen the findings.

1.2 Research Methodology

Following this introductory section (1.0) the aims and objectives of the research will be discussed. The structure of this study unfolds as follows:

- Chapter (2.0) will delve into a literature review, synthesising research on various factors identified as pivotal to the success of brands.
- Chapter 3.0 will present an extended exploration into the customer perspective, investigating elements distinct from the intricate factors influencing purchasing decisions to shed light on the development of brand loyalty.
- Chapter 4.0 will pivot towards an examination of the employee perspective, aiming to ensure a coherent alignment between external brand perceptions derived from the literature review and the internal orchestration of brand dynamics.

- Chapter 5.0 will delve into employee interviews, offering valuable insights into the perspectives and experiences within the chosen outdoor brands.
- Chapter 6.0 will centre on the Gorpcore trend, specifically discussing three selected brands and products through the lens of Thorstein Veblen's conspicuous consumption theory. It will feature case studies focused on outdoor brands, providing a deeper understanding of their operations and brand strategies.
- Chapter 7.0 will contemplate the future of brands from a people-oriented perspective, highlighting specific themes identified throughout the research and emphasising how brands can adapt key factors for a more promising future.
- Chapter 8.0 will culminate in a presentation of the summary of findings, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the studied elements.
- Finally, Chapter 9.0 will provide the conclusive remarks of the study, summarising key insights and implications drawn from the research journey. It will also propose suggestions for further research to stimulate future academic inquiries.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore how people interpret brands. Focussing on a selection of outdoor brands globally, the research will delve into the factors that build brand loyalty. The examination extends beyond conventional analyses and encompasses an exploration of the future trajectory of outdoor brands.

This research spans both internal business perspectives, seeking to understand employee wellbeing and culture, as well as external dimensions involving the brand and nurturing of a community with consumers. Through this dual lens, the study aims to uncover the intricate dynamics that shape the evolving landscape of outdoor brands, shedding light on their operations and interactions.

The main objective of this study is to explore a range of factors that build a successful brand, looking to the future and what could be needed for longevity and authenticity. This study will not present conclusive guidance but will present an in-depth understanding of certain elements, and provide an opportunity for further research which can be adapted for specific factors such as brands, customer traits, and employee culture.

2.0 Literature Review: What is a brand?

2.1 Methodology

This literature review aims to delve into the understanding of the term "brand" and related elements essential for conducting the research. Exploring the definition of the word brand will enable the reader to appreciate the complexity of the meaning. This study centres on the examination of five crucial elements that contribute to the establishment of a successful brand, with a specific emphasis on people, which are:

1. Brand Purpose
2. Brand Values
3. Brand Identity
4. Brand Loyalty
5. Brand Culture

The author emphasises that these insights are curated from diverse sources, spanning various backgrounds, and encompassing both historical and contemporary perspectives. This range of inputs contributes to the formation of a comprehensive and expansive understanding. The findings of this literature are now discussed.

2.2 What is a brand?

"The brand is defined by individuals, not by companies, markets, or the so-called general public." (Neumeier, 2006).

The term 'brand' holds multiple interpretations, tracing back nearly a century when the American Marketing Association initially defined it as "a name, term, symbol, or design, or a combination thereof, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from competitors" (Atkin, 2004).

Today a brand is more than just a name, a logo or a trademark, it is a distinctive marker of human identity (Atkin, 2004), and the collective intent of the people behind it (Stengel, 2011). Brands tell stories about who we are (Thanhauser 2022), they are defined by individuals (Neumeier, 2006), and are seen as icons (Holt, 2004). Neumier (2007) encapsulates this complexity by affirming that no other term adequately captures the

multi-dimensional concept of a 'brand', supported by Oh, T et al (2020) which identifies that “brands are rich in meaning and complex in their effects”.

The early answer to the “why” of brands was a functional purpose which permitted buyers to distinguish between the products made by various brands, whereas today is less about quality and functionality and has more to do with social, subcultural and personal meanings (Hirschman, 2010). The success of a brand depends on internal and external factors, from employees to consumers. Neumeier (2006) defines a brand as an individual's intuitive perception, their gut feeling about a product, service, or company. It serves as a definitive representation of one's identity and values (Stengel, 2011), resonating deeply with our inherent emotional quest for connection.

The notion of 'brand' elicits varied interpretations from different perspectives. As Stengel (2011) describes, a brand embodies what a business stands for in the hearts and minds of those pivotal to its future. Hollis (2010) asserts that a brand's strength relates to the balance among three crucial areas: its physical attributes, functional advantages, and emotional associations. The symbolic essence of a brand isn't solely shaped by advertising; it emanates from customers' interactions with staff and other brand adherents (de Chernatony, 1999).

2.3 Brand Purpose

Brand purpose goes beyond simply selling products and generating profit. It embodies a long-term goal, which is central to its broader identity through business structure and the strategy of a brand. Brand purpose focuses on goals, behaviours, motivation and action towards its actualisation (Williams, Escalas, Morningstar, 2022). It signifies the brand's dedication to a societal or humanistic goal, articulating the positive impact it aims to achieve on the world through a distinct mission.

Sinek (2009) characterises brand purpose as the "why" a brand exists, underscoring that customer loyalty stems from those who lead through inspiration, and with a clear purpose they think, act and communicate from the inside out. Joy Howard, co-founder of the outdoor brand Early Majority (discussed in chapter 7.0), asserts that the essence of what a brand stands for is ‘the net result of the people that wear it.’ (Dzhatiev, 2023).

To distinguish one brand from another, consumers seek more than a cascade of products with features and benefits; they yearn for a distinctive rationale driving their purchasing decisions. A brand ethos centred on improving people's lives emerges as

the sole sustainable method to recruit, unite, and inspire all within a business, spanning from employees to customers (Stengel, 2011).

2.4 Brand Values

Distinct from the financial valuation of a brand, brand values are what represent the principles that a brand embodies. These values should be identifiable throughout, from its product to its employees and overarching identity. They should be evident in the company's operations, choice of suppliers, communication strategies, and a representation of both brand purpose and revenue generation methods, seamlessly integrated into each operational process. Having clear values, and ensuring the company understands, emphasises and follows these, creates a fundamental role in shaping the brand reputation, builds trust and ensures enduring success.

The outdoor industry has in recent years become a proving ground for advertising and brand communications that focus on values (Risch, 2018) for example Patagonia's "Don't buy this jacket" campaign. Consumers are four times more likely to purchase from a company with strong brand values. Moreover, approximately fifty-two per cent of global shoppers are more likely to purchase from a company with shared values (Adegbuyi, 2022).

While brand values and purpose are interlinked concepts, they differ in emphasis and function. Both are crucial in shaping a brand's identity and its connection with its audience; however, they underscore distinct dimensions of a brand's mission and meaning.

2.5 Brand Identity

A brand identity is a shared understanding of the brand's purpose and values, aligning seamlessly with its business strategy. Most elements of brand identity live in the brand's name, logo, tagline, language, colour or style (Rukosuev, n.d), although according to Ekhlassi et al (2018), brand identity encompasses two facets: core identity and extended identity. The core identity, stemming from the heart of the brand, centres on product performance and attributes. The extended identity unfolds through associations,

relationships, and personality traits. For consumers, brand identity serves as a means of self-expression, facilitating the fulfilment of their desires.

While businesses establish brands, products, and services, it is the customers who shape the brand identity. Success comes when a consumer's perception of a brand is identical to the business (Berthon et al 2009), where brand identity acts as a promise from the firm to its customers that associates the brand with a variety of features and attributes. This study will explore social identity in the next chapter.

2.6 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a product of social networks (Holt, 2004), where a responsible company would treat their customers as friends who share a love of what the brand offers (Stanley & Chouinard, 2023). Hoffman (2002) mentions how cultural icons take form when a brand remains authentic to its identity and purpose.

Brand Loyalty is a Product of the Social Network

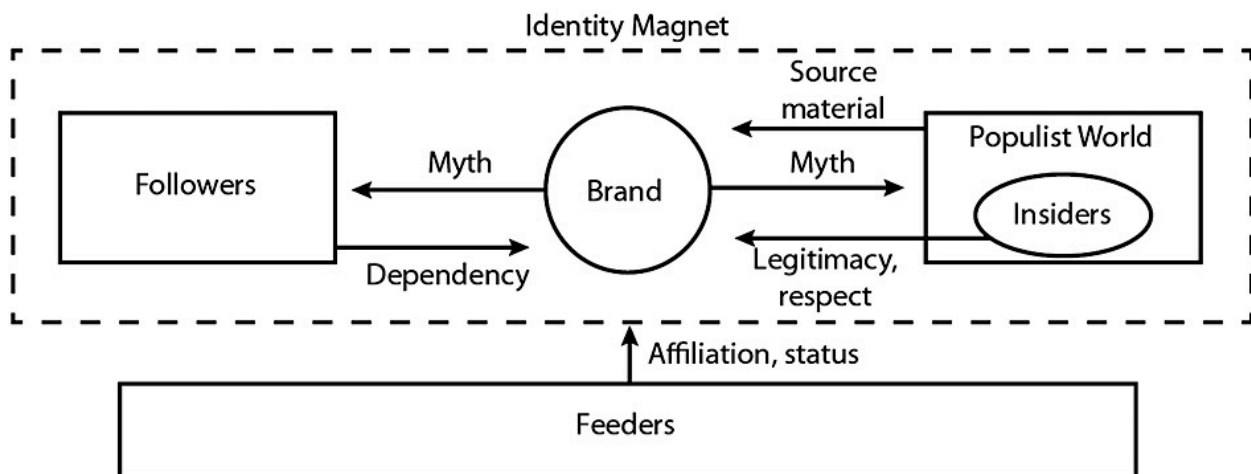


Figure 1. Brand Loyalty (Holt, 2004)

Holt's (2004) conceptualization concerning the dynamics among three groups 'followers, insiders, and feeders', offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of brand loyalty within iconic brands (see Figure 1). Followers, constituting the majority of a brand's customer base, have a strong identification with the brand's narrative or purpose. This satisfies their identity needs and solidifies the brand relationship through the use of compelling stories. Insiders, though forming a small segment, hold significant sway over followers as opinion leaders and gatekeepers to the brand's influence in the broader cultural realm. Their impact extends beyond their numbers, influencing the majority through their opinions. Feeders, on the other hand, gravitate towards iconic brands for the identity value they provide. Attracted by notions of status and social connections, feeders are essentially drawn to the cultural identity that these brands offer.

2.7 Brand Culture

'The symbolic meaning of a brand is not only driven by advertising but also emerges through customers interacting with staff and other brand users.' de Chernatony (1999).

Brand culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, behaviours, and symbols that define the identity and personality of a brand. It goes beyond the products or services a brand offers; and encompasses the intangible aspects that make a brand distinctive and resonant with its audience. The emergence of brand culture, or as Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) refer to as consumer culture was seen "in which branded goods replaced unmarked commodities", replacing mass advertising with personal selling, and the individual consumer was replaced by the communal citizen.

Today there needs to be consideration and a prominent drive of modernity, community and society within all brands to succeed. Drucker iterates that "Culture eats strategy for breakfast" (Stanley & Chouinard 2023), brand culture encompasses the collective perceptions, attitudes, and experiences associated with a brand, both by the company itself and among its consumers and employees.

Brand culture is identified through their values, identity and personality. With a clear distinction, humans can identify with, whether from a consumer or an employee perspective. Through creating a sense of belonging through consumer engagement in social media, loyalty programs, and events that create connection. Internally, brand culture influences the company's workings, including its organisational values,

employee behaviour, and corporate culture. A strong brand culture can inspire employees, align their actions with brand values, and promote a sense of pride in their work. Some brands develop rituals or traditions that become synonymous with their culture. This could include product launches, annual events, or specific marketing campaigns that reinforce the brand's values and identity.

Developing and maintaining a strong brand culture is crucial for brands aiming to establish long-term relationships with customers, differentiate themselves in the market, and create a loyal customer base. It involves consistent communication of values, maintaining authenticity, and building emotional connections with consumers based on shared beliefs and experiences.

3.0 Customers

Cultural icons aren't formulated by brands; instead, they are defined by the consumer, not the brand, as highlighted by Hoffman (2022). In this next section, the focus will be on the customer, encompassing the stages from initial brand discovery, through purchase, and the evolution into a loyal advocate and ambassador for the brand. In the context of this research, six key factors contribute significantly to the dynamics of brand formation:

1. **Taste:** Reflecting the customer's interests, serving as an expression of their identity.
2. **Value Proposition:** Anchored in the brand's authenticity and reliability, shaping the perception of customers.
3. **Trust:** Establishing an emotional connection between the customer and the brand.
4. **Community:** Fostering a sense of belonging among individuals with similar interests or tastes.
5. **Loyalty:** The commitment and support demonstrated by customers.
6. **Social Identity:** Providing individuals with a means to convey a personal 'brand'.

These elements collectively play a pivotal role in elucidating the intricate dynamics that underlie brand development, showcasing the multifaceted relationships between customers and the brands they engage with.

3.1 The Power of a Customer

According to Neumeier (2006), “a brand is not what you say it is. It’s what THEY say it is.” The emotional resonance a person develops towards a product or brand holds tremendous significance in determining a successful business. It is noteworthy that our subconscious mind can swiftly formulate decisions within a concise span of seven seconds, as expounded by Gladwell (2006) in his work "BLINK."

From a societal standpoint, an individual's impression of a brand can often hinge on the latest social media post, or from an experiential perspective, it can be influenced by factors such as the in-store interaction with employees, ambient fragrances, music, spatial layout, and other sensory elements.

Contemporary society has ushered in an era where individuals are inundated with being information-rich and time-poor, where a shift from an economy primarily focused on mass production to one centred on mass customisation (Neumeier, 2006). Resulting in an array of choices for consumers, it has consequently wielded unprecedented influence on consumers, stressing the significance of establishing meaningful emotional connections over mere materialistic concerns for a brand.

3.2 Taste

Gladwell (2006) suggests that when we become experts in something particular it fosters the development of our taste, which grows more esoteric and complex. Philosopher Immanuel Kant's authoritative definition of taste is "the faculty of estimating the beautiful". Essentially a metaphor (Marx, 2022) or a crucial concept in providing a link between status-seeking and individual identities.

Contemporary views delineate taste into categories of good and bad, where today, it encompasses inclinations towards specific lifestyle choices (Marx, 2022), positioning brands as active participants in the "business of taste" (Andjelic, 2021). A culturally attuned consumer, with an awareness of new brands, trends, and launches, signifies symbolic status.

Pre-purchase decisions are currently driven by symbolic attributes (Neumeier, 2006), prompting inquiries such as the product's aesthetics, sales channels, consumer demographics, tribal associations, perceived desirability based on cost, public opinion, and the brand's origin. The global fashion and lifestyle media brand Highsnobiety (2023) categorises a certain customer as the 'tastemaker', where they are looking for products which break industry norms through fabric, colour or design, who aren't tied to a specific aesthetic and are looking for brands from unconventional locations.

Andjelic (2021) addresses taste as a market cycle of imitation and distinction, a modern aspirational economy, where taste is about knowledge, aesthetics and creativity, rather than purely monetary values. Strengthened by Thanhauser (2022) who mentions that "sometimes the clothes we wear tell truer stories than we do". Taste represents the consumer's values and identity, and can not be manipulated as it is a personal preference. Ultimately, purchasing decisions revolve around the product's quality, design, colour, emotional resonance, and representation of the consumer's identity.

3.3 Value Proposition

According to Ekhalassi et al. (2018), a brand's value proposition is defined as the functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits which align with three fundamental types of customer needs: functional, symbolic and experiential. Functional needs, such as those met by waterproof trousers or a packable coat, pertain to tangible attributes that augment the product's value and address the customer's practical requirements. Emotional benefits encompass the psychological gratification a customer derives from a product, whereas symbolic needs delve into the representational value attached to a product. For instance, in contemporary outdoor culture, exclusive collaborations, limited edition releases, or distinctive designs cater to self-expression needs, reinforcing an individual's uniqueness and aligning with their taste.

The economic landscape has witnessed a transition from a supply-side to a demand-side paradigm (Atkin, 2004), signifying a shift where before brands were separated from people, whereas now brands are people (Abloh, 2022). Customers now hold control over brands' success, and the value each brand delivers assumes paramount importance. This value signifies authenticity within a community or reflects individual status. It is not possible to convince someone of the value of a product, as each person assigns a different value to different products (Sinek, 2009). From an ecological perspective, value is increasingly manifested through circular product strategies like resale programmes such as reBird (Arc'teryx) and WornWear (Patagonia), repair services, or lifetime guarantees. These initiatives highlight the creation of value for customers while aligning with sustainable practices.

Fundamentally, value, by definition, is the transference of trust (Sinek, 2009), underlining its significance in establishing a rapport between brands and customers based on reliability and authenticity.

3.4 Trust

When you trust, you are reliant and believe in the integrity of an individual or entity, a sentiment that emerges from an emotional connection rather than a rational evaluation. As highlighted by Sinek (2009), trust is earned through consistent actions and cannot be purchased. Trust gradually develops when a person or brand demonstrates motivations beyond their self-gain. Brands that exhibit authenticity and a clear purpose in every facet of their operations foster trust among consumers. Influence on human behaviour often comes through either manipulation or inspiration. Manipulation tactics involving

marketing promotions, price reductions, fear, or peer pressure fail to cultivate trust. When a customer trusts a brand, each element of what a brand does demonstrates its purpose, cause or belief to the outside world (Sinek, 2009) which becomes a representation of the customer.

Trust builds true and lasting commitment, similar to what is seen in a devoted following. Atkin (2004) mentions this is down to the “primacy of the person”, where conventional wisdom shows that people buy ideas or things, and the transaction is between the individual and the object or idea. People buy people. This underscores the notion that individuals ultimately invest in people, rather than products or ideas.

Amidst an expanding market landscape, successful brands become a storehouse of trust to the customers (Simmons, 2003) simplifying their lives by offering products that cater specifically to their needs. This storehouse of trust is built on a foundation of genuine connections and consistent delivery of promises, fostering enduring relationships with consumers.

3.5 Community

As humans, we want to belong. It is a fundamental human condition which creates a sense of reality and meaning (Atkin, 2004). This need for belonging transcends rationality, where it is a basic need, fostering a profound sense of connection and security when one feels a part of a larger community sharing similar values and beliefs, thereby nurturing trust.

Conformity is rewarded through social acceptance and inclusion, where an individual is motivated to behave like those within their community. Wearing the same brand of footwear or outerwear fosters a sense of connection and serves as a conversational conduit to articulate desired identities. Through increased affiliation, it cultivates confidence and bolsters a sense of belonging (Bellezza, Gino & Keinan, 2014).

According to Stewart (2023), “The future of a strong brand is through communities, where people want to live and breathe brands, attend events, and meet like-minded people in the real world”. Notably, the quest for belonging prompts irrational behaviours and expenditure (Sinek, 2009), and finding a sense of belonging allows individuals to “become more themselves” (Atkin, 2004). The concept of community draws people close, fostering a deep sense of loyalty (Sinek, 2009). In the context of fashion, the “sensus

communis," or the community within the realm of fashion, represents a universal taste, drawing individuals together and influencing collective preferences.

3.6 Customer Loyalty

Genuine loyalty epitomises commitment, representing profound support and unwavering belief. As noted by Andjelic (2021), "true loyalty is emotional", embodying a deeply rooted attachment to a brand or product. Today, customers are brand ambassadors, and building loyal customers can be seen as a pivotal marketing strategy. When a customer feels part of a community, or an exclusive group through the connection of a piece of product, it leads to loyal subscribers (Andjelic 2021). Notably, 60% of customers tell others about brands they're loyal to (Shopify Plus. 2023).

Due to the loyalty and passion that customers have towards brands, strategies are being revised (Ekhlassi et al, 2018), and brands are treating customers like 'fans', playing an important role in the modern aspirational economy, mastering interpretation, and gaining status within their community to build trust and remain loyal (Levinson, H. 2023).

Loyalty transcends beyond product quality or price considerations, as Sinek (2009) highlights true loyalty is not easily won and is showcased when customers consciously opt for a brand despite better alternatives available. The aim is to cultivate loyal customers who identify with the brand's authenticity, identity, and purpose. A 2021 study estimated that loyalty increases a customer's worth by 22 times, where the influence of loyalty on purchasing behaviour has seen that 40% of loyal customers will buy from a brand, even if a cheaper option exists (Shopify Plus. 2023).

3.7 Social Identity

Defined as "an individual's perceptions regarding their position within social groups and the connections they establish and sustain" (Ekhlassi et al., 2018), social identity serves as a cultural emblem that imparts significance to an individual's sense of self.

Individuals frequently strive to acquire and conform to dress codes, etiquette, and both explicit and implicit behavioural norms. This pursuit of conformity drives the desire to gain social acceptance and status. In present Western societies, there exists a notable societal pressure to emphasise independence and individualism, often perceived as brave and bold attributes, encapsulating traits that diverge from conformity, signifying autonomy and control (Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2014).

Social identity, within the framework of conformity, can be exemplified through wearing Salomon XT-6 trainers or the Arc'teryx Alpha SV jacket (both subjects will be explored in an upcoming chapter). However, the Salomon XA Pro 3D collaboration with the brand 'and wander' (SNKRDUNK, 2023), produced in limited quantities, distinctive colours and fabrics, enhances one's standing within the community, elevating social status. Despite this, each individual possesses the ability to convey their unique 'brand' or distinctiveness. Defined by Highsnobiety (2023) as the 'Storm Hunter', who seeks rare, limited-edition products to display knowledge and exclusivity, often name-dropping connections, are drawn to collaborations between outdoor and fashion brands for cultural currency to assert their insider status and a representation of social identity.

4.0 Employees

4.1 Introduction

The notion that "It takes a village to build a brand," as articulated by Neumeier (2006), enhances the collaborative and multifaceted nature of a brand. Furthermore, Tidd & Bessant (2009) emphasise that innovation is all about people. The clothing industry stands as a prominent example, employing over 300 million individuals globally and boasting a market worth 1.3 trillion USD (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). This scale accentuates the pivotal role of employees within brand operations.

Brands are increasingly directing attention towards aligning their internal ethos with core values. Stanley & Chouinard (2023) advocate for the integrity of company strategies, where employees are to be fully engaged and committed, they must perceive alignment between the company's purpose and its actual operations. This alignment builds a sense of authenticity, enabling employees to understand and embrace their roles within the organisation more effectively.

In line with this perspective, viewing employees as customers (Simmons, 2003) has become a guiding principle for brands seeking to fortify their identity. Employing tools such as brand identity and values, as highlighted by Ekhlassi et al. (2018), is instrumental in nurturing a brand culture that resonates internally. By creating a robust brand identity and values system, organisations not only establish a coherent narrative but also foster a sense of belonging and purpose among the employees. This resonates deeply with the concept of employees embodying the brand essence in their interactions, both internally and externally.

In this section, the focus is directed towards employees who contribute significantly to the establishment of cultural icons. By examining the social perspective of employees through the lenses of brand culture and leadership, this chapter aims to provide an understanding that extends beyond conventional financial and strategic frameworks.

4.2 Importance of Brand Purpose and Values to Employees

For employees, values, vision, and mission play pivotal roles in influencing their choice of brands. Brook (2024) emphasises that his decision to pursue a career in the outdoor industry was significantly shaped by the values embodied by brands like Patagonia. Conversely, Trapp (2024) elucidates how, during the inception of his career, 30 years ago, these factors held minimal importance and lacked influence in decision-making, a scenario starkly different from the present day, where priorities have shifted notably over the last five years.

A catalyst for this transformation could be attributed to the impact of COVID-19, which served as a catalyst, intensifying and expediting changes and evolutions in individuals' perspectives. The pandemic prompted people to reflect on what truly mattered to them, thereby elevating the significance of values, vision, and mission in the decision-making processes related to their careers.

4.2 Brand Culture

Culture within a brand extends beyond superficial elements, encapsulating the enduring values and beliefs that meet its identity and purpose. As explained by Tidd & Bessant (2009), culture operates within the domain of anthropology, emphasising its profound and enduring nature, shaping the brand's character.

Authenticity stands as a cornerstone in building a resonant brand identity. Neumeier (2006) highlights the significance of aligning the brand's purpose with its internal culture to cultivate authenticity. When a brand's articulated purpose is deeply embedded throughout its internal culture, it creates a sense of genuine connection and credibility. This alignment enables an authentic representation of the brand's values, resonating with both internal and external audiences.

Furthermore, the cultivation of a strong sense of culture within a brand plays a pivotal role in creating a sense of belonging. Drawing an analogy, Sinek (2009) compares this cohesive culture to a safety net and a shared identity.

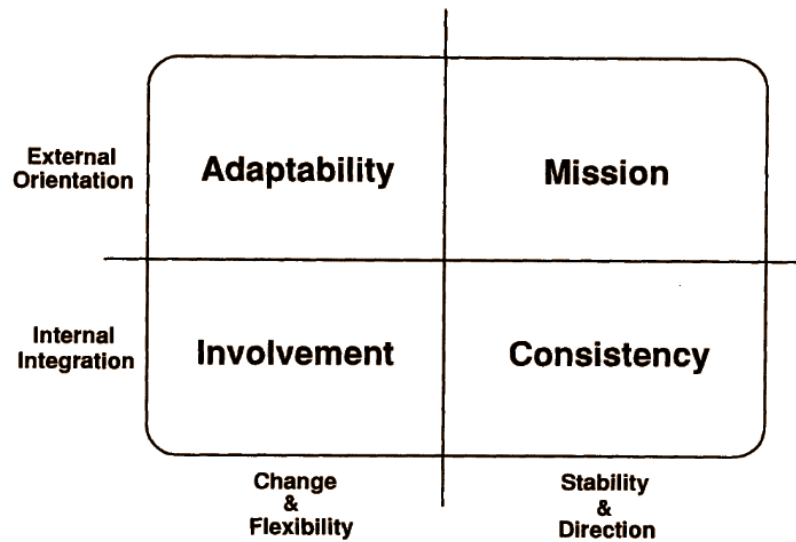


Figure 2. Theoretical Model of Culture Traits, (Denison and Mishra 1995)

Denison and Mishra (1995) present a theoretical model that recognises the distinct cultural traits associated with internal integration and external adaptation, highlighting the difference between change and stability within brands. As a brand evolves, culture develops as a means to address the challenges of both adapting to external factors and integrating internally. Traits such as involvement and adaptability are linked to embracing change. At the same time, consistency and a clear mission are more inclined to uphold the brand's ability to maintain stability and predictability over an extended period.

Trapp (2024) asserts that numerous brands within the outdoor industry exhibit a well-defined framework surrounding organisational culture. This framework encourages employees to embrace the brand's purpose, as evidenced by practices such as team-building days, allocated time each week for brand-related activities, and a strong emphasis on employee well-being. Trapp specifically highlights Picture Organic Clothing and Timberland as industry pioneers in pursuing such organisational cultures based on his industry experience.

Brand Culture

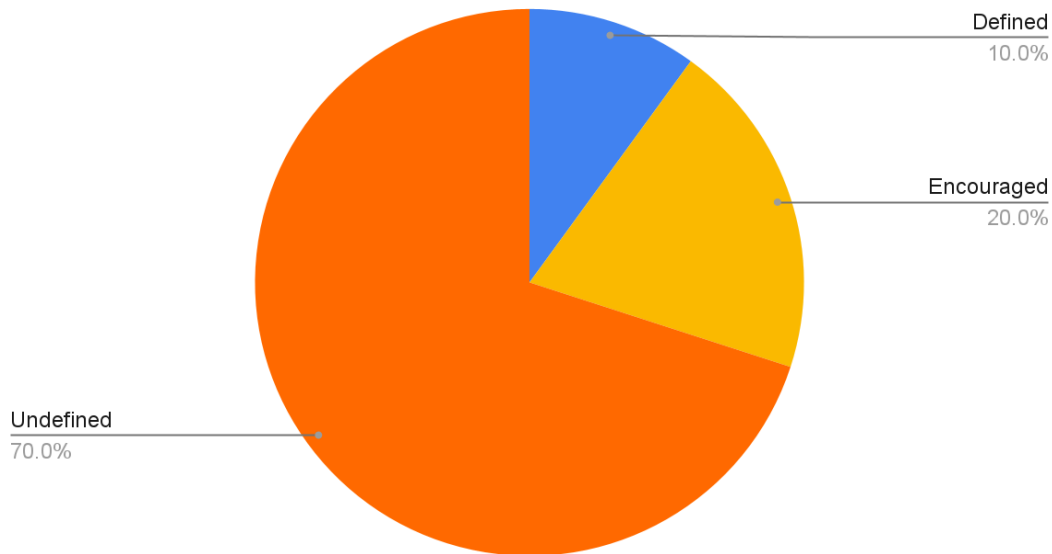


Figure 3. The Perspective of Brand Culture within Outdoor Brands, (Trapp 2024)

Figure 3 serves as a visual representation of the prevailing degree of clarity regarding organisational culture within outdoor brands, as indicated by Trapp (2024). It is evident from the diagram that there exists a need to enhance efforts in both promoting and delineating internal culture, aligning it with the brands' core values and purpose. Currently, only a modest ten per cent of these brands have a formally defined culture, explicitly outlined in employee contracts and integrated into the overarching brand values.

4.3 Leadership

Leadership is pivotal in driving innovation and encouraging a culture of creativity within brands. As highlighted by Tidd & Bessant (2009), leaders with a vision think creatively by challenging conventional norms and "doing differently." They possess the ability to inspire and act, as noted by Sinek (2009), creating a sense of purpose among their teams.

The internal factors integral to effective leadership, as identified by Interbrand (2023), are four key dimensions: direction, alignment, empathy, and agility. Direction refers to a

brand's defined purpose, ambition, and culture, guiding its plans, while alignment reflects the organisation's unity in following the brand strategy, supported by empowering systems. Empathy involves actively understanding and responding to evolving stakeholder needs, while agility represents a company's ability to react to opportunities and stay ahead of expectations.

Moreover, leaders are tasked with creating an environment in which great ideas can happen, as Sinek (2009) emphasised, in which leadership should occur across various brand functions and levels. Leaders embrace new concepts and frameworks, as proposed by Tidd & Bessant (2009), to adopt an inclusive approach to leadership, creating a safe, collaborative and innovative environment.

Tidd & Bessant (2009) further categorise three fundamental dimensions of leadership: concern for tasks, concern for people, and concern for change. These dimensions signify the nature of effective leadership, encompassing a balanced focus on achieving objectives, nurturing and empowering individuals, and driving transformative change within the brand.

4.4 Building and Maintaining Employee Loyalty

Building on brand purpose and values, when an employee has clarity within their role, a sense of purpose and an identifiable 'why', this translates to business growth, employee loyalty, productivity and motivation to drive the success of the brand (Sinek, 2009).

Possessing a loyal and committed workforce proves advantageous for both the organisation and its employees across various dimensions. As per the insights of EO Executives (n.d.), the departure of an employee, often regarded as the most costly form of attrition, emphasises the broader significance of employee loyalty. This principle holds universally: when employees experience discontent, frustration, and a lack of recognition or benefits, a lack of motivation and reduced productivity ensue, prompting a desire to seek alternative employment. The psychological toll on an employee, involving invested time, money, and commitment, can impact not only confidence but also professional rebuilding and reintegration into the job market.

Furthermore, such instances result in financial losses for the business, tarnishing its reputation and potentially creating a climate of mistrust within the team. The departure of loyal employees thus emerges as a multifaceted challenge with far-reaching implications for both individual professionals and the brand entity.

5.0 Brands in Focus - Employee Interviews

5.1 Methodology

Four individuals were interviewed from different organisations and agreed to participate. All brands chosen are within the outdoor industry, based in the United Kingdom, with a range of roles specifically chosen. By doing this it enables a broader aspect from different perspectives and levels within each brand.

An informed consent form (Appendix A) was crafted to outline the requirements for participant involvement while emphasising the safeguards for data protection and its intended use in the study.

The interview was structured as an informal dialogue aimed at unveiling the participants' insights into the organisational culture within their workplace. To maintain the natural flow of conversation, prompting questions were incorporated, and was conducted via online video calls. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for future reference. Excerpts from these transcripts are featured in Appendix A.

In conducting a comparative study, it is crucial to consider a range of factors such as company size, demographics, and the duration of a company's existence. Appendix B offers a comprehensive overview of all four companies. The interview explores the employee perspective of the brand, reviewing if the purpose and values align from the inside, to what they communicate on the outside. The resulting findings are now presented.

5.2 Adam Gardiner - Sustainability Manager, Rapha

To inspire the world to live life by bike is Rapha's purpose. The purpose is reflected in the brand's culture, keeping cycling at the core of everything they do. According to Gardiner (2023), Rapha provides three foundational benefits to its employees, facilitating cycling activities that extend beyond their commuting needs. These perks include designated cycling mornings every Wednesday, encouraging individuals to engage in biking activities until midday, three specific company days per year dedicated to collective office rides, and an annual allocation of two days for 'sportive days.' These

days allow participation in cycling-related events or trips, extended of an individual's annual leave entitlement.

Furthermore, the workplace environment at Rapha is tailored to accommodate cycling enthusiasts, including a storage facility capable of housing up to 300 bicycles, ample shower facilities, and the provision of an in-house mechanic offering complimentary bike servicing. An initiative known as Rapha 101 is specifically designed for employees unfamiliar with cycling, offering them the chance to either learn or bolster their confidence in biking activities.

Every Monday morning, during the company's regular update meeting, a segment dedicated to bike racing updates takes precedence. This covers a wide spectrum of cycling events, ranging from renowned competitions to various cycling disciplines. This platform serves as an avenue for any employee to share updates and enlighten colleagues about the diverse landscape within the cycling sphere.

Although primarily tailored for head office employees, initiatives are also in place to engage store employees, providing them with opportunities to ride and establish connections within the cycling community.

At the core of their approach lies the principle of circularity. Rapha's commitment to this concept is evident through its repair services for products and its recent collaboration with a socially-driven repair centre in Amsterdam. This particular repair centre serves as a platform for the integration of refugees and migrants into the Netherlands, providing them with training and valuable skill development opportunities. Notably, Rapha's active participation in the Sustainability Apparel Coalition underscores their dedication to sustainability, with ongoing discussions regarding the establishment of a resale platform, recognising its significance in their overarching sustainability goals. To assess and mitigate its environmental impact, Rapha is constantly evaluating its production volume, methodologies, and logistics.

Gardiner (2024) emphasises the importance of purchasing quality items and prioritising longevity as fundamental steps toward curbing overconsumption. Rapha adopts a deliberate focus on emotional durability, endeavouring to instil a sense of care and attachment among its customers toward its products. This is achieved through the cultivation of authenticity and a compelling narrative that resonates with their audience, fueled by a genuine passion for cycling. These efforts are visibly reflected on their website, particularly within the Rapha community.

5.3 Adele Gingell - Head of Positive Impact, Finisterre

'To inspire a deeper connection with the sea' is the purpose and why Finisterre exists. Currently revising its brand book, the company aims to articulate its purpose distinctly, particularly as it expands and ventures into new markets. Originating as a brand centred around cold water surfing, Finisterre has gradually shifted away from this singular narrative with the diversification of its product range. Gingell (2023) emphasises the importance of ensuring clarity in how the public perceives and understands the brand's identity.

Gingell (2023) asserts that the employees seamlessly embody the company's purpose, often without conscious awareness or explicit guidance. Situated close to the ocean, the office environment naturally integrates this element into their everyday lives. At the head office, a weekly practice known as 'Sea Tuesday' is initiated, wherein employees commence work an hour later, dedicating time to engage with, be it near or on, the sea. This programme aims to nurture and enhance their connection with the ocean, thereby reinforcing their purpose within their employees of why they do what they do (Gingell, 2023).

'Growing a brand is not a problem' says Gingell, but growing new and different business models through being innovative and diverse for a positive impact and a progressive path forward from both a social and environmental impact. As an illustration, Finisterre introduced a wetsuit rental program aimed at enhancing accessibility to Yulex wetsuits—a sustainable alternative to neoprene—for sea enthusiasts. This initiative enables customers to evaluate the quality and performance of Yulex in a non-binding manner, thus providing a platform for customers to access an environmentally conscientious fabric. Additionally, Finisterre offers repair services and operates a pre-loved program, permitting customers to exchange their used products for credit toward purchasing new Finisterre items or acquiring pre-owned products. This strategy prolongs the life cycle of products, ensuring they remain in circulation and find new owners, aligning with sustainability principles.

Becoming B Corp certified in 2018, Finisterre is committed to sustainability practices and ethical standards. The establishment of the Finisterre Foundation in 2021 marked the inception of a Community Interest Company. This initiative supports small-scale charitable projects exclusively focused on enhancing access to the ocean (Finisterre, 2021).

5.4 Charlie Stewart - Co-founder, Albion Cycling

Albion brand's purpose is to “stay outside for longer”, serving as a guiding principle that reflects their ethos and product development strategies. Stewart (2023), one of the three co-founders of Albion, asserts that the brand is dedicated to crafting tools aligned with this purpose, particularly because they are users of the products, actively living by this guiding principle. This approach shapes their design philosophy, where emphasis is placed on enhancing the ease and comfort of prolonged outdoor activities through meticulous product design and conceptualisation.

Brand culture is evident through team weekends away, encouraging cycling if the employees want to, where Albion will provide the kit for, and most importantly, creating a positive environment within the workplace.

As Albion pursues B-corp certification, it remains dedicated to crafting superior-quality, durable products. Their goal is to set a positive example within the technical apparel industry by prioritising social and environmental impacts. Notably, Albion's distinguishing feature is its lifetime repair service offered for all products. This repair program operates within the design team, aiding in identifying and rectifying product weaknesses for continual enhancements in future designs. Approaching repairs from a perspective that aims for a net positive impact empowers the company to elevate its product standards. Stewart notes that customer feedback suggesting Albion products perform exceptionally well during extended rides could be attributed to factors such as fabric selection, fit, or specific design features.

According to Stewart (2023), Albion's customer base occupies a deliberately specific niche. Their strategy revolves around deeply resonating with a specific customer segment rather than pursuing a diluted mass-market approach. This goal is pursued by cultivating brand loyalty through emotional engagement through mediums like photography, storytelling, and films. Emphasising an emotional connection forms their decision-making process, supported by multiple factors, resulting in an aspirational appeal for customers who prioritise product quality and performance when making purchasing decisions.

Their major hurdle currently involves limitations related to available resources and time. They intend to energise their community by arranging planned rides, events, or film screenings. Stewart acknowledges the substantial support gained from these gatherings and envisions the future of successful brands as rooted in real-world connections. Events are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the brand's future.

5.5 Harry Brook - Community Marketing and Impact Coordinator for UK & Ireland, Patagonia

Brook (2024) attributes his entry into the outdoor industry to Patagonia, citing lifelong exposure to Patagonia products through friends and family. A significant moment in this connection occurred when he received a hand-me-down Patagonia fleece, coincidentally of the same age as him. His affinity for Patagonia deepened as the company actively campaigned for equitable access to the outdoors and took into consideration of greater environmental footprint and impacts their business can have beyond just its manufacturing process.

Initially, Brook found employment at Patagonia in a role that did not align with his prior experience. However, this served as a strategic step in his professional growth within the company. The alignment of Patagonia's values with Brook's passion for fostering outdoor experiences and accessibility played a pivotal role in his career trajectory.

Reflecting on Patagonia's organisational culture, Brook contends that the brand's purpose is genuinely mirrored in its workforce. Despite a potential misconception of Patagonia as a "light, breezy, California laidback company," it operates as a for-profit entity with the practical considerations of business. The Chouinard (2016) principles of 'let my people go surfing' are embedded within the brand, which encourages flexible working arrangements as long as work responsibilities are fulfilled.

Brook (2024) acknowledges that a notable challenge lies in reshaping perceptions of workplace culture, particularly among younger generations. He emphasises the need to educate that work extends beyond traditional office tasks, encompassing the expression of the brand's values. Strengthening the existing workplace culture provides opportunities for extending Patagonia's purpose beyond sports-focused initiatives.

When questioned about the brand's impact and growth, Brook (2024) candidly admits that Patagonia recognises its role as part of the problem. Acknowledging the unsustainability of rapid growth, the company has not set a specific growth target but has organically expanded based on its established reputation. Future strategies involve a balanced approach to growth, focusing on 'passion projects' where the brand can make a meaningful impact, such as fishing initiatives.

Highlighting the collaborative nature of Patagonia's workplace, Brook (2024) underscores his direct involvement with the founder, even from his Manchester location. This close collaboration exemplifies a positive, inclusive, and synergistic organisational dynamic.

6.0 Taste and Value Proposition - GorpCore Case Studies

6.1 Introduction

Arc'teryx, Patagonia, and Salomon are widely recognised as innovative leaders within the outdoor industry. Three brands with a wealth of knowledge and pioneers within their purposes. An exploration of these brands promises valuable insights into the elements of their identities. As Oh et al. (2020) highlight, brands possess a richness of meaning and exert complex effects.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the case studies are reflections of how the brands present themselves through their communication. However, discerning the accuracy of these communications is challenging without access to interviews from employees, which can offer a deeper understanding. This study draws an etic approach from various sources, including the brands' official websites, published materials, and online interviews. This comprehensive approach aims to unravel the outdoor brands' communicated narratives, with a specific focus on their purpose, values, language, culture, and identity.

Thorstein Veblen's classic theory of conspicuous consumption highlights the influence of social norms and cultural values in shaping consumption patterns, driven by the desire to signal one's social status within the community. Veblen defines conspicuous consumption as a '*symptomatic of the superfluous lifestyle of the rich*' (Diggins, 1999), and how clothes serve the purpose of 'advertising extravagant expenditure'.

In this chapter, we will look specifically at three products which fall within the Gorpcore trend, and could be defined as 'breakthrough products' (Satell, 2017), or 'cultural icons' (Hoffman, 2022 p152) from what can be deemed as 'cult brands' (Atkin, 2004). Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption will consider how social status, wealth, and cultural norms drive patterns of consumption.

Veblen states that '*objects of conspicuous consumption must be without function and serviceability; since their social value lies in their having no practical use whatsoever, only those who can squander wealth can afford them*' (Diggins, 1999). Within the outdoor industry, which are predominantly functional and practical products, there can be relevance to this from what will be discussed throughout this chapter where products are taken out of the context of why they were designed and now act as a social value within their community.

6.2 Gorpcore

In the evolution of fashion trends, Gorpcore has gained prominence, yet before its emergence, athleisure dominated, succeeding the era of sports fashion. Kenworthy (2015) explains the transformation of sportswear into high fashion, attributing this shift to societal changes, urban adaptation, cultural phenomena, and advancements in synthetic materials.

The athleisure market, combining fashion and function which became popular in the 1980s, is predicted to grow 25% by 2025, where 55% of people wear athleisure for more than just sports activities (Adegeest, 2022). This not only signifies a transformation in fashion preferences but also highlights the enduring appeal and adaptability of athleisure in contemporary wardrobes. Moreover, the evolution of athleisure can be traced through iconic cultural moments and influential figures who have seamlessly integrated athletic elements into mainstream fashion, perpetuating its relevance across diverse lifestyles.

Today, Gorpcore is a movement which has outlived the transcended lifespan of your average fashion trend and become a 'cultural phenomenon' (Clarke, 2022). 'Gorpcore' is a phrase raised in 2017 by Jason Chen. 'Gorp', a term derived from "good ol' raisins and peanuts", the trail mix hikers would use to refuel. Described as a wave of technically-minded outdoor apparel that's gone off-track (Maoui, 2023), which represents practicality, ease and cultural clout (Clarke, 2022).

There is concern that the 'fans' of Gorpcore fail to understand the depth and complexity (Van Oostrum, 2023) ingrained in these products. Products of Gorpcore are often waterproof, breathable, practical and highly technical, where the logo is in the background, and functionality is at the forefront. (Warsaw Sneaker 2023). With material innovation on the rise, the introduction of Goretex in outdoor brands becoming more accessible, yet still at a price, consumers are looking for specific specialised materials for their outdoor clothing. 67% agree that performance fabrics such as Gore-tex are a form of luxury fashion (Highsnobiety, 2023).

Wearers of Gorpcore fashion seem to prioritise a harmonious blend of both form and function (Babcock 2022). However, their motivations might be influenced by considerations of social identity and status, as depicted by the image of *"all those city dudes wearing technical outdoor gear, looking like they want to climb Everest, and probably going to lunch."* (Warsaw Sneaker 2023).

The trajectory of Gorpcore has undergone a significant evolution, witnessing a transition from its origins in outdoor brands pre-millennium to contemporary fashion brands embracing its aesthetic, trends, and technical materials. The new millennium has

witnessed a fashion takeover, incorporating the essence and functionality of this technical apparel into mainstream style. Nanda (2021) suggests that Gorpcore represents a unique, potentially once-in-a-generation opportunity for outdoor brands, as they navigate the challenge of welcoming new customers while maintaining authenticity with their core consumer base.

The rise of Gorpcore has brought about unexpected dynamics, as competitors forge collaborations and high-end fashion brands seek to imprint their logos on technical apparel. Noteworthy examples include groundbreaking collaborations such as Arc'teryx and Palace Skateboards, The North Face and Gucci, New Balance and Snow Peak, and Salomon's collaboration with Maison Margiela MM6. These collaborative ventures underscore the blend between traditionally distinct spheres of the market, emphasising the growing appeal and influence of Gorpcore across diverse segments of the fashion industry.

6.3 Arc'teryx

Arc'teryx, a renowned outdoor apparel and gear brand, is synonymous with cutting-edge design, technical excellence, and a commitment to pushing the boundaries of outdoor performance. Founded in 1989 in North Vancouver, Canada, by Dave Lane, the brand's name is derived from "Archaeopteryx lithographica", symbolising the brand's commitment to evolve and adapt in pursuit of perfection, believing there is always a better way (Arc'teryx, n.d.1).

Arc'teryx (n.d.2) brand's core purpose is to "build the finest products possible." In recent years, a significant shift in the brand ethos towards sustainability has been observed, marked by initiatives like the "Rebird" program, which promotes product longevity through repair and trade-in services (Engle, 2020; Sidell, 2023). Embracing values such as quality, craftsmanship, and minimalist design, Arc'teryx has established itself as a symbol of excellence in the outdoor industry. Key to Arc'teryx's distinctiveness is the timeless and classic design of its products, prioritising practicality over style (Croteau, 2019). CEO Stuart Haselden emphasises the brand's role is community-building and providing consumers with knowledge and support beyond mere product offerings (Sidell, 2023).

"Live it" is a core value at Arc'teryx, encouraging employees to use vacation days to connect with nature. The brand exhibits a commitment to flexible work schedules,

mental health, and an inclusive working environment (Arc'teryx, n.d.2). Described as a familial environment where dogs are welcome, Arc'teryx's workplace culture is highlighted for its loyalty to employee well-being (Croteau, 2019). The brand's meticulous attention to detail is reflected in its commitment to understanding every aspect of each product (Engle, 2020). "Knowing how to run a factory, knowing how to handle materials and knowing how to do construction is valuable for doing good design work." Dan Green, Design VP, Arc'teryx (Engle, 2020).

Croteau (2019) notes that Arc'teryx's products are not just crafted from technology but are human-driven, with employees understanding customer needs as they are also consumers. The brand's unique approach involves 200 employees across 25 departments, creating an engineering lab at the Design Centre for prototype testing, ensuring clear communication and constant innovation.

The brand encompasses two sister divisions, LEAF (Law Enforcement and Armed Forces) and Veilance. While LEAF caters to law enforcement and armed forces, Veilance, founded in 2009, focuses on minimalist design for urban environments (Arc'teryx, n.d.2). Veilance, offering cutting-edge technology and materials like Arc'teryx, targets a more experimental and fashion-forward consumer with a higher price point (Karsten Kroening, 2022). These sister brands allow Arc'teryx to extend its customer base.

6.3.1 The Alpha SV Jacket, Arc'teryx

The Alpha SV Jacket, a lightweight outer layer designed for climbing and alpine environments, features a minimalist design. Arc'teryx (n.d.1) products are named after Greek letters such as The Beta, The Delta and The Gamma, categorised into collections showcasing similar features and purposes.

An idea which nearly bankrupted the company (Arc'teryx, 2024) in 1998, The Alpha SV Jacket has emerged as an iconic representation of its defining features and functions. Crafted from Gore-tex Pro, this durable and breathable jacket boasts several technical attributes, including the Micro Grid Backer to withstand abrasions, an embedded RECCO reflector for enhanced searchability, pit zips, articulated construction, and the StormHood, a brand-specific design ensuring compatibility with helmets.

The jacket's 'SV' designation signifies its suitability for severe weather conditions, utilising top-tier, durable materials to provide prolonged exposure protection against harsh elements. Aligned with the brand's purpose to "create equipment that enables a person to be immersed in the moment of doing, regardless of external conditions" the

Alpha SV Jacket serves as a true representation of this ethos, where 19 tests are done on this jacket, including a rain tower test and an environmental chamber test (Arc'teryx, 2024). Arc'teryx remains true to its brand identity by refusing to compromise on quality, abstaining from the use of average materials for cheaper products, and acknowledging that quality remains a non-negotiable feature, this is also true to collaborations where Dan Green, the brand's Design Vice President highlights, "The moment we pivot and try to address the streetwear world, we'll totally lose it," (Engle, 2020).

Arc'teryx, according to Babcock (2022), has transformed into a "cult-fave-flex." It's intriguing to note that products initially engineered for high-performance activities now permeate everyday life, transcending their intended use. This trend has reached an ironic peak, exemplified by a viral TikTok video where an individual stood in a shower while wearing the jacket to test out the functionalities. As of January 2023, related TikTok videos to "Arcteryx shower" have an astounding 247.9 million views (Woolven, 2023).

This brand has now become a desirable icon, sought after by consumers seeking social identity and status, who are investing in higher-priced products from brands with elite status and purpose. The brand's credibility receives an added boost from celebrity endorsements such as Frank Ocean, Drake and Virgil Abloh, which subtly shift the brand's narrative away from functionality and more toward its incorporation into fashion.

6.4 Patagonia

Founded in 1973 by Yvon Chouinard, Patagonia, a product-driven company (Chouinard, 2016) has built a legacy of purpose, values and innovation, by challenging the fashion industry with its dedication to making a positive impact on the planet. Their campaigns which align with their philosophy of "cause no unnecessary harm" have caused a conflicted mindset of traditional retail businesses (Jones, & Gettinger, 2016).

In September 2022, the Chouinard family transferred all ownership of the brand to two new entities: Patagonia Purpose Trust and the Holdfast Collective (Patagonia, 2022). The reason for this is to ensure that Patagonia makes good on its commitment to run a socially responsible business and give away its profits (Gelles, 2022). Chouinard said: "Instead of extracting value from nature and transforming it into wealth, we are using the wealth Patagonia creates to protect the source." (Patagonia, 2022).

Their design philosophy focuses on repairability, durability, and multifunctionality, with consideration to innovation, invention, authenticity and focus on their core customers. Patagonia's core customers, the ones for which they design the clothes, are the 'dirtbaggers', the ambassadors within climbing, surfing, fishing and trail running (Chouinard, 2016). Their "Worn Wear" program, which encourages customers to buy used Patagonia gear, has garnered success, aligning with the brand's ethos of reducing waste, as well as expanding their customer base by being more accessible and inclusive through a cheaper price point. Patagonia actively participates as a founding member of influential organisations such as the Fair Labor Association, Textile Exchange, and Sustainable Apparel Coalition, while maintaining close involvement with the Outdoor Industry Association, B Lab, and Bluesign.

A notable instance highlighting Patagonia's commitment to transparency was the launch of an interactive website detailing its environmental footprint. Originally designed for graduate students, NGOs, and engaged customers, the company was surprised by the enthusiastic response from its employees. Their increased understanding of the company's production processes made them more knowledgeable and cooperative. This platform has significantly elevated the quality of internal debates within the organisation and enhanced the company's problem-solving capabilities (Stanley & Chouinard, 2023).

6.4.1 The Better Sweater Fleece Vest, Patagonia

A particular product from Patagonia has gained notable popularity, transforming into a symbol of status due to its combination of functionality, style, and the brand's reputation. This product is the 'Better Sweater Fleece Vest' which is crafted from 100% recycled polyester, boasting various distinctive features that contribute to its appeal such as a range of colour offerings, and a sweater knit aesthetic which looks smart but is also practical.

The success of this product is attributed, in part, to its promotion via a widely-followed social media profile "midtownuniform" (Instagram, 2017), where the vest is a crucial part of the 'tech bro' wardrobe. Flanagin (2018) mentions the power vest "uniform" fascinates him with the ubiquity, the near-universal appeal of hyper-masculinity and disposable income that is less about blending in, bringing it back to Veblens' theory on social values. It serves as more than just an outfit but signifies belonging to an exclusive and aspirational community. Wearing this vest is a demonstration of shared values aligned with Patagonia's strong environmental commitment and ethical standards, reinforcing the brand's ethos. This product has become a symbol that various

companies are all too ready to capitalize on, acknowledging its integral role in the corporate environment and for the planet.

Patagonia has notably shifted its focus to exclusive partnerships with "mission-driven companies that prioritise the planet" and collaborates with B-Corporation-certified entities that adhere to specific social and environmental criteria (Cantor, 2019). The company has introduced a disclosure in its corporate sales catalogue, signifying a commitment to aligning with its values, even if it means reserving the right to refuse service. This approach underscores Patagonia's devoted commitment to its purpose, extending beyond profit maximisation.

6.5 Salomon

Founded in 1947 by François Salomon in Annecy, France, with an initial focus on ski bindings which would lead to revolutionising the skiing industry. Eventually, in the early 90s, we saw their first 'Adventure' collection of hiking boots, proceeding to a range of sports from inline skating, to trail running (Salomon n.d 1) and the start of crafting the future of outdoor sports.

Salomon's brand purpose revolves around inspiring and enabling people to enjoy the outdoors to the fullest. They aim to create products that enhance the outdoor experience, whether it's trail running, hiking, skiing, or mountaineering. With their new brand signature, 'Tomorrow is Yours' since October 2022, Salomon President and CEO states "We believe that forging a deeper connection with nature and the outdoors can improve peoples' lives and make us all better," (Fogliato, F 2022). Their core values of innovation, authenticity, and craftsmanship align with their purpose whilst constantly pushing the boundaries of technology to develop exceptional reliability, durability and high-performance products.

Voted 19th in Highsnobiety 'New Luxury Brands' (2024), it is clear the brand is organically crossing through into the fashion industry, where a pair of Salomon trainers are now a must in every cultural pioneer's wardrobe, who want to belong to a certain community.

6.5.1 The XT-6, Salomon

The Salomon XT-6 stands as an iconic trail running shoe that has gained significant popularity, particularly in recent years. Its historical significance, innovative design, and symbolic status make it a noteworthy case study within the outdoor industry.

In 2013, Salomon introduced the S/Lab XT-6 shoe, the identifiable zig-zag laced-up trainer which has transcended the 'gorp-core' trend into a trail shoe brand in its own right (Maoui, 2023). Designed by Benjamin Grenet, Salomon's Lead Footwear Designer, the concept of the XT-6 was to magnify the shoe's technology and make it visible (Salomon, n.d.2). Originally designed as a performance-oriented sneaker engineered to withstand the harsh conditions of 100-mile ultramarathons through the mountains (Goh, 2019), today it is the most popular shoe in the fashion industry, even being awarded the GQ's Sneaker of the Year in 2019.

According to Van Oostrum (2023), the functionality, comfort and design are the main features that lead to the success of this shoe, which has a large team involved in making it a phenomenal hit - from pattern, development, design, product line management, commercial and marketing, underscoring the thoroughness involved in its creation. The Salomon XT-6 boasts a quick-lace system, an innovation that adjusts the shoe's fit with a single pull, along with a 'contagrip' outsole engineered to provide optimal traction on various surfaces, ensuring ultimate grip and stability. These innovative design elements contribute purpose and value to the product. Today, the XT-6 offers several variations, including the XT-6 Gore-tex, XT-6 Expanse, a traditional trainer approach, and the XT-6 Mindful, catering for the responsible, climate-conscious customer.

Babcock (2023) confidently describes the aesthetics of the XT-6 as both futuristic and classically styled, effectively dominating the contemporary men's style sphere and becoming a cult favourite. The emergence of this popular product can be traced back to 2015, according to Highsnobiety (2023), where Parisian boutique The Broken Arm began stocking Salomon's Speedcross trainers. The founder decided that the aesthetics sat well with the shop's couture offerings, which led to a collaboration between the shop and Salomon. With a 91% increase in social mentions year on year, with searches on Lyst seeing a 634% increase in 2020 (Nanda, 2021), it is evident that Salomon is in demand.

The smallest adaptation to the XT-6 through colour or subtle aesthetics has enhanced the diversity of this product, ensuring there is a specific variation catered for all, where the product itself is never compromised from the authentic, functional needs and practical design which makes the XT-6 a successful, versatile and diverse shoe.

6.6 Chapter Summary

The paradigmatic products within the Gorpcore movement function as status symbols during societal moments, aligning with Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption. The act of donning one of these three focal products serves as a manifestation of an individual's personal brand, reflecting values in line with the associated brands. This phenomenon, as articulated by Woollven (2023), can be regarded as a 'political act,' symbolising the projection of one's social identity.

7.0 Future of Brands

7.1 Introduction

“If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.”— Henry Ford (Walsh, 2017).

Although there is strength in consumer perceptions and the power they hold in directing success on ‘cult brands’ and breakthrough products, as the quote by Henry Ford goes, the customer doesn’t always know what they want (Walsh, 2017).

The outdoor clothing industry is now a platform at the intersection of style, culture, and community. Gorpcore has outlived the trend, consumers are becoming more conscious, a new audience has developed a taste for the technical, performance-informed design, and cultural pioneers have given outdoor clothing a new meaning. In the era of the new outdoors, cultural pioneers are highly influential, with their values playing a pivotal role in shaping future trends. Highsnobiety’s 2023 report highlights that their influence stems from knowledge, authority, and social influence. According to Highsnobiety’s 2024 New Luxury report, these cultural pioneers are positioned at the forefront of a fragmented culture, making diverse and targeted engagement essential. They are the early adopters of new products, brands, and ideas, thereby playing a crucial role in shaping the future of culture.

There is a noticeable transformation occurring within the outdoor industry, as products undergo a reevaluation, transcending their original design context. This evolution is characterised by a blending of functionality and style, as the Business of Fashion noted in 2024. From being tested in the shower, worn on the catwalk and endorsed in pop culture, outdoor brands and their products are experiencing consumption that extends in every direction within the expansive realm of the fashion industry.

In the words of Hawken (1992), “Tomorrow we can’t be the same business we are today”. There is an inherent need to evolve with customers and their needs, elaborated by Chouinard (2016) that to change the government, you have to change corporations, and to do that you first have to change the consumers.

This next chapter looks at the future of brands, and what elements are important to ensure success through building trust and loyalty, aligning values and incorporating a collaborative, authentic strategy.

7.2 Community

A recurring theme in this research highlights the significance of fostering communities, either among consumers or within brands themselves. Establishing communities takes various forms. For instance, Snow Peak orchestrates 'The Snow Peak Way,' offering a camping experience that unites customers and staff through outdoor activities and product-focused workshops. Similarly, Rapha's online navigation, 'Life by Bike,' enables users to explore diverse rides, engage with the Rapha cycling club, and access global clubhouses.

As Stewart (2023) iterates;

“The future of strong brands is communities and a massive part of that is that people want to live and breathe their brands. They want to do events, they want to do rides, they want to meet like-minded people. They want spaces where they can come together in the real world”.

Research highlights that 66% of Gen Z believe communities stem from shared causes and interests, not economic or educational backgrounds (Francis, & Hoefel, 2018). This emphasises the contemporary view that community bonds are formed through shared passions rather than conventional demographics.

Contemporary communities are shaped by a brand's social mission and values. There is a strategic shift from considering the community solely as a top-of-funnel tactic to recognising it as a long-term, bottom-of-funnel strategy. In this evolved perspective, the emphasis is placed on loyalty and advocating the brand's purpose, paving the way for the organic growth of communities. The most valuable and effective interaction for brands transpires when they connect intimately with communities, building trust and cultivating meaningful customer relationships.

Mansfield (2023) proposes that shared values serve as the nurturing soil for the growth of a community. The dual processes of building and expanding a community are deemed equally important for a brand. The building aspect involves establishing an infrastructure that brings the community together, whether it's through the sharing of experiences, as seen in 'selfie' photos atop a mountain in a cosy jacket, or engaging in a discussion about specific footwear products tied to the benefits they offer. On the other hand, the growth element is to the community as a whole, creating a space where individuals can communicate and express their authentic selves during organised events, ranging from cycling events hosted by Albion Cycling to film premieres held at Patagonia stores.

An effective strategy for both building and growing a community lies in campaigns and marketing initiatives where storytelling is customer-led, particularly in the realm of environmental initiatives. Organised environmental campaigns, such as beach litter clean-ups for brands like Finisterre or initiatives focused on mountains and rivers for Salomon, offer a valuable opportunity to build a sense of community and shared values.

7.2.1 Communicating with Cultural Pioneers

Currently, 60% of the global population is engaged on social media, making it the second most popular avenue for consumers to search and buy products. According to Shopify Plus (2023), 78% of consumers are more inclined to purchase from a brand with a strong social media experience, 77% prefer such a brand over competitors, and 72% are willing to spend more.

Table 3 in Appendix B highlights the significant influence brands wield in communicating with a vast audience. Established brands, such as Patagonia, tend to post frequently, often incorporating video content aligned with their core purpose and product showcasing. Despite boasting a substantial following of 5.3 million, Patagonia refrains from using its platform solely for sales, remaining dedicated to its mission of environmental conservation.

Arc'teryx, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on community through its Instagram presence. Examples include posts for International Women's Day, insights into sponsored skiers, coverage of the Arc'teryx Backcountry Academy, and features on their Community Grant Program and Arc'teryx Academy, all centered around building and engaging their community.

While these brands maintain authenticity in their content and campaigns, cultural pioneers, or 'storm hunter' consumers, play a transformative role by adopting and reimagining communication. These consumers curate mood boards, Instagram pages, and 'memes,' contributing to the creation of culture and references beyond the brands' direct control (Highsnobiety 2024).

By allowing consumers access to behind-the-scenes content, such as videos of staff testing new products, at a factory or providing educational insights into new materials, brands can establish integrity and honesty within their community, also offers valuable knowledge into the reasons behind product designs. While social media provides an efficient and immediate way of communication with consumers, brands should carefully

consider where and how the content might be interpreted and reshaped in other contexts.

7.3 Listening Brands

According to Business of Fashion (2024), a shift towards brand marketing, with 71% planning increased spend compared to 46% for performance marketing, highlights the growing significance of emotional connections in enduring consumer-brand relationships. Brands attentive to consumer voices who will listen are poised for success. Consistency and authenticity in messaging are essential for consumers seeking genuine connections.

With Instagram's declining reach and a 30% yearly drop in engagement rates (Business of Fashion, 2024), brands must adopt innovative communication strategies. Highsnobiety (2023) asserts that authenticity, storytelling, and heritage resonate with consumers, urging brands to prioritise customer-focused strategies. In this climate, the lifetime value of a customer surpasses mere profit, emphasising trust and loyalty for brand sustainability.

Through changing the language, it is possible to adopt an inclusive, honest and transparent future. Using “citizen” instead of “consumer” allows the individual to participate in a better way of doing things. When purchasing, you are “buying into” rather than “buying from”, which builds loyalty beyond selling new products (Textile Exchange, 2023).

Maintaining consumer attention will prove difficult in a world where marketing is being pushed in every direction. A “less is more” approach is what Business of Fashion (2024) advises is needed, where carefully crafted storytelling can amplify the brand's purpose through an authentic personality. Proof points of this come from Arc'teryx's recent (October 4th 2023) use of the hashtag #nowasteddays on Instagram. The initiative to “celebrate uncommon journeys into the mountains—get out there, and delight in the detour.” (Arc'teryx, 2023), now has over 7000 entries, celebrating customers wearing their products in action, reiterating their purpose through their community.

7.4 Responsible Brands

Ensuring authenticity in a brand's commitment to the planet involves a nuanced understanding of its production practices, materials, and values. Leach (2023 1) raises a valid concern regarding an overemphasis on the "eco" aspect, potentially sidelining considerations of product wearability and longevity. When brands make great products, in a better, more innovative way, Leach (2023 3) iterates how this sends a powerful message to the rest of the industry, but also resonates with customers.

65% of Gen Z actively seek information on the origins and materials of their purchases (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) which underscores the demand for transparency in the market. This generation places pressure on brands to communicate honestly about their responsible practices. Ross (2023) notes the increasing availability of information on sourcing and materials, empowering consumers to make informed choices.

Brands wield significant influence in promoting environmental responsibility and can drive positive changes in consumer behaviour. Hawken (1992) emphasises that consumers hold the power to shape market dynamics by choosing products that align with their values. Overproduction and overconsumption within the clothing industry pose significant challenges, and recycling alone may not sufficiently address the linear business model that is currently in a mass of never-ending products.

Balancing environmental and social responsibility with market demands and trends poses a dilemma for brands. Staying true to their purpose, as exemplified by outdoor brands like Arc'teryx (2024) with a focus on iteration on improving design can be a guiding principle. Consumers, however, must also assert their influence by adhering to their values and resisting manipulative advertising pressures. While a sense of belonging and connection remains significant, the evolving mindset should pivot towards aligning purchasing decisions with personal values. This shift away from impulsive buying, coupled with a practical need-based approach, may be considered an idealistic goal but represents a necessary transformation for a sustainable and responsible consumer culture.

When talking about the responsible brand, Dreke (2023) mentions that transparency is required. A marketing strategy that is honest about the nature of the product, and helps the consumer appreciate its unique quality and durability are just as much a sustainability strategy as they are a marketing strategy - interlinked and responsible.

Brand	First Impact Report	Repairs	Resale	Rental
Albion	-	Y	N	N
Arc'teryx	2019	N	Y	N
Finisterre	2019	Y	Y	Y
Patagonia	2012	Y	Y	N
Rapha	2022	Y	N	N
Salomon	2022	N	N	N

Figure 4. Responsible Brands Analysis

7.4.1 Resale

As per the findings of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), there is a notable underutilisation of clothing, evidenced by a 36% decrease in the average number of times a garment is worn before being discarded compared to 15 years ago. This results in a global loss of USD 460 billion annually, as consumers dispose of clothing that could still be utilized.

Forward-thinking brands committed to sustainability are anticipated to incorporate accessible resale platforms for their customers in the future. The evidence for this shift is already apparent (see Figure 4), with three out of six focus brands in this study—Arc'teryx ReGear, Finisterre ReSkinned, and Patagonia WornWear—currently offering resale platforms. Notably, StockX reported an 800% growth in brand searches for Salomon, Arc'teryx, and The North Face in 2023 compared to 2022, underscoring the increasing demand for such initiatives (Business of Fashion, 2024).

The rise of 'recommerce' is a significant trend, contributing nearly £7 billion to total retail sales (1.6%) and supporting 49,000 jobs within the UK retail sector (Barclays, 2023). As highlighted by Dreke (2023), the escalating environmental concerns are expected to drive a substantial shift towards resale practices in the years to come. This transition is particularly pertinent in the outdoor industry, where products often boast a reliably strong length of life.

7.4.2 Membership and Rental

The revelation that garments are often discarded after a mere seven to ten times of wearing, as highlighted by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in 2017, underscores a

significant opportunity for brands. In response to this, brands can proactively explore the implementation of rental or subscription programs. By adopting such initiatives, brands not only contribute to the increased longevity of their products but also actively work towards minimizing environmental impact. Additionally, it allows brands to take responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their products, aligning with a more sustainable and circular approach.

A noteworthy example of this approach is exemplified by ON Running through their Cyclon subscription service. This initiative involves a monthly subscription for their Cloudneo running shoe. After six months or whenever the customer deems fit, the worn shoes are returned, and a new pair is provided. Through this sustainability-focused initiative, ON Running actively assumes responsibility for the end-of-life cycle of their products, ensuring their recycling and transformation into new components for other items. This strategic approach not only minimizes unnecessary waste but also maintains a commitment to the quality of the customer's running experience, thereby reinforcing the brand's purpose to 'ignite the human spirit through movement' (ON Running, 2022).

Similarly, Finisterre has introduced a 'Rent, Wear, Return' program for their Yulex Wetsuits (Finisterre, 2023). This initiative aligns with the broader industry trend, allowing customers to rent the wetsuits for a specific duration, wear them, and subsequently return them. It represents a step towards a more sustainable and circular model, addressing concerns related to the environmental impact of short product lifespans.

7.4.3 Degrowth

Established in 2021, Early Majority is redefining the concept of a 'brand' by positioning itself as the world's pioneer fashion degrowth company, as highlighted by Rubin (2023). Embracing a circular business model, the brand is committed to producing outdoor clothing suitable for all circumstances while prioritising systemic change. The foundation of Early Majority's growth lies in fostering a sense of community rather than perpetuating the proliferation of unnecessary products.

Early Majority distinguishes itself through the creation of multi-functional, high-performance, gender-equitable, and versatile products (Early Majority, n.d). To support its vision, the brand introduces an innovative membership system, offering both annual and lifetime memberships. Intriguingly, Early Majority explores the realm of NFTs as part of its membership strategy—a term associated with the metaverse. The lifetime membership includes a unique member badge in the form of an NFT, and its value is designed to be appreciated in tandem with the company's growth. Howard emphasizes

that these tokens are an experimental platform for organisation, collaboration, and cooperation. They represent a pioneering effort to explore new methods of operating in transformative and positive ways within the fashion industry (Rubin, 2023). Early Majority's commitment to innovation and sustainable practices underscores its dedication to not only providing quality products but also shaping a novel and responsible approach to the business of fashion.

7.5 Collaboration

There's a new collective mentality emerging as indicated by Leach (2023 3), denouncing elitism and hierarchy for a better future. As highlighted earlier, collaborations between outdoor brands and high-end fashion are already emerging. This shift is in response to a growing consumer appetite for novelty and cross-industry partnerships. According to Highsnobiety (2023), 73% of consumers express a desire to witness collaborations between outdoor brands and entities outside their industry. Furthermore, a substantial 80% are interested in observing unexpected creative changes or collaborations in unconventional ways within the realm of outdoor brands. This signifies a departure from traditional norms, emphasising a preference for innovative, boundary-pushing collaborations that resonate with the evolving collective mindset.

The future trajectory for brands necessitates a shift in their approach towards competitors, embracing a narrative that emphasises co-creation and collaboration. Illustratively, brands like Pangaia are securing patents for their innovations, a move aimed at establishing a monopoly. However, the industry could witness significant improvement if such innovations were made accessible to all. Patagonia has previously exemplified this collaborative ethos by open-sourcing a sustainable rubber formulation, contributing to the wider industry's benefit (Brook, 2024).

As highlighted by Brook (2024), Patagonia extends its collaborative spirit by opting out of initiatives like climate neutrality status. Instead, they redirect the funds toward offsetting emissions in factories where they may be a minor customer, thereby actively participating in the broader effort to decarbonize these facilities. This strategic use of profits extends the brand's impact beyond its immediate footprint, contributing to the benefit of other brands within the industry and the planet.

This inter-brand collaboration not only builds a sense of community within the industry but also transforms the competitive landscape into one where brands complement each other. This departure from a mindset of scarcity requires brands to exhibit courage and boldness, validating their purpose and values through actions that benefit the industry as a whole. According to Stanley & Chouinard (2023), transformative collaborations within the industry necessitate transparency, fostering trust and loyalty among both employees and customers by showcasing the brand's commitments aligned with its core values.

7.6 Gen Z

In examining Generation Z, comprised of individuals born between 1995 and 2010, often referred to as "Gen Z" or "Gen Rent" (Ross, 2023), several defining characteristics emerge that influence consumer behaviour and preferences. Being true digital natives showcases distinct traits that brands must consider for future engagement strategies. One notable trait among Gen Z is their proclivity toward rented accommodations, leading to limited wardrobe space, aiding a minimalist approach where they prioritize functionality and sustainability over amassing possessions. This inclination toward minimalism extends to their conscientious recycling of unwanted garments, reflecting their environmentally conscious mindset.

Despite being burdened with considerable debt, Gen Z is willing to invest in high-cost products, particularly garments aligned with their values. Francis and Hoefel (2018) underscore that Gen Z perceives consumption through three distinct lenses: consumption as access rather than possession, as a means of expressing individual identity, and as an ethical concern. Manifesting individual identity is extremely important to this generation, and financial cost does not impact the brand they choose to wear that aligns with their values and socially accepted brands (Ross, 2023).

Moreover, Gen Z's reliance on social media as their primary information source for product research and purchases significantly shapes their consumption habits. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok serve as their go-to search engines, indicating the crucial role of digital platforms in their buying journey (Shopify Plus, 2023). Consequently, brands aiming to engage with Gen Z must understand and align with these nuanced consumer behaviours, values, and preferences to establish meaningful connections and foster brand loyalty.

8.0 Summary of Findings

8.1 Brand Boundaries

Utilising the framework of planetary boundaries, as pioneered by Johan Rockström (Ernstberger, 2023), serves as an apt adaptation for the analysis of findings in this study, facilitating a transparent comprehension and interpretation of the brands' positioning in contrast to the perceptions conveyed by employees, customers and potential customers.

Respondents have provided their insights through a scoring system, wherein the responses are colour-coded, as illustrated in Figures 5 and 6. The allocation of green for agreement and red for disagreement establishes a visual representation that parallels the alignment with the brand's self-proclaimed identity against the varied perspectives held by employees, customers, and potential customers. This nuanced approach adds a layer of clarity to the assessment of compatibility or disparity between the brand's narrative and the perceptions of its stakeholders.

Using the planetary boundaries framework provides a holistic approach to understanding the interconnectedness of brands and the need for approaching specific factors discussed in this research to strengthen the brand. The results of the questions asked for each sector can be found in Appendix B, Tables 3 and 4.

Patagonia Brand Boundaries

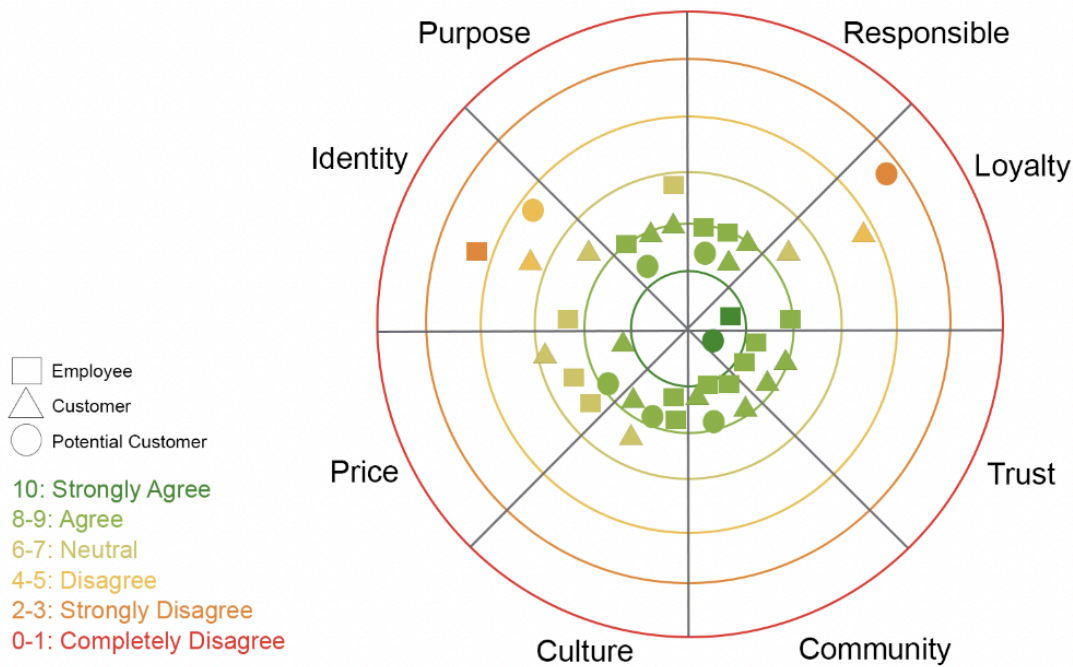


Figure 5. Patagonia Brand Boundaries

Analysing Figure 5 reveals that community, responsibility, and trust are Patagonia's strongest elements. The brand distinguishes itself through its influential voice, industry leadership, and an unwavering commitment to advocating for its purpose. As indicated earlier, Patagonia undertakes significant risks, exemplified by its dedication to running a socially responsible business and contributing profits toward a better, healthy planet. (Gelles, 2022; Brook, 2024).

A notable challenge for Patagonia lies in establishing a robust identity which could be due to its size and age. The brand, originally appealing to outdoor enthusiasts, has evolved to attract city dwellers and individuals aspiring to project a socially conscious image. Despite diversifying its growth strategies, there is apprehension that the brand may compromise the perceived integrity associated with wearing its apparel. To fortify the identity of its clothing products, Patagonia might consider a focused approach, potentially creating a sub-brand or sister brand for distinct initiatives such as its fishing project, similar to what Arc'teryx has done with LEAF.

Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of culture as a pivotal factor that the brand could emphasise, considering both customer and employee perspectives. By doing so, Patagonia can cultivate trust and reinforce the overarching purpose of the brand.

Albion Brand Boundaries

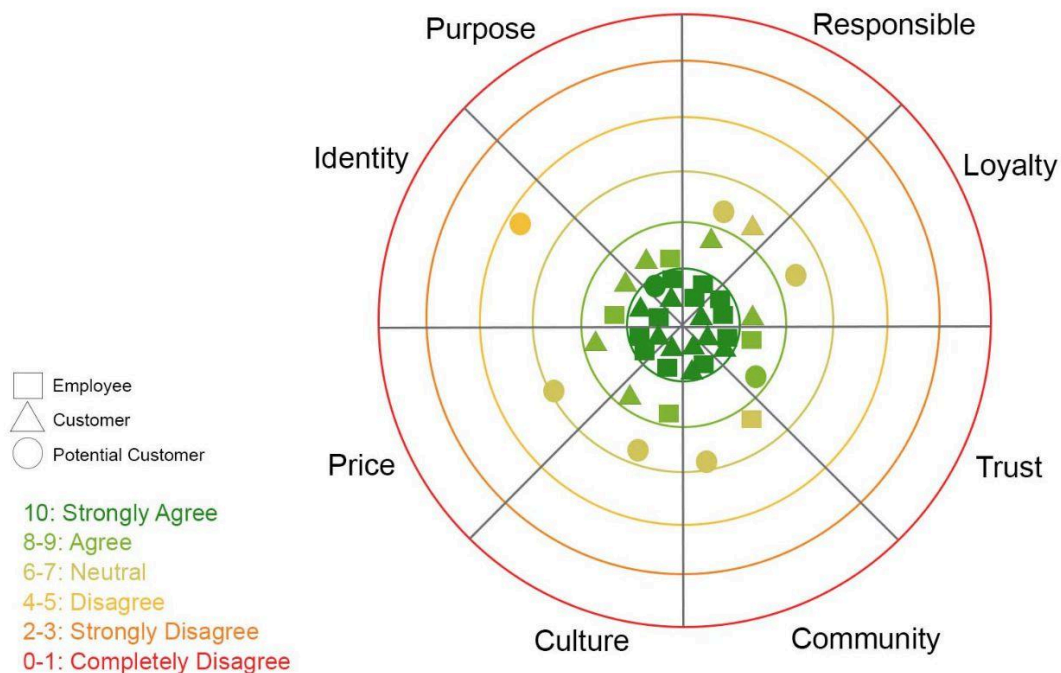


Figure 6. Albion Brand Boundaries

From analysing the findings, it can be concluded that Albion has successfully crafted a strong brand with a distinct purpose, garnering loyalty and trust from both customers and employees. The employee community, in particular, exhibits strength, and Albion has the opportunity to further fortify its brand by emphasising a forward-thinking vision for the future of brands, incorporating organised events and encouraging communal connections.

Stewart (2023) emphasises:

“The best brands are going to be the ones that can really bring people together, bring their customers together and make it feel like a real additional value that you add. If a brand can take you to that place, then you're going to love that brand. Because it genuinely changes your life.”

It is noteworthy that despite Albion's later establishment in 2016 compared to Patagonia's founding in 1973, the former exhibits a stronger brand in terms of purpose, identity, and loyalty. This signifies a noteworthy achievement for Albion in a relatively short span.

The researcher acknowledges the never-ending evolution of the industry. Emerging brands, such as Albion, have the advantage of learning from the successes and failures of their predecessors like Patagonia. By establishing a clear brand vision from the outset, grounded in a purpose and defined values, and maintaining a flexible and integral approach to the future, these new brands can navigate industry changes effectively. It is imperative for brands to not remain still in defining their essence; rather, they should align with industry shifts, environmental concerns for a healthier planet, and the evolving needs of their customers. This proactive approach ensures the creation of a robust and loyal community.

8.2 The Modern Consumer Consumption

8.2.1 Taste and Knowledge

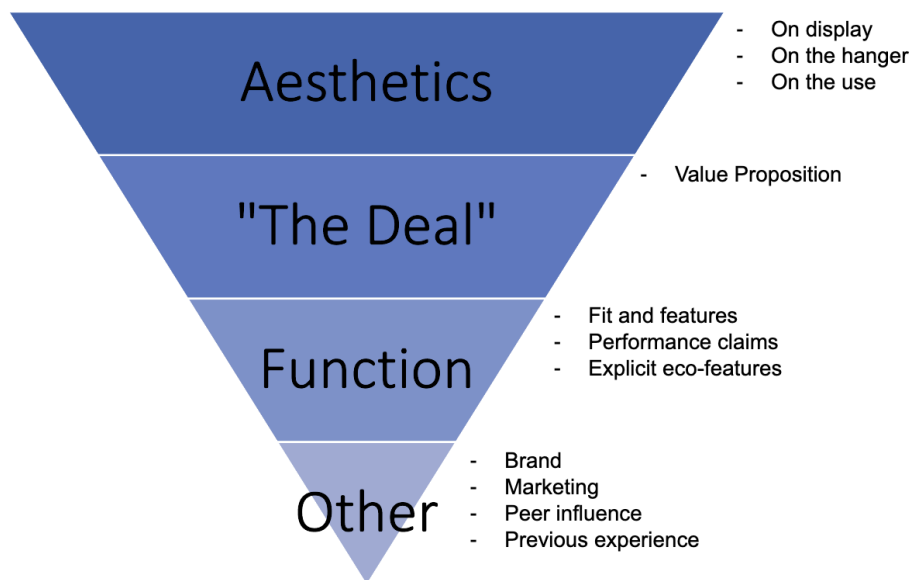


Figure 7. Outdoor Buying Behaviour (Ross 2024)

Figure 7 illustrates outdoor buying behaviour, with a predominant emphasis on aesthetics as the primary influencing factor in purchasing decisions. Having delved into customer profiles and the factors shaping their purchasing choices, it is crucial to acknowledge the numerous outdoor brands which are offering similar products. Consequently, meticulous attention to each influencing factor is essential to align with the brand's purpose, ensuring the authentic communication of integrity between brands and customers and encouraging the development of trust.

As highlighted earlier, within the consumer value proposition, three significant dimensions are functional, symbolic, and experiential (Ekhalassi et al., 2018). The rationale behind a purchase, referred to as "The Deal," may revolve around functional aspects such as water or wind resistance, emotional benefits like the joy derived from the product, the accessibility to a community, or a self-expressive aspect reflecting the consumer's taste and contributing to their social identity. A noteworthy trend is the emergence of a 'New Luxury' mindset (Highsnobiety, 2024), characterised by a preference for knowledge over possession, prioritising participation over consumption, and valuing stories over the product itself.

8.2.2 Cost

Although it can be argued the theory may not be relevant today as it is less about money and more about taste, knowledge (Andjelic, 2021), and allowing customers to efficiently associate personal meaning to a brand's products (Oh, T et al. 2020), there is an element in which extravagant expenditure is applicable today.

Examining Veblen's conspicuous consumption theory, one can propose that the cost associated with the Alpha SV Jacket may be construed as an 'advertising extravagant expenditure'. This assertion becomes more apparent when compared with a similar product available from alternative outdoor brands, where the price differential is notably significant (Figure 8). Expanding upon the concepts of social identity and community, as previously elucidated, a discernible trend is emerging wherein cultural pioneers exhibit a willingness to invest in order to experience a sense of belonging. The utilisation of the Alpha SV Jacket not only communicates a distinct social status to observers but also serves as a symbol of affluence.

Gore-tex Jacket Price

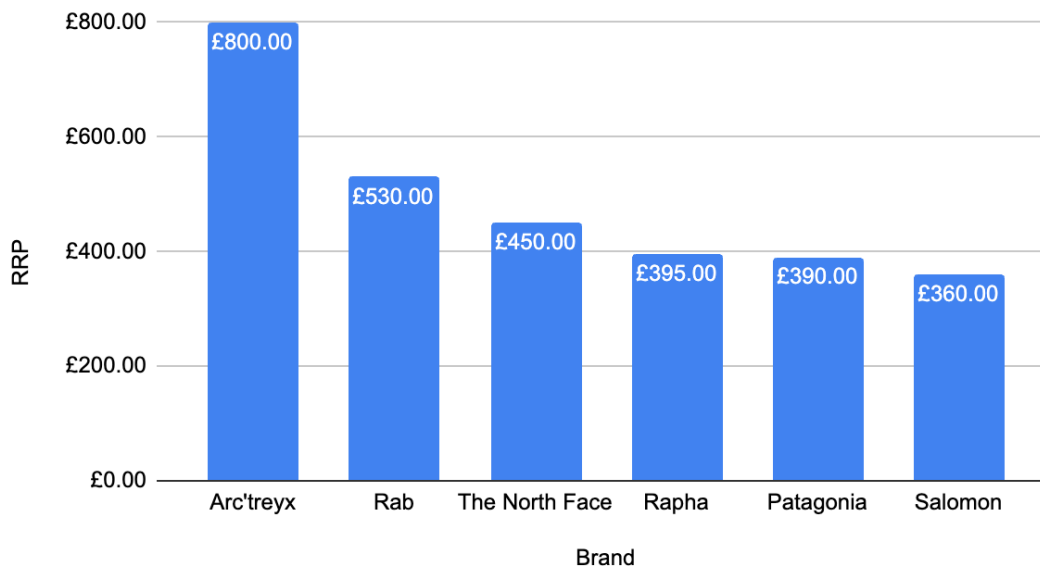


Figure 8. Gore-tex Jacket price analysis

Appendix B, Table 2 illustrates that the cost of a product becomes less relevant when considering factors such as personal taste, community culture, and the formation of social identity.

9.0 Conclusion

This study has shown that a brand is a complex amalgamation of a brand's overall perception, incorporating its purpose, values, identity, and emotional connection established with its audience through products, communication, and experience.

What brands were doing five years ago, differs from today. Technological advancements such as using RFID or QR codes within products to enhance transparency are being explored, and the shift in material innovation, a great example is that Arc'teryx (2024) has introduced material from post-consumer waste with a dope-dyed construction, using less water and chemicals, and the evolving motivations driving consumers from latest TikTok trends to influence from cultural pioneers, contribute to this transformative landscape. Remaining relevant in such a dynamic environment necessitates a vigilant focus on discerning faint signals that point toward the future. As brands evolve, the expansive array of vocabulary embedded within the business realm also does, which is important to understand, implement and drive the progression of brands.

The primary finding from the research underscores the vitalness of a well-defined brand purpose for achieving brand success. A brand's communication of its purpose and values becomes pivotal to ensuring consistent information transfer among customers, nurturing brand coherence, and community growth whilst establishing trust and loyalty, leading to the formation of a community.

Customers seek assurance that what they are buying and from whom aligns with their tastes and values and adds to their social identity. Consumers are now shopping in line with their values, where a cultural currency is more about community and social identity, as iterated by Leach (2023 2) "the old fashion mindset of elitism, materialism and hierarchy has now been replaced by a mindset of collaboration, activism and transparency". The study finds importance in emphasising the future role of community and authentic human connections, a sentiment shared by both consumers and employees. The establishment of a sense of self-belonging enhances the belief that community is the future of all business models.

The brands that adhere integrity to their ethos of creating the best products aligned to their purpose are what will succeed. "I believe it's imperative to consistently advocate for the creation and design of exceptionally high-quality products that endure and perform," Gardiner (2024) asserts. Examining future trends, with a specific emphasis on brands building communities, attentively listening to their consumers, and adopting increased responsibility, offers valuable insights to assist brands in proactively preparing for evolving expectations.

While initially aiming to forecast the trajectory of successful outdoor brands by identifying key elements, this research acknowledges the challenging task of predicting developments in the industry due to dynamic societal shifts. Recognising the need for brands to be proactive in identifying current trends and agile in responding to emerging patterns, the study emphasises the importance of adaptability without losing sight of brand purpose.

The intricacy of a brand will persist and evolve with cultural, social, psychological, and emotional factors shaping the future. What people want from brands is integrity, transparency and to build emotional connections

9.1 Further Research

Numerous elements of a brand have been identified and examined, revealing opportunities to conduct more in-depth investigations into each specific factor for a comprehensive understanding. As highlighted earlier, this research intentionally maintains a broad scope to allow for the exploration of various factors, creating room for focused inquiries and additional research endeavours.

Exploring a deeper understanding of individual brand dynamics could yield substantial benefits, particularly if access to all employees is available, and the brand is receptive to gaining such insights. This approach not only has the potential to enhance a company's internal processes and cultural knowledge but also empowers them to proactively promote employee well-being. Furthermore, it ensures alignment with customer expectations, enabling the company to communicate effectively and authentically. This avenue of research builds upon the elements elucidated in the literature review.

Given the dynamic nature of the outdoor industry, the components of the Future of Brands (7.0) provide a strong framework for further exploration. Delving into responsible brands represents a promising area for further investigation, ensuring brands keep pace with evolving standards of transparency and sustainability for example decarbonisation, and circular economy. Research could also explore customer preferences regarding certifications such as 1% for the Planet or B Corporation within the value proposition.

Another avenue for exploration lies in collaborations, where competitors join forces and customers become co-creators. If the future of brands revolves around collaboration, studying successful case studies within the same or different industries becomes imperative. Emphasis should be placed not only on the collaborative process but also on ensuring that the partnered brands share the same values and maintain the quality

standards of their products. This research direction is vital to prevent brands from deviating too far from their core purpose and ensuring that collaborations result in products of high quality.

9.2 Research Limitations

This research, while insightful, acknowledges certain limitations stemming from the intricate nature of brands within a dynamic and evolving industry. The inherent complexity of brands, coupled with the rapidly changing landscape, introduces uncertainties and unpredictabilities, particularly concerning environmental and social factors. It is important to note that the scope of this study embraces a holistic perspective, with a focus on people, intentionally excluding discussions on the financial aspects of brand equity and profitability.

One notable limitation arises from challenges in accessing employees affiliated with specific outdoor brands, wherein some individuals were withdrawn to respond candidly due to factors such as loyalty and trust in their employing brand. The interview process with employees inherently carries a bias, shaped by the subjective nature of individual experiences, attitudes, and loyalty towards the brands.

Despite the deliberate broadness of this research, there exists a potential limitation in not delving deeply into specific areas, raising the possibility of insufficient depth in the examination of certain factors. Furthermore, external influences, including cultural factors and the impact of legislative measures such as the emergence of B Corp certification, can introduce additional complexities and considerations which have not been discussed.

The reliance on case studies and interviews, though valuable in providing qualitative insights, may not render conclusive findings. The study recognises the influence of external entities and cultural factors, which can potentially shape perceptions and responses, adding a layer of intricacy to the interpretive process.

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Appendix A: Interview Transcripts

Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Humanising Brands: Exploring Individual Dynamics in Shaping Brand Perception within the Outdoor Industry

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the dynamics of brand perception within the outdoor industry, with a particular focus on the intricate interplay of individual influence in shaping brands from both an employee and customer perspective.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer questions regarding the exploration of this research. This will include a focus on the brand which you are employed for and the outdoor industry as a whole.

Time Involvement:

Your participation will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. This includes a video call on Google Meet where the researcher will lead the discussion, prompted by specific questions towards the study.

Risks and Benefits:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. However, we anticipate that the knowledge gained from this research may contribute to a deeper insight, and will build upon a greater understanding. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality:

Your privacy is of utmost importance. All information collected during this study will be kept confidential. The video call will be audio recorded and a transcript will be conducted from the conversation. The data recorded will be stored securely and will be deleted when no longer required.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw at any time, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Sara Ladd at saraladd_01@outlook.com.

Consent:

I have read and understood the information provided above. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Certification:

I have explained the nature and purpose of the study to the participants. I believe they understand the information provided.

Researcher's Name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interview 1: Adam Gardiner

SL

Rapha's brand purpose is to inspire the world to live life by bike. How does that reflect on the brand from an employee perspective?

AG

When Rapha started, I'd say pretty much every single person was like a die-hard cyclist. As the company's grown, that's changed, we've got a far broader range of people, but still, they've tried to keep cycling at the core of what we do.

We get every Wednesday morning off to go riding, company-wide. Everyone's encouraged to go and ride their bike until lunchtime on a Wednesday. Then we have three company days a year where the office will shut and everyone goes out riding for a full day. We get two days off a year to go anywhere on 'sportive days'. If you want to go and do an event somewhere or go on a trip, then you can take those days which are supplementary to a holiday.

And I'd say they are the three underpinning things of how they enable us to ride beyond just sort of commuting. But then on top of that, the office is kitted out with cycling in mind. We've got a huge shed which can store like 300 bikes, showers for everyone. When you arrive, there's an in-house mechanic who does free servicing of bikes.

I would genuinely say that Rapha is first and foremost about cycling. And I think what's been nice is in the last five years, cycling has probably grown and expanded. It was very much those like set up for people who'd go and ride 100 miles consistently at weekends, whereas in the last five years or so, there have been initiatives to try and get people who don't ride into riding.

We have a scheme called Rapha 101, which is designed for employees who've never ridden before, and every Wednesday at the Velo Park in Stratford, on a closed road track, opportunity for people to learn, not how to ride a bike, but like how to get more confident on a bike.

I would say there are some genuine initiatives. The employees in the Rapha stores tend to be cycling first and jobs second in a nice way. It's like they work there because they love cycling and it's a connection to the community. And that's where the clubhouses, shops or clubhouses are just as a term. They engage with the community on bike rides, and rides are going out almost every day from the shops the staff are either leading those rides or involved with the groups when they come in as well. Allowing everyone to ride and connect with bikes.

From a brand perspective, every Monday morning we have our Monday morning meeting which is a company update. The start of that session is always a bike racing update. And that could be any type of bike racing, but somebody will present what's been happening in the last week around riding, and that could be like the Tour de France, but it could also be local cyclocross or anything that's going on, and it's sort of free for anyone to take the opportunity to talk about that platform.

Not a week goes past where sort of biking isn't talked about. And I think that's how employees can engage.

SL

I looked at the impact report that you've got and it's focused on people, planet and product, and with you being the sustainability manager at Rapha. From a business perspective and the planet, are there any certifications that you're looking into? Like B-corp or anything similar?

AG

So we're a member of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition or the SAC. And as part of that membership, we conduct their brand assessment called the Brand Retail Module. I mapped out every question versus B Corp and it's a similar assessment. It doesn't go quite so far in tying in sort of business governance to the board of B Corp. However it assesses a brand's ESG commitments holistically. And that sort of comes with our membership. I would love to go through the B Corp process, but transparently, B Corp is quite a lot of money to be a part of. And for a brand the size of Rapha, the cost of it is prohibitively expensive.

BRM is driving similar actions, just isn't as binding from a top level. I've seen B Corp movements from companies in one of two ways. It either comes from a very top-down approach where the board want to implement it, and is tightly aligned with the brands, or it comes from a bottom-up perspective.

AG

It's also people resource-wise, I'm the only person who's working on sustainability, like dedicated. There are other people, who are doing parts within my role, but it's like, do I want to spend a few months of my year working on that accreditation versus other projects?

SL

So, what does your day-to-day look like from the sustainability side and what are you working towards at the moment?

AG

On a wider level of what a year looks like, a key section, maybe 3 or 4 months is a reporting period. And that's essentially writing the impact report, doing our carbon assessment, and doing this brand retail module.

We also do an accreditation through Textile Exchange called the Material Benchmark Analysis. All of that work takes up months. And now is more of a horizon scanning and planning for next year. That includes attending conferences and just doing research and strategy planning.

And then it's for implementation, which happens throughout the year, but it's more project-focused on what we can do, where we are and where we're going.

Where I'm trying to push us more is within the supply chain of how we can work with our facilities to aid in their not just decarbonization, but in total environmental and social improvement.

And then from a social side, we became members of the Ethical Trading Initiative and we're working through the full onboarding process to become full members because you have a couple of years to become graduate members.

SL

Circularity is one of the buzzwords at the moment. 50% of production is to be designed for recycling recirculation. What does that look like? Is it a kind of take-back scheme, or is it working with mills to recycle the fibres, or is it something bigger?

AG

Our key strategies are around circularity. Traditional repair is something we've always been confident in and will continue to be and it only has opportunities to get better in terms of who we work with from a repair perspective. We just signed up to work with a United repair centre over in Amsterdam, which is a social enterprise as well as a repair centre. They employ predominantly refugees and migrants into the Netherlands and train and upskill them.

I think repair is already a foundation of it, but that's just prolonging the life. We know that we need to launch a resale platform. We see our products being sold on eBay, and

there's no reason why we can't own that space. That sounds a bit monopolizing, but provides a space where customers can sell their garments.

That goal around designing for recyclability or compostability is recognising that a lot of the materials we're using are synthetics. We're in a race against time, but chemical recycling is accelerating in how quickly it's coming to market. We recognise that most of our products aren't suited to conventional mechanical recycling. And also it's downgrading the quality of the products you make. So we need to think of ways that when our products get to the end of life they are either able to re-enter the textile loop or have as minimal harm in their end of life as possible.

Where this design commitment comes in is thinking about how could we design that product to have minimal harm at its end of life when that customer is finished with that product.

So much of the textiles still is incineration. There's a little bit of relying on technology from a chemical recycling perspective to catch up and be able to break down blended fibres,

SL

And then another buzzword is overproduction from a business perspective. Is that something that's on Raphas's radar? And are you doing anything to reduce that?

AG

I personally think that we need to address this and I think buying quality and buying things to last is a fundamental thing of how we can reduce overconsumption.

A lot of the products that Rapha makes are designed to last. And that's something you expect with a brand. One way we can address it is just making high-quality products and trying to promote emotional durability with those products that people care about.

I still haven't seen a business that isn't linked to growth. I haven't seen a business that's been able to say, yeah, we're going to sell fewer products, and we are confident we'll be here in five years. And I don't know a way out of that at the moment. I'd love to see a case study of that existing.

Ultimately for us, it's looking at how much we make, how we make it and how we move it. That's three pots where we see managing our impact.

I think Rapha can tangibly do better at trying to buy more smartly and think the cycling industry specifically has been burnt over the last couple of years because during the

pandemic it grew hugely, and then everyone sort of expected that growth to continue in a linear way, and it's dropped off.

I don't think unfortunately there's a coherent answer or a completely robust answer. I think brands in the short term can just focus on making things that last and people want to keep hold of, and then try to migrate to other ways of making money.

SL

Rapha seems to have quite a loyal customer base and the community that you've built with all the events, the different films and initiatives. How do you think you're going to be able to keep those customers with new brands coming and doing different things? What makes them come back to Rapha?

AG

It's a challenge. It's really interesting that brands have come and are doing similar things, and in some ways, they're able to be far more agile than us because they can start from scratch.

And that also is true from a sustainability perspective. I think across any business, if you were to start a business now, you would be doing things quite different to if you started 120 years ago in how you source and how you set up things.

What makes people come back? I guess it's being authentic. We've always had a real strength of telling a story and engaging with customers far more than just from a product level. About promoting and being passionate about cycling.

And for the products we make, I genuinely do believe are good quality. And I have a lot of conversations with people who have bought a pair of your cycling shorts and bought another brand and come back to Rapha. So I think we need to never lose focus on the need to promote produce and design high-quality products that last and work.

And being brave. Rapha was quite a pointy brand and I think remains in terms of lots of people like to hate on them because they are quite divisive. They create expensive products which at times weren't like incredibly inclusive. It still needs to have an opinion and not just try to become a mass-market, sort of soulless product.

I think you still want to be able to know what Rapha stands for, and I think that's important for all brands. Because of longevity. I think you can ride a wave well in the short term, but whether that lasts longer is a lot more difficult. So that's where the brand and the voice of a brand are really important.

SL

And when was the first sustainability rollout? The new brands that I'm looking at, don't seem to have impact reports, but it all seems to be ingrained into their brand values or purpose and their products.

AG

So I'd say the role has existed for about 4 or 5 years. And for about a similar time, there's been a working group of 10 to 15 people who are working on projects around sustainability as part of their role. I think that from other companies I've spoken to, it seems quite normal for it takes. It's getting to a certain size to have, like a purely defined role.

There's a recognition that you can't solely integrate it into people's work. Once you get to a certain size. It comes back to your beginning question on B Corp and things. I think the benefit of those frameworks is how you integrate at the board level to then subsequently feed down into everyone's like targets. And I think that's what we need to do more of. How do we make people accountable and be judged on their work from a sustainability impact?

Interview 2: Adele Gingell

SL

What would you say is Finistere's brand purpose?

AGL

We've just changed it, our purpose, and why we exist is to inspire a deeper connection with the sea.

SL

And how does that reflect internally in the brand?

AGL

Well, I think that's where we've slightly gone around in circles. And we were just workshopping it. In a way inspires a deeper connection to the sea as a standalone statement can mean so much, which is good because different people can apply it in different ways.

SL

And within the brand culture?

AGL

You can't not connect with the sea when it's on your doorstep. Even for me, I'm not even in the water, but when you take that break and go and see it it does ground you into like, why?

Why we're so lucky to be there and still be base and to work and generally the circles we then move in link back to that purpose.

I think people live and breathe it without knowing they're doing it necessarily or without having to. We don't have posters up around with our purpose. And to remind everyone that that is it. I think people can take their own sort of subtext from it.

SL

And from a customer perspective, do you feel there's a loyal customer base that you have?

Why do you think they keep coming back?

AGL

I think we do have a loyal customer, and I think as brands change over the years, your messaging can get confusing. So this is the purpose of us redoing our brand book, our purpose, because as you move into new markets. It's got to be clear what people think of us, about us.

We started off as a cold water surf brand and then moved away a little bit from that narrative as we extended our collection. And then if you didn't know the brand and you came to our website, it's like, is it swimming? Is it outdoors? Is it fashion? We're sort of doubling down on making it clear on what we stand for. I think it's fair to say that can change and it can change with different people in the business, different priorities, different markets.

SL

From your perspective, from a social impact side, what do you see Finisterre already doing? I know that you are a B-corp, but what is the future looking like?

AGL

What we've done is to get focused. We're trying to shape out what our social and broader charitable impact is. It goes beyond financial. You have to be more creative sometimes and lean into your skill sets when you don't have cash.

We see what we can offer as a huge resource. Where we can't necessarily give lots of organisations money, we offer up our store space or we give them a platform in our broadcast.

The way we define it a bit more is we knew we wanted to set up a foundation, and initially it was a broad concept, and we worked with a charity advisor who helped us to narrow it down.

And at that point, we decided our foundation is purely going to be access to the ocean. So to break down the barriers that prevent access. And then we've kept our activism and ocean health in the business.

Now there's kind of really two clear defining points. And it's not to say we don't support any other charitable cause, but it makes it so much clearer. To decide what you do support and to do it better, because when you're trying to execute way too many things, it's unlikely with a small team that you'll do it well.

SL

And then from a circularity point of view?

AGL

We launched take-back probably about two years ago now. And we only take back certain products. I am looking to change that. Then we launched resale 12 months ago. A lot of the repairs that the take-back scheme will use old jackets for patches or potentially mix and match. We've done repairs since 2012. And that's always been paid for repairs. I think people are starting to see the real value of repairing what they own and sort of value what they have already.

SL

The buzzwords recently have been about overconsumption from a customer perspective, but then also over-production from the brand perspective. What are Finisterre doing?

AGL

For us as a brand, even if you don't put an environmental lens on it, there's a margin lens, and there's a cost to having too much stock. To get people to value their clothes, they have to have that investment. If we keep buying too much you will get it wrong. We'll always get a style that we think, why didn't that work and have to sale it. But it's interesting even looking at how our sales are up, year on year. That shows how we're doing fewer promotions because we're not putting as much into sale.

It's hard because you see so many brands out there with a huge market share that aren't doing well, so I think overproduction is wrong.

I don't think it's a problem to grow and grow your different business models and new business models like we launched rental a few months back, and that's been interesting to see how people have taken to that.

SL

And then impact reports, I can see that you've had one since 2020, was that the first?

AGL

Yeah. Three so far.

SL

How important do you think they are to the brand? What I'm seeing is the older, more established brands have got impact reports, whereas the newer brands want to have that, but they're focusing on the doing at the moment because they're still growing. And it is a role needed in itself.

AGL

Its hard. And it was hard for us because we'd never done anything like that. We create this beautiful content. We have an amazing creative team. But this was something so different.

Suddenly putting a graph in front of our customers was very alien to us. Probably not to them. It's testing our skills of storytelling but also data collection.

As a B Corp, you don't have to submit one in your first year, but then you do have to submit one annually. It takes a lot of work. And every year you kind of think, why aren't we capturing this as we go along? Why aren't we doing this? But by doing it every year, it does reset your focus.

Also makes us put our commitments out there, there's stuff that we've done that we didn't achieve, and we go back and say, we didn't do this, we didn't do our scope three. I think it's good to make those public commitments. As a team, if people have queries, if you've got your key information in there, you can send it to them. I get why we do them. I think we need to probably look at switching up the format a little bit and playing around with it.

SL

Why do you think Finistere stands out from other brands that have a similar purpose or within the outdoor industry?

AGL

Good question. I don't know if I'm too internal for that. We were championing things like recycled materials long before anyone else. We had a very early sort of pioneering sustainability stance.

So it bridged that gap for those sort of aspirational outdoorsy people.

And obviously, we see the market has caught up with us. There are a lot more out there and that is a good thing in terms of choice and environmental impact. We have to keep pushing to own our market space, which I don't think is a bad thing.

It makes us reassess because what was good, like we were talking about regenerative fibres, You sort of sit on organic and go, right, we've done that. Beyond the clothes. The creative director has made our signature and there is a lot of following for that. So it's quite interesting.

Interview 3: Charlie Stewart

SL

Albion brand's purpose is to stay outside for longer.

CS

Yeah, that's the mission. That informs everything that we do. And drives the company. It gives us a reason to make the products that we make. Tell the stories that we tell. We're not a fashion company and I think staying outside for longer is the sort of epitome that we believe we make tools for the job.

And the idea is that through the way that we design, through the way that we think about the way that we as people who are users of the product think about the product. We can bring ideas together that can make it easier or more comfortable to stay outside for longer.

The feedback that we're getting more and more is the longer the ride, the more the Albion products come into their own. And that might be fabric choice, that might be fit, that might be features.

In terms of why we do what we do. Why anyone does do what they do? On the topic of responsibility, and sustainability, wouldn't it be better if we just didn't didn't make

anything? The way that we see it is more like, things need to keep moving in a direction. And we want to make the best products that we can make. We engage seriously with not just making another rain jacket or another jersey if we're going to do something it needs to move things forward.

And, if we weren't doing that, then we would argue potentially that maybe other people would be doing it less, less well. In terms of being evangelical about that. We don't sit around and look at what's the easiest way to sell the most stuff. It's like, right, how can we make an amazing product? So, I think that's a big part of the bigger purpose.

SL

And how is that reflected within your brand culture?

CS

I think if you only employ a very specific type of person who is just into hardcore cycling you might not get that sort of diversity of thought. That is important. If you look at what we do, certainly the three of us who set it up, the three founders, by most objective measures, are very passionate about cycling and do a lot of riding, and we encourage it from everyone else.

Some people have joined Albion who didn't ride when they joined but had a skill set and are now really into it. And a lot of that's about creating an environment, a positive environment where it's if you want to ride, you can ride.

We'll let you have the kit, we'll let you have the time. You know, we won't ridicule you if you're not doing massive rides. Trying to create a very open and inclusive environment because, you know, stay outside for longer could be you've never ridden and then you're suddenly starting to spend the odd hour. We like the fact that it's quite broad in that respect. It's a big mission.

Now, actually, in terms of how we're going about trying to achieve that, I think we exist in a niche at the moment. Quite deliberately, I think, we want to mean the world to like quite a specific type of customer and then build it out from there versus, trying to be in a diluted mass market proposition right now.

A big part of our approach to sustainability and responsibility as a business is creating an enduring brand business that will be stronger in 30 years and will continue to be strong and get stronger versus this sort of flash in the pan.

We like the work we do. It gives us a lot of fulfilment. We want to keep doing it. We want more people to sort of come into that journey.

SL

I've seen it firsthand at Granffondo when the whole team comes and you can see that there's such a community that's built within your team, and that's quite a refreshing thing to have, isn't it? Quite important in the sense of it.

CS

Yeah, definitely. And I think a part of that stems from the three of us. We were all doing other things that we kind of, for different reasons, didn't want to end up doing. We wanted to take some control and spend our working days doing stuff that we wanted to do. And enjoy it. And I think that for me it's probably one of the reasons why everyone feels like a family or a group of friends because I've worked in places previously where it was a job.

Whereas this doesn't feel like work. It doesn't mean that there are times when it's not challenging or there's work, but we have a pretty good time of it in terms of we get to make amazing products for something that we love doing. It should be fun. And it is fun.

SL

You're quite a new young brand and what I'm finding is with all the younger brands, sustainability and the impact side is already ingrained into the brand. Something like B-corp or an impact report, is that on your radar or looking into?

CS

Definitely. We are in the process of applying to become a B-corp. It's an ongoing project and something that's on our radar. We'd like to achieve it as soon as possible.

At our size and with our limited resources, we try to focus at the moment on the doing. If we are making things in the right way and thinking about things in the right way, then that's what we can achieve at the moment. If we can make the best quality products that we can that last as long as possible, where you get free repairs on any Albion product for life. We're committed to keeping them going for as long as possible. When you start to add that stuff up, that to me, feels like to the best of our ability at this point.

As people get more informed and what felt right or exciting a couple of years ago now, maybe it's different. And I think maybe we're all getting more cynical. Our focus is very much on the doing.

SL

Everyone's talking about overproduction, do you think Albion overproduce? And would you ever move into made-to-order?

CS

Overproduction is a very hot topic in cycling specifically at the moment, post-pandemic, there was this big boom in cycling because it was one of the only things you were legally allowed to do at one point. There was this unprecedented demand, almost very artificially created. There's this massive glut of oversupply in the cycling industry at the moment.

And we're not completely immune from that in terms of if every business, every brand in your sector is offering 30% off, it's going to be difficult to make full-price sales, even if you have a differentiated offering.

We have tried to protect brand equity. And it's made us more focused on differentiation. Making sure that the positioning is really clear. The customer really understands that. They can get something different from Albion that they can't get anywhere else.

And we talk about trying to essentially to take customers out of the market. Once you find out about Albion and you go on that journey, maybe get your first product and you love it, and you love the films that we make and the stories we tell. Suddenly before you know it, you're not thinking, if I need to upgrade my jacket, you're not thinking, which one should I get? I'm thinking, Albion is the one I'll get.

One thing it has done is force us to be pretty brutal about what we order and make sure that we're ordering the right amount of stuff, the right products.

We hold stock but we don't have loads. In the future, I would hope that mindset of being a responsible business is not massively overleveraging yourself and buying loads of stock on the chance that perhaps you might be able to grow. But also just makes good business sense.

The three founders own most of the businesses and we have a lot of control over the speed at which we grow. And it's something that we're aware of.

We're trying to run this business that is profitable and secure because we like our jobs, and we believe in our mission. We'd like it to be 10 times the size that we are but we want to do that sustainably. The risk there is that it kind of explodes or things change.

SL

And that brings me on to the question of growth. What does the future of Albion look like?

CS

We want to be as big as we can, as in the right size for us to be. We think stay outside for longer is a big mission. It's bringing that mindset, that we want to try and improve things, and contribute to moving the world of technical apparel in the right direction. Leading by example, in terms of, how we do things. What we will and won't do.

The future of strong brands is communities and a massive part of that is that people want to live and breathe their brands. They want to do events, they want to do rides, they want to meet like-minded people. They want spaces where they can come together in the real world.

From a product point of view, where we'll be able to make even better product. And we're making amazing products, really for the size of business, products that often outperform much more established brands in terms of reviews.

And we want to take that to more people. We want more people to get to experience. I'll take on this stuff because we believe in it. And we're ambitious.

SL

And you have got that drive and ambition, it's not growing for a profitable reason. It's growing for the right reason of keeping that purpose?

CS

There's lots of interesting stuff happening in terms of materials and innovation and, it's an interesting tension point because making technical, amazing products, takes time. Not only in the sort of designing and developing and getting out of factories but understanding how it works, what its strengths are, and where it might be weak. One of the interesting things about the repair program has been you learn a lot about where the weak points are in your products, and that's filtered through. We've designed out problems based on the repair. Looking at repair as a real net positive. It helps us be a better business in many ways.

SL

What is it that you're doing to build a community? Are there organized rides? Are there events that you're planning? What do you see the future of the community side to gain more people?

CS

We make decisions for emotional reasons first, and we want those emotional reasons to be backed up by, the other factors.

When you're buying a waterproof jacket or, the thing that draws you in is you see someone wearing it in shit weather and you're like, I'd like to be able to, you know, you're sat at your desk and you're like, oh, I wish I was there in that. And there's something aspirational about that.

And then you go and you see the product and it ticks all the boxes in terms of the performance of the fabric and the features. We're very focused on trying to build an emotional connection with our customers.

Photography, storytelling, films, events is something that is going to be a big part of the future of building the brand. We're already partnered with loads of really interesting events and we want to do more.

One of the challenges, if you look at Albion, as I said, it's long distance ultra cycling community maybe we're becoming sort of more and more well known and the quality of the product and the performance of the product. So it's quite a committed person, who is probably buying Albion.

But most people aren't, the mass market often actually isn't nearly as committed as that. So how do you bring as many people into the brand as possible? How do we grow the business? How do you distil what Albion is down to, an hour or a couple of hours ride, something quite accessible that you could do on a weekday or in the morning or the evening? We want to mobilise our community. Every time we put on rides or events or film screenings, we're always overwhelmed, with the turnout. And we're still quite small. And again, it's come back to this point of resource and time.

Bringing together people in the real world feels like the future of brands. I think the best brands are going to be the ones that can really bring people together, bring their customers together and make it feel like a real additional value that you add.

Brands that partner with the right events can give you a life-changing weekend in Scotland riding or something. If a brand can take you to that place, then you're going to love that brand. Because it genuinely changes your life.

And it takes me back right to the start of the Albion journey, I remember going cycling in Wales in the Elan Valley. It was one of the first times that I had cycled outside of

London. We went and did this trip and I remember coming around the corner into this valley. It was a gray wet day, but it was just amazing. There's this road just stretched out as far as the eye could see. And I was just like, wow, this is fucking amazing. And it was the feeling that we wanted to bottle up. And that was how it all started. And if we can give people that feeling is pretty powerful stuff.

Interview 4: Dan Trapp

SL

How important do you think brand purpose and values are from an employee perspective?

DT

I've been in the industry for 30 years and I started in speciality retail in the UK. At the start, when I first started working, which was 2001. I was 26. And for me, those things, values, vision, and mission, at that age didn't have any impact or influence on me at all. And I don't feel like it was anywhere near as important or influential in decisions as it is today. I think over the last five years it's become really important.

Whether Covid amplified or accelerated that change and evolution. Covid forced people to, reflect on the way they were living, whether it's professionally or not and forced people to reconsider what is important for them. And I think a lot of people realize that to your point, where their values align with the values of their company. And were they comfortable with that?

Brands pay a lot more attention to this topic now than they did even ten years ago. I think some brands do it in a very authentic way. And I think particularly brands that have been around for not so long, it's much easier to do that because it's somehow just part of the catalyst of who they were. I think more established brands, it's potentially more difficult.

I think brands that were established 20-plus years ago, maybe it wasn't so important. And to retrofit these things is difficult. It's very easy to say, this is what you want to do or this is how you want to be, but it's not easy at all to transform an organisation that potentially does not have those values or is not behaving in those values.

And in addition to that, I think there are a lot of companies, unfortunately, where they say it's X and in fact, it's Y. I think with some companies, it's just marketing bullshit and with other companies, I don't think it's marketing bullshit, but they're not either aware of the gap that they have in terms of where they are and where they want to be, or even

the gaps there, but it's such a big gap that transformation will just take so long I think it's a super important topic now more than ever.

It becomes the younger your employees, the more important the topic is. I would say this topic has forced me to, change roles or at least change companies once in the last, three, or four years and change completely career, within that time as well.

So it's something that I'm personally much more sensitive to, but I think there's a scale. An average 25-year-old to an average 55-year-old. I think the importance is, it is very different. I think on average as you get older it becomes less important.

SL

That's really interesting. Then from an employee perspective, they say innovation starts in the interview room. How important do you think it is to find the right candidate for the role within the outdoor industry? If you were to compare the right skill, versus the right fit in the sense of if they're interested in their purpose?

DT

I think within the sports and the outdoor industries, in fact, one of the reasons why I started doing what I'm doing, I did a lot of research into the decision-making process in recruitment within the industry and realized that it was still very driven on what happened in the past.

And what I mean by that is people, the majority of the time, when they're making recruitment decisions, are only really thinking about what people have done in the past.

Of course, that is important, but I believe very strongly that, first of all, actually identifying within the business, what is the type of personality behaviour, motivators, beliefs, and values do we have as an organisation and assessing that.

It's absolutely clear to me that when there is a strong overlap in, what I call the benchmark profile of the business, and the behavioral profile of a candidate, the longevity of that partnership is much longer. Whereas if it's based purely just on skills, I think there's a big risk for both business and candidate that fundamentally, especially, during tough times, it won't last the relationship. And it could be tough times from a business point of view. It could be tough times from the candidate's point of view.

On a personal side, if you don't have stability at home, you need that stability at work and vice versa. It can work both ways. I think from a behavioural point of view, there's still a long way to go in terms of businesses, considering that there's much more consideration now around culture, or at least around passion.

I think it's still in the majority of cases, done from a gut feeling point of view, rather than any meaningful way of really assessing and putting robust, data or at least psychometric insights behind it to validate what somebody is saying.

And from both sides, from a candidate point of view and a business point of view, because often I'll, ask different stakeholders internally in the company to complete a survey to build up a behavioural, and a motivational profile, and you'll get a completely different profile from two stakeholders for the same role.

It just shows that even internally, there is oftentimes a lack of alignment. That's why later on down the process there can be issues because if somebody joins and one of the stakeholders is not aligned to that profile, that's going to cause issues later down the line. I think this is a big topic. It's getting better. But it's still in the reasonably early days.

SL

What have you seen that the outdoor brands are doing differently to look after their employees and build that culture?

DT

I would say that, yes, many brands are. Some brands are absolutely doing that.

I think there are not so many where it's clearly defined as such. Some encourage it and give freedom to do it, but it's not defined. You know, it's like you said it's Wednesday afternoon. You take that time. There are definitely some, Picture Organic Clothing do that, Timberland were always very good at that. I think many brands encourage or have team-building times throughout the year, but that's irregular. It's maybe, 2 or 3 times a year that happens, which I think is good, but there are still a lot of brands that don't do anything.

Unfortunately, there's definitely a trend to answer your question for brands doing more of this.

I would say it's the 10% that are doing something that is very kind of clearly carving it out. It's identified, it's encouraged. It's written into the values, into people's contracts. Then there's 20% where it's encouraged. Facilities are provided, but there's nothing like time-wise clearly carved out. And then there's 70%, that are doing nothing. Maybe I'm too pessimistic, but I'm thinking about the companies that I'm working with or I've worked with since I'm doing what I'm doing now I would say that's about the right ratio.

SL

And do you think when you're looking for the right candidates, are the candidates looking for brand culture? I've looked a lot into the younger generation, Gen Z who have, one got a different mindset to shopping, but also have got a different mindset to

work as well in their careers. And there's more about entrepreneurship and where they're maybe demanding more from a brand.

DT

My feeling is that, yes, the young generation is demanding or expecting more. I think the key area that the younger generation is looking at is flexibility with regard to place of work. Work from home, hybrid work, whatever we want to call it. When I speak to candidates of all ages, I would say that is the one question that I get asked is what's the work-from-home situation.

I think the difference is that the younger generation will; A, are much less likely to accept a situation or put themselves in a situation where it's not what they're looking for in terms of whatever it is, but in this situation, you know, work from home flexibility.

When we look at the people today that we already have, that's not what's happening today in the office. So we can't ask somebody new to do that if we're not even doing it today ourselves. That's the one thing I think, that the younger generations are less willing to compromise on topics that are important for them, whether it be work from home, whether it be culture, whether it be benefits, whatever it might be.

I think they're much more willing to just say after 12 months or six months, 'No, it's not what I want, I'm going to go and do something else'. Whereas my generation would absolutely, first of all, wait to find something else first. It always amazes me that people are leaving without having another role to go to. I would never have done that.

And I think that should be a really powerful signal to employers. What is underestimated from an employer's point of view is the cost of recruitment and the cost of people leaving. The risk of that person leaving over a short space of time is much lower to the point where actually, I guarantee it up to 12 months at least.

Depending on the type of role, but when you look at it, you have the recruitment fee, the cost of the onboarding, the cost of training, cost of development. Then if they leave, you have to go through it all again. You have the invisible cost of the negative impact that has on the people around you, especially if they're having to pick up the pieces and work 20% harder themselves to compensate.

SL

I haven't thought about looking at it in that perspective as well.

DT

There are so many things that are visible costs, but there are a lot of costs that are invisible in terms of, the recruitment process and the broader impact on the people around the team around.

More often than not, it can also be a psychological cost, because joining a new company is an investment in time, in money, even for the employee. And it's a commitment that you make in any relationship. And if it doesn't work, that has a cost. Some people are better at dealing with it than others. For a lot of people, it can be can be pretty tough. It can take a lot of time to rebuild people's confidence and just make them feel comfortable enough to get out there again and represent themselves in the market.

I think smaller-sized businesses are much more willing to be, innovative and flexible in their approach to things such as work from home. I think that the challenge does become when you get it to be a bigger business. And if you have multiple people in similar roles you don't want a situation where you have people in the same role or similar roles with very different, conditions in their contract, and it doesn't necessarily have to be salary-based. I also understand the need for or can appreciate the need for a framework. I think there are probably more different levers to pull, or more brands are willing to pull different levers to find a good solution, to secure and then retain the right talent.

SL

We've spoken a bit about what brands say they are and what customers see them as. What do you think brands could do more to encourage, to align the brand, the employee and the customer? What do you think brands could be doing more of or what have you seen that has strengthened their purpose?

DT

I think one of the easiest things to do is for brands is to be honest and open and somehow vulnerable about saying, the fact that, "This is where we want to be but we know we've got work to do because actually, we're over here somewhere. And we want to involve, our teams and our customers to help us on that journey".

The most efficient way of solving issues is to involve the people who are actually living the brand every day, whether that be customers or, employees.

People are not stupid, whether it is employees again or customers, you know. Marketing is super sophisticated. And on the topic of sustainability, there's so much greenwashing that goes on. I think on a topic around community, around employment, around engaging, I would invite those people to be a part of actually achieving that.

And be honest about the fact that it's a journey. It's that sort of activity that is where innovation will come from. It's those activities that will drive innovation. It's not going to be a leadership team that is going to solve this problem.

It's getting better but there are still so many people, so many leaders that I think don't appreciate and understand the value of being open and being vulnerable. And I don't think people view it as a weakness.

Interview 5: Harry Brook

HB

The way I like to approach Patagonia is that ultimately, everybody deserves to know the realities of what's happening here for the sake of transparency, as you do yourselves.

SL

From your perspective, how important was it for you to work for Patagonia? And what was it that made you want to work for them?

HB

To be honest, it was the reason that I joined the outdoor industry. I have always grown up around Patagonia, it's always been on the backs of friends and family when we've gone into the outdoors. I think back to essentially what I own from the year I was born. They used to belong to my godfather, and I had no idea that he had this fleece. I had no idea it was from the time of which I was born. It's what we used to wear when we went on holiday to the lake. It was given to me a few years ago, and it was just one of those moments where there's been a touch point with the brand that I've not been aware of along the way, and for me, it was all around access primarily and access to the outdoors to advocate or do the sports that I love. And I want to share that love, passion and knowledge with our outdoor users too.

To me, Patagonia came to the forefront when I saw that they were campaigning on access. They were campaigning for equitable access to the outdoors and taking into consideration of greater environmental footprint and impacts their business can have beyond just its manufacturing process.

It's very much that alignment of technical outdoor products that met the needs that I needed as someone who wanted to go and climb, discovering routes in Scotland and the Alps and then aligned with my values around how I wanted to be able to share the outdoors and enable others to access and engage with it. So when the opportunity

came up to work for Patagonia, originally six and a half years ago, I stepped into a role that wasn't necessarily aligned with my experience, but I knew that it was the right move to be part of a brand, to then take the opportunity for the role that I currently have.

SL

That's interesting. And the role that you got given, how did you manage to get that if you didn't have the experience that was needed?

HB

I had experience of being a regional manager for retailers, for a very short period, as well as doing a lot of marketing and community building work. And this role was assistant manager. It was very much on the back of that community building that I was able then to step into this current role, which is looking after the UK and Ireland with our marketing and environmental initiatives.

SL

And from an employee perspective, do you manage people and how does it work?

HB

So my title at present is Community Marketing and Impact Coordinator for the UK and Ireland.

Which is a lot of words, but the reality is the way I look at it is bringing the brand to life, and that's bringing the brand to life in the community, on the ground with grassroots, that's doing so through supporting our retail stores and also supporting our retail partners through trade marketing.

And of course, with such a broad brand, there are so many different touch points on that as well.

Our team, we're really small. So in the UK beyond our retail stores, we only have eight members of staff and that includes the country manager for sales reps logistics and then two of us within marketing. So we've got an outsized impact for our scale.

SL

How important do you think finding the right candidate for a role at Patagonia is? Is that something that you get asked in the interview in the sense of do your values align with Patagonia's values?

HB

There's a lot that can be taught, and values can't be taught. You either hold them. They can be developed, of course, but there's got to be a fundamental principle there as well.

I think of a recent hire where it was someone who had a very specific knowledge base of the UK for a pan-European role. However, their values, the way that they approach their outdoor sports, the way that they hold their environmentalism, and their perception of equity and intersectional issues were so strong that it demonstrated learning and that the European knowledge to complement the UK knowledge could be acquired.

We're very lucky that we are encouraged to experiment, I think at Patagonia you get given a silo, you get given a room in which you're allowed to operate, but the walls quite often are soft and they move. And sometimes you've just got to give them a bit of a push with some strong foundations behind them, and you find that you've opened up a new opportunity or a new doorway.

SL

I know you've mentioned that you're quite a small team in the UK. So from a culture perspective is there any structure or encouragement that is built within the brand? Are there any things that Patagonia has offered or any initiatives?

HB

We very much use the principles of, let my people go surfing. And it's essentially, as long as the work gets done, go surfing. And it's the same for the culture here as well. I work flexibly on the basis that there are things I want to do in the sports that I love that drew me to the brand in the first place but I also know that I work for an unapologetically for-profit company, and there is work to be done but they can work side by side, and the flexibility is there to be able to do that.

There is a difference in that generational shift, and we have to shift their perception of culture and work, that work isn't the laptop, the work isn't just the Excel doc that needs to be sent off to release those held items. It's everything else around it. It is taking that time to go out on a bike. It is that time to go climbing in the evening. There's a strong culture and we all find our space within it. And I think sometimes we could be much better at actually encouraging that culture because it is so sports-focused. And things around making sure you've got sufficient time for the family if you want to take your child swimming, how do we create that to be as acceptable as, training for an ultramarathon? I want to go out for a run for four hours in the middle of the day.

SL

Finding that balance, isn't it? So would you say that Patagonia is true to its purpose from the internal side, as much as what they say they are from the outside?

HB

Yes, I would, I'm trying to think of holes to find. I think the reality is that we do often give this impression that we're a light, breezy, California laidback company. and like I've said already, we're a for-profit company at the end of the day. And there are the realities of business around that, too. We give sufficient space and opportunity for those who want to be able to benefit from what Patagonia stands for. Whether it be our environment, our sporting support, or our childcare, all of the things that the Chouinards fiercely advocate for are there.

SL

And then the future of Patagonia, quite a lot of the things I've been looking into is community, where brands are going to become more listening, move into more brand marketing and I guess Patagonia are leaders there. From a growth perspective, you could argue that because Patagonia is so big it isn't maybe as sustainable as it says it is, but what would you answer to that?

HB

I would respond that we are part of the problem, and we do have frank conversations internally about growth, and that essentially that growth is unsustainable. We can't continue to extract at the rate we are doing so. And for us, we're not growth-focused. We don't have 8%, or 3% year on year that we are committed to. That's not the right thing to do. Ultimately, we're at a size where Yvonne is already uncomfortable with the size of the business. And isn't looking to drive it any further. What we are looking for is more of a balanced approach to growth in the right areas. So we don't need more t-shirts. We don't need more fleece. I mean, the story alone of my godfather's fleece that's from the year I was born demonstrates the products already out there are made well enough. Let's keep it in play for longer.

We're looking at passion projects around Yvonne, such as fish. So Yvonne is a massive fisherman now and again we've got environmental campaigns that reflect that too. And it's it's a nightmare but it's also wonderful at the same time working with an owner, founder even this far down the chain, but there are areas where we see that we can have a greater impact. And I think as much as we advocate for change within the industry, as the fashion industry as a whole, rather than just the kind of outdoor apparel we can't advocate for change without demonstrating it, too. And hopefully, you take that away from the responsible business, the future of the responsible company, as well, in that it's very much about deeds, not words.

There's so much more we could do better and everyone acknowledges that. It's a learning curve. And we've always tried to demonstrate the tip of the spear when it comes to things like radical transparency. When it comes to our footprint, I genuinely

think there's a lot of hard work we need to do to keep up with everyone else, because much smaller businesses can be more nimble on these things. And I'm seeing communications coming from smaller brands that I just wish we would learn from.

The scale of our black hole program, and the fact that it's open source for the rest of the industry, means that it has a scalable impact beyond. In the same way that we are not paying for climate neutrality status, we're not paying for an offset. We're actually going to start taking what would have been that money into the offset, into factories that aren't ours. They are used by many brands. We may be a tiny customer there, but to decarbonize those factories, to then have an expanded impact beyond our footprint.

SL

So you use your profit to benefit others as well?

HB

I think the way that we already approach our employees is one that resonates with the younger generation very strongly. If you already look at the second-hand purchasing habits of Gen Z, you've already alluded that we're incredibly popular there because people want to wear Patagonia because they align with the values that we publicly advocate.

The best way that we can build an environment that attracts that young talent is actually to remain authentic internally to those values that we advocate externally. And because they're authentic, they're embedded. There's nothing that we need to change. They're our foundations

What we do need to change is the working environment. And that's something that's completely adapting and certainly has been since 2020 with things like the Black Lives Matter movement and the rise in social justice within the workplace, especially in the professional environment and the need that we've had to adapt and change or acknowledge that we've needed to change in that time.

I genuinely think there will be challenges that we still don't know about yet, and we certainly don't have the tools for. But we're a company that's always evolved. And because we've got those core foundational principles, and the Chouinards have always centred people in the business, then evolution will happen to meet their needs.

Interview 6: Tom Mansfield

SL

How can brands lead and make a change from the internal perspective? Through meetings, staff or trust, where do you think the future of a brand is heading?

TM

A lot of the formal structures we have in organisations and ways of organising people and managing time are quite deadening. They don't allow for people's creativity, for sharing other aspects of themselves that aren't, relevant to the specific work that they're doing.

I think broadly, the practices that can help staff are about including aspects of life that aren't just relevant to the workstream. There's a sense that if you treat the organisation like a machine, then you're selecting for efficiency anything that's not part of, you know, maximising profit or what your organisational goals are, get excluded.

And so staff-wise, I think things like making space to gather. That culture is developing and has been developing for a while, you know team, offsites where everyone goes kayaking for the weekend or bonding and stuff, that's great, but that feels kind of transitional. I think a full realisation of that is creating a company culture where there's regular room for people to sort of share themselves. And that strengthens the relationships between people. And an organisation ultimately makes it a more resilient organisation.

So when you learn about these other aspects of people they can be included in interesting ways and useful and surprising ways. Organisation as a whole. In management theory, that principle is called wholeness. And it's about including, more of the staff and making more of their lives visible to each other. And from a purely profit point of view, that has a cost at that time. But, how are you valuing the quality of experience or not, in an organisation? I think a high level that's usefully framed is the organisation like a machine or is it like a living system?

SL

And I guess you spend the majority of your time at work and then you identify as that, but bringing in your strengths from your hobbies and your interests is such a great way of looking at it.

TM

You're a whole person and it's a better experience for you if more of you is witnessed and can kind of show up to work, which can create. Diminishing that real split between work and life. If you enjoy your job and you feel like you're living there, it's part of your life, then you're going to be happier. And from a business point of view, it's going to be higher employee retention.

SL

I know you touched on the brand culture and behavioural change within the business. It may be easier when it's a smaller, newer brand to implement change, but with bigger brands, how do you implement it from a larger brand, especially towards the regenerative purpose or a different business perspective that is bringing it back to the planet and that living organism?

TM

So with larger organisations, I think the work is necessarily slower. There are more levels of hierarchy to work through. You can often get initiatives that are picked up by a department. What they want to do, it has to travel up to the executive level to the C-suite, of management and then get the green light from there and come back down. And so those processes can take quite a long time.

Patagonia is an organisation which has made some very high-level commitments to Earth, the planet being its primary shareholder. So once commitments are made like that at a top level, then the organization can start exploring. What does that look like on the ground here? How does that show up in marketing? What does that look like in sales or procurement? Or what does it mean for these different departments? And then consultancy work can be useful to go in and support, that kind of level of the organisation to work out what that means for them.

I think there is a culture of, consultants burning out, trying to change large multinationals where ultimately that commitment isn't made at a high level.

I think a useful approach is creating a team in an organisation or across an organisation to stimulate some positive change. Organising a team of people that is across the layers of the organisation, what some people call a diagonal team. And that's quite an interesting approach because then you form a group of people in an organisation that has a whole organisation perspective.

SL

Do you think that from the outdoor brand perspective, can you see the regenerative business structure being adapted? Or leaning more into a circular economy? Or do you think it is a lot of talk and no action?

TM

Overall, I think the short answer is no, not enough is being done. It's that sort of process of paying attention to the situation of the planet's runaway heating and biodiversity collapse.

You know, the various planetary boundaries being overshoot six of nine now, maybe the seventh one this year. It's quite hard to comprehend that level of emergency. So there's not enough being done.

There's that quote that's like there's no sustainable business in an unsustainable economy, which I think is a really important one to keep in mind.

So if even one business doing its utmost is still operating in a system, that's fundamentally degenerative, the way we organise our economics. And I use the word meaning like a fundamental change in the way that our systems operate in the way that we record and create value, like our monetary system.

Shareholder capitalism doesn't seem like it's capable of actually meeting the needs of the planet. How do you disrupt and change the textile industry? It's difficult. It's huge. What can be produced in Europe? How can we ameliorate the fast fashion footprint of how textiles are produced in northern India or Bangladesh? What can we grow locally?

Those organisations that are really, leading the way and showing that other completely different ways of doing things are possible. I think they can be replicated very quickly. And we do see those as leaders.

SL

And from a literacy and language point of view, how educated the staff are, how important is that throughout the whole level and how do you implement that? That all employees understand the literacy that is being used and, why it's being used.

TM

I think it's important. And I'm glad you came to that question because following on from my last answer, there's so much to tackle and it's difficult and it takes time. And in some ways, we're doing the best we can. And also at the moment, it's not enough.

That's all kind of outward-looking, but I think shifting people's mindsets and changing their ability for what they can imagine and what they can perceive. That's all in the realm of education.

So I think committing resources in organisations to educating staff. I think education and literacy in organizations are fundamental.

And I think there are two forms in my mind of that.

One of them is a sort of basic sustainability literacy. And some great organizations are doing that, going into businesses and doing a kind of 101 on sustainability.

Does everyone in the organization know what circular economy is? What does that mean? What are the examples of it? So when we use phrases like circular or net zero or nature positive, That's all super useful and it feels a bit more accessible.

What I'm trying to do with Cards for Life, the tool that I've designed is another form of literacy, which is eco-literacy, but in a very broad sense. But it's about understanding concepts. There is a kind of fundamental dynamics of how nature works.

To understand, like nature doesn't, you know, plan out a tree and then and then build it. It emerges from a seed, it's a very different sort of process of growth. How energy flows through systems, how it's exchanged, this kind of a way of seeing, an ecological way of seeing, which is such a shift from our way of seeing the world as a machine, which is very much how we do.

And that shows up in our language. We talk about the climate, but the climate is not something to be fixed. And the climate is created by living beings. We don't acknowledge. I don't think we have a mental model of that.

So that idea of emergence, like a tree emerges from a seed, the atmosphere emerges from living beings. These are not mechanical concepts. The atmosphere wasn't, made somewhere and then added.

We come out of the earth, we are like an apple. An apple comes out of an apple tree. That's how a person comes out of the world. And I don't think we see it like that. How did I come into the world? We didn't come into it. We came out of it. So shifting that way of seeing, is more fundamental than sustainability literacy.

And that's what I'm interested in, which is a slightly more philosophical project.

I feel like it needs to be mainstream. That's why I've designed this deck of cards that make these ideas quite accessible for people, so they can kind of start talking about. Emergence and even bringing that to how might that shift an organization.

A team might gather and say what do we need to do. Like what are we going to do about the problem? And that's very valid. And there is something that needs to be done.

But there's also something to balance that is like what wants to emerge here from this group of people.

TM

To sit in a circle and notice each other differently. And that's looping back to that principle of wholeness and realizing, as a group, as a team, as a business, as an organization, we're a unique collection of abilities, gifts and talents.

And so what about if we create a room? For something to come up without trying to do it directly. How would it be if we spent half a day kind of exploring what we're interested in? Someone's going to go, oh, what about if we did that? Oh, and yes, it could be in this way. Like wow, okay. We wouldn't have come up with this project or this innovation if we just set out to innovate.

This is what I'm sort of excited about, this is what it means to be like a living organisation.

SL

That's beautiful and an interesting way of looking at it. Going to flip the language side from the brand internally to externally and how not just educate the staff, but educate the customers.

TM

In the way that I'm interested in communications in linguistics and this early stage, I think there's strategic communications, which is not my forte.

Staying committed to the new language and new terms, as a part of normalising them. That can be a hard choice as a business, because if people don't get what regenerative means, then that's going to affect sales, because it's not going to have that pull that, organic as a known concept, like people see organic and they think if they can afford to make a better choice and they have that environmental conscience, then that's just a very easy move for them. Right?

But then if they have to consider regenerative, that interrupts that flow. But I'd like to see us get to a place where regenerative is a broadly understood concept, and I'm not sure how that happens unless you kind of are prepared to put it out there.

And so that is kind of the education piece. Whatever extra resources can be thrown at communicating that visually.

I think there is regenerative needing a subtitle that renews the soil. Like what's the most crisp way that you can say that the cotton is being regenerated to give people a sense

of regenerative, not as a noun, but as a verb, as something that's happening rather than just a label.

The education piece is about being able to effectively communicate that something good is happening from this label because people get that about organic. If you ask them about organic processes, I bet a lot of them wouldn't have much of a sense of, like, the finer points of what it means to be organic. Maybe it's a simpler communication because without synthetic inputs in the farming system. But there are nuances to that.

And I think visual media and really short snackable content that, a quick illustration that shows like the cycle of cotton growth and how that ends up in a piece of clothing or something.

That's the realm of sort of marketeers and strategic communicators that I think there's so much creative work to be done there. Pushing new language is hard and there's going to be failure along the way.

SL

You talk about do we build or grow a community, which is a really interesting way of using that language of kind of not being.

I've been looking at growth from a brand and why does the growth always have to turn to financial perspective.

Why can't we grow deeper or stronger?

I think flipping it to using the word building like a building a community is a really interesting way of looking at the language and how do you think, like the outdoor brand specifically may be a kind of doing that?

TM

Like growing. How are they? How are they working with the community? The community of their kind of customers?

I think by virtue of being an outdoor brand, there is already a sense of shared pursuit and love of the outdoors and sort. Inherent in the product, right?

In terms of advancing a sustainability agenda for outdoor brands, there is an inherent value that's baked into that market, which is that it's good to be outdoors. And so it's only good to be outdoors if the outdoors is good or in good health or nice to be in as well.

Some things follow from that, that need to be in place, which amounts to having certain shared values. I think shared values, are the soil that the community can grow in. Active stuff is about being involved in events and things that bring people together. And sponsorship of outdoor brands. And there's lots of that going on.

I think that building or growing a community is interesting because I think both are valid. Building a community is about setting up the infrastructure for the community to come together, and that could be people taking selfies of a warm jacket on the top of a mountain or sharing their experiences of footwear somewhere, tied to the kind of pursuits that those products enable. There's a story sharing so that building might be like digital infrastructure for people to share and connect and get a sense of I'm part of a movement of people, part of a community.

But the growing part is more about the sort of wholeness with an agenda. It's like giving space for people to communicate and, share more authentically who they are. And I think that happens more in in-person events. Campaigns for messaging and storytelling that are customer-led, to build on that I think where outdoor brands have a ready advantage is to grow and build community through, customer-led environmental initiatives.

These things are quite popular now like, cleaning plastic off beaches or cleaning up rivers and things like that. I think as an outdoor brand if you can sponsor that kind of activity, that's going to bring people together in a real expression of shared environmental goals, of being stewards of the land.

Helping shift that narrative from like customers. With our products, we support citizens to take care of their common land. I think there's a lot of opportunity for that with outdoor brands and much more could happen.

And I think also collaborating across brands. The regenerative paradigm is all about collaboration and coordination and not trying to monopolize a market share.

So as we see sustainable innovations in clothing, you know, Patagonia open-sourced, sustainable forms of rubber and aspects of their outdoor clothing. So we found a way to do this that's much better for the environment. And here's the design, rather than patenting it.

Community at the level of organizations rather than the customers. I think brands really need to be creating a sense of community, amongst others in their market.

And trying to shift beyond that sense of competition, how can we complement each other, you know? We might have similar product lines but maybe there's a way that people are always going to have their preferences in a sense of allegiance to a brand.

Can we work together to, move beyond that feeling of scarcity? I don't see how we can do it if we don't get kind of beyond that. There needs to be a sense of community at the organizational level in the outdoor brands market and would be great to see more and more of that.

Which feels like quite a brave, bold step.

SL

Not seeing them as the competition, but seeing them as a co-creator or a collaborator.

TM

Let's do an innovation lab together and see if we can work together to slash costs on our manufacturing of product X.

SL

Is there a priority message that you think brands should maybe be pushing to educate the customers on?

TM

I think there are ways of doing education. Like having a carbon footprint label. It's like publishing data about environmental targets and compliance in an accessible way, which is on a clothing label. And normalising that kind of transparency.

Little and often regular messaging is what it takes to change and for things to become a new sort of normal, it's just getting them out there. And so rather than like a big visible campaign is, I would say that light little and often educative communication is important. I'd find it hard to sort of pick anything between carbon, nature, and equity. Like they all kind of go together, those things. Saying what's being done and being transparent about aspirations, Buying from us because we've got this commitment by this date to be circular or to be negative or to be nature positive and report about the journey along that path to get there. Share that information.

I'm saying transparency, communicating transparency and just formalising that feels like a brave move.

Appendix B: Tables

Table 1: Comparison of Outdoor Brands

Brand						
Brand	Albion	Arc'teryx	Rapha	Finisterre	Patagonia	Salomon
Brand Purpose	Stay outside for longer.	Immerse yourself in Nature	Our purpose is to inspire the world to live life by bike	To inspire a deeper connection with the sea.	We're in business to save our home planet.	To help people unleash the best version of themselves through fulfilling outside sports experiences
Founding Year	2016	1989	2004	2003	1973	1947
HQ Location	London, UK	North Vancouver, Canada	London, UK	St Agnes, UK	Ventura, California	Annecy, France

Table 2: Gorpcore Product Prices

Selling Price of Products			
Brand	Gore-tex Jacket	Fleece Vest	Trail Running Trainers
Arc'teryx	£800.00	-	£150.00
Finisterre	-	£110.00	-
Hoka	-	-	£160.00
Merrell	-	-	£140.00
Patagonia	£390.00	£110.00	-
Rab	£530.00	-	-
Rapha	£395.00	-	-
Salomon	£360.00	-	£160.00
The North Face	£450.00	£48.00	£115.00

Table 3: Brand Communication through Instagram

Social (data taken on 7 Dec 2023)						
Brand	Albion	Arc'teryx	Rapha	Finisterre	Patagonia	Salomon
Instagram Followers	26,200	1,300,000	680,000	190,000	5,300,000	1,100,000
Instagram Bio	Stay outside for longer.	Delight in the detour. Welcome to #NoWastedDays. @arcteryxacademy @veilance	The world's finest cycling clothing and accessories #NeverJustARide	For those who share our love of the sea. Proudly B Corp.	We're in business to save our home planet.	Born in the French Alps. Inventing the future of outdoor sports since 1947. #TomorrowIsYours
Total Posts between 1 Jan 2023 - 7 Dec 2023	131	206	121	210	319	291
Photo	108	150	87	111	141	166
Video	23	56	34	99	178	125

Table 4: Patagonia Brand Boundaries Results

Patagonia Brand Boundaries						
Sector	Questions	Customer 1	Customer 2	Potential Customer	Staff 1	Staff 2
Purpose	Do you think Patagonias purpose of 'cause no unnecessary harm' is true?	8	8	9	6	8
Responsible	Do you think Patagonia is a responsible brand?	8	9	9	8	8
Loyalty	Are you a loyal customer / employee to Patagonia?	7	5	7	8	10
Community	Do you think there's a strong community built from Patagonia?	9	8	8	9	9
Trust	Do you trust Patagonia as a brand?	8	8	10	9	9
Price	Does Patagonia sell their products at a fair price?	9	6	8	7	7
Culture	To what extent do you believe Patagonia's brand aligns with or influences your personal cultural identity and values, especially in comparison to other brands?	8	7	8	8	9
Identity	Do you wear Patagonia products because of the social identity it gains?	7	5	4	7	3

Table 5: Albion Brand Boundaries Results

Albion Brand Boundaries						
Sector	Questions	Customer 1	Customer 2	Potential Customer	Staff 1	Staff 2
Purpose	Do you think Albions purpose of 'stay outside for longer' is true?	10	9	10	10	9
Responsible	Do you think Albion is a responsible brand?	8	7	7	10	10
Loyalty	Are you a loyal customer / employee to Albion?	10	9	7	10	10
Community	Do you think there's a strong community built from Albion?	10	7	6	10	10
Trust	Do you trust Albion as a brand?	10	9	8	10	10
Price	Does Albion sell their products at a fair price?	10	8	6	10	10
Culture	To what extent do you believe Albion's brand aligns with or influences your personal cultural identity and values, especially in comparison to other brands?	10	8	6	10	8
Identity	Do you wear Albion products because of the social identity it gains?	8	9	4	10	9

Appendix C: Interview Questions - email

Interview Questions 1: Katie Dreke

Q: Social - Regarding brand identity and tribalism, why is it essential for outdoor brands to cultivate a loyal community of consumers? How will they build trust, and add value to the consumer?

A: It is essential for all brands, regardless of their industry, to cultivate a long-term relationship with their customers.

Why?

1. Because it is much more expensive to speak to those you DON'T know (broad based mass media channels are expensive) than it is to speak with those you DO know (CRM, email, push notifications, retail person-to-person recognition and conversation are all much more affordable and create higher ROI).

2. Because your customers are the reason you receive a paycheck and stay in business another year. Customers, users, members deserve to know that they are important to you. And if done well and distinctively, these efforts can be an impossible to replicate attribute of the brands character in full expression.

3. Because we are humans, making things with other humans, for other humans. If a brand behaves any other way, the brand won't feel, well...human.

How?

In both big ways and small. EG: Thank yous, in person or through handwritten letters or surprise messages of appreciation. Unique product designed with and for a core audience, or select VIP members. Invitation only events and one-of-a-kind memorable experiences. Early access to product or discounted offers on product or the ability to reserve or customize product. Support programs, training, education, alterations, inspiring content = a library catalogue of deeper immersion.

Q: Overproduction from brands. Overconsumption from consumers. How can we change the business structure and shift the consumer mindset for a better future? Do we need to wait for legislation to be put in place? And change the marketing strategy? Where does transparency come into play?

We don't want to wait, or need to wait, for legislation to occur -- but legislation will be required before large scale and meaningful impact will be made across the entire apparel/footwear industry. It sucks. But it's unfortunately true. Each company gets to ask itself these questions: Do we want to be a brand on the right side of history? Do we want to wait and be made to evolve? Or, do we want to be the designer and architect of the next frontier of this business? What are we capable of doing today? What questions do we need to investigate this year? What special-sauce do we offer to the world and this industry, which puzzles are we uniquely designed to conquer for the good of all?

Transparency is required. A marketing strategy that is honest about the nature of the product, and helps the consumer appreciate its unique quality and durability are just as much a sustainability strategy as they are a marketing strategy -- interlinked and responsible.

Q: From a business perspective of a brand, do you see regenerative business structure being adapted by outdoor brands? Leaning into a circular economy? Or is this all talk and no action?

Regenerative business (depending upon the brand) will be a more complicated adaptation for the outdoor market because gear that withstands nature's fury requires performance characteristics that are tricky (at least right now) to achieve without relying on specific complex technical materials and method of make. I have much more faith in circular thinking, making, and the myriad of yet fully untapped business models that can live within that system. It honestly blows me away how many brands have yet to participate in the resale of their OWN products. For decades brands have allowed resale to take place outside their P&L -- climate pressures being what they are, I believe we will see an earnest shift into this space in coming years, especially in the outdoor space where product often has reliably strong length-of-life.