Exclusive and Aspirational: Teen Retailer Brandy Melville Uses the Country Club Approach to Brand Promotion

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Abstract

Italian clothing store Brandy Melville entered the American market in 2009, poised to compete against established American brands including Abercrombie and Fitch, Hollister, American Eagle, and Forever 21. With only a fraction of the retail outlets as the leading teen brands, the company needed to raise awareness among American teens, differentiate from its competition, and drive traffic to its website. Brandy Melville's unique product line (one-size-fits-most clothing) along with its nontraditional marketing strategy (based solely on social media) have contributed to its rapid increase in popularity among teens.

Keywords: Brandy Melville; retail; teenagers; marketing; social media; Instagram

Introduction: Teen Fashion in the 21st Century

According to the Spring 2015 Piper Jaffray survey of teen trends, teens are responsible for approximately $75 billion of discretionary spending, but tend to be budget-conscious and value-seeking ("Taking Stock," 2015). This survey also revealed that teen spending is shifting away from goods (like clothing) to experiences (like dining out and entertainment). Jay

Schottenstein, Interim CEO of American Eagle, recently called the teen apparel retail marketplace "highly challenging and competitive" (Dumais, 2015, para. 8). Indeed, it is a "crowded global marketplace for clothes, where you're doing battle with department stores, legacy brands, online upstarts, and boutiques" (Thompson, 2012, para. 2).

The industry has experienced some rapid changes in the past decade or so. In 2014, Piper Jaffray explained two clear trends of the 21st century:

> First, the shift to off-price retailing is very real and not anchored simply in also-ran overstocks from the department store crowds. These teens almost equally prefer off-price venues to traditional department stores for their fashion needs. Second, teens are increasingly shopping online and on their phones. ("Taking Stock," 2014, para. 7)

In the early 21st century, the list of top American teen brands was dominated by "legacy brands" like Abercrombie & Fitch, Hollister, American Eagle, and Aeropostale. These stores were filled with branded clothing that, in the case of Abercrombie & Fitch, was meant to appeal to "clean-cut, frat-boy hunks, and a conventional, cheerleader-type" of girl (Saner, 2012, para. 15). These brands were skilled at marketing to their target audience (teens) by creating immersive in-store experiences, complete with popular music, brand fragrances, and model-like store clerks. They also relied on edgy advertising campaigns, often featuring scantily clad models.

While many clothing retailers have experienced declining sales in recent years (Sears, J. C. Penney, Gap), many of the teen legacy brands have been hit especially hard. Delia's, Wet Seal, and Deb Shop have all filed for bankruptcy (La Monica, 2015). In 2014, American Eagle announced it would close 150 stores over the next three years ("American Eagle to Close," 2014). Aeropostale shuttered 120 stores in the United States and Canada in 2014-2015 (Marsh, 2014). And after closing 275 U.S. stores since 2010 with another 60 closures expected in 2015 (Wahba, 2015), analysts are asking whether Abercrombie & Fitch is the "next retailer to die" (La Monica, 2015).

Kerri Anne Renzulli (2015) of *Money* magazine listed five reasons why teens stopped shopping at these once-ubiquitous stores. First, teens prefer

individualism over branded clothing. Second, the emergence of "fast fashion" meant that these traditional brands were no longer nimble enough in terms of trends or priced low enough to attract teen buyers. Third, Renzulli pointed out, malls where these stores are located are no longer hangouts for teenagers. The fourth reason relates to the ever-dwindling clothing budget of the American teenager. Teens, she says, are spending less on clothing and more on electronics and eating out. Finally, more teens are interested in "athleisure" wear, or athletic clothes that can be worn straight from school to the gym, which are offered most notably by brands like Lululemon and Athleta.

As the "fast fashion" trend took off a few years ago, stores like Forever 21, H&M, and Zara rose in popularity. Offering "ever-changing, bang-on-trend clothes and without any obvious branding" (Harrison, 2015, para. 6), they won over many teen shoppers. According to a recent *Economist* article, "Zara remains the leading innovator in fast fashion, introducing more than 18,000 designs each year and producing them within an average of three weeks" ("Faster, Cheaper," 2015, para. 5). Fast-fashion brands are also known for their affordability, again differentiating from the high priced t-shirts and jeans offered at the likes of Abercrombie & Fitch.

While teen purchasing preferences have shifted over the years, a commonality between legacy brands and the fast fashion favorites does exist: their traditional approach to marketing and advertising. While their tactics may differ, the major teen retail players have relied heavily on advertising and marketing to win over shoppers. Some of them are known for their sexy ads, with beautiful models in little-to-no clothing. Abercrombie & Fitch plastered their half-naked male models on all of their shopping bags, catalogs, gift cards, on posters in-store, and in advertisements. It also often featured shirtless male models in stores and in front of stores to lure female buyers inside. American Apparel has used sexy ads since the late-1990s. H&M recently featured a nearly-naked David Beckham in their ads for underwear (Alexander, 2015). American Eagle also used sexy advertising to appeal to buyers, and made some headlines as a result ("American Eagle Sparks," 2011). At the same time, many teen retailers (J. Crew, Gap, Forever 21, Aeropostale) have always maintained a more classic, casual image on their advertising and marketing materials. One of the leading fast-fashion brands, Zara, has broken the traditional marketing and advertising mold, though. It spends

relatively little on advertising, and yet has become one of the leading retailers of 2015 (Sozzi, 2015). Given Zara's success without a big advertising and marketing budget, perhaps it was only a matter of time before a brand eschewed advertising altogether.

Background: Brandy Melville

Brandy Melville has been called one of the 25 companies that is revolutionizing the way we shop (Lutz & Peterson, 2015). The Italian clothing retailer was founded 20 years ago by Italian father and son, Silvio and Stefan Marsan. According to Jessy Longo, Stefan Marsan's friend and the owner of the first boutique in America, the name and brand were inspired by a love story: "(Brandy) was this American girl, and Melville was this English guy. They fell in love in Rome. ... It was a cute love story" (Scofield, 2009, para. 4). The company "sells clothing—loose T-shirts and long cardigans, flowing summer dresses and jeans—that presents shoppers with an opportunity to define their own look" (Marsh, 2014, para. 7). Some call it "California" or "bohemian" style, but the neutral color palette allows shoppers to layer pieces and mix-and-match to create a different look every day. With most price points between $20 and $40, Brandy Melville is in line with fast-fashion competitors like Forever 21 and Zara, and cheaper than Abercrombie & Fitch.

Just six years ago, few American teenage girls had heard of Brandy Melville. Brought stateside by Jessy Longo, it opened up its first American retail space in 2009 in the Westwood neighborhood of Los Angeles, down the road from UCLA, and used the name "Brandy & Melville." The company eventually dropped the "&" and today teens cite it as one of their favorite clothing brands ("Taking Stock," 2015). Brandy Melville currently has just 28 boutiques in Europe and Canada, and only 18 stores in the United States. Its relatively new distribution partnerships with larger, more established retailers PacSun and Nordstrom have helped it reach a wider audience. The brand does exceptionally well via its e-commerce site.

The brand's relatively quick rise in popularity was not achieved by following in the footsteps of other successful teen clothing brands, nor did Brandy Melville invest any money in advertising. Unlike the flashy signage of their retail competitors, their boutiques feature discreet signage. Their break with traditional retail rules happens both in store and online, with

nontraditional product offerings and nontraditional marketing efforts. If their success can be sustained, Brandy Melville may stop getting headlines for being controversial and become the model of successful teen branding.

While it still has not reached the levels of popularity as mainstay American brands like Forever 21 and American Eagle, it has emerged as a new teen favorite (especially for online shopping) on recent Piper Jaffray surveys of American teen shopping preferences ("Taking Stock," 2015). This is particularly impressive given that there are only 18 Brandy Melville boutiques in the United States, and 12 of them are located in California. Some of the media coverage the brand has received lately revolves around its sudden popularity among its target audience, American teen girls. Headlines like "An obscure Italian brand is suddenly the hottest name in teen retail" (Peterson, 2015) and "Brandy Melville: Hottest teen retailer sells only to 'skinny girls'" (Goodkind, 2014) have been popping up for the last few years.

However, there are many that are critical of the exclusivity of the brand. With most clothing tags reading "one size fits all," the store claims that women of all sizes can find "something" at their stores, offering up bags (purses) as an alternative if a woman can't find clothing that fits (Mills, 2014). However, when the only size offered is a small, Brandy Melville is rejecting a large group of female consumers. This exclusivity, as we will explain later, could be both the draw and the downfall of the brand.

Faced with the daunting task of making a name for itself in a very crowded, competitive teen retail marketplace, Brandy Melville's culture may have contributed to their promotional strategy. Brandy Melville representatives rarely speak on the record, and the company is "notoriously tight-lipped about its business" (Marsh, 2014, para. 10). For a company new to the market, one would think the executives would want to make a big media splash, appear on the regular business talk shows, and talk up the brand to a new American audience. But the company has not deviated from their tight-lipped nature. One reviewer on Glassdoor.com said that Brandy Melville "operates under 3 different company names on paper, and [employees are] not allowed to tell the public anything about the CEO's or brand history ("Unethical," 2015, para. 3). Brandy Melville also does not advertise. Instead it has opted for a social media-based strategy that relies upon the online images of a group of

strategically selected "young, white, skinny, and long-legged" girls that the company calls "Brandy Girls" (Bhasin, 2014, para. 3). Its social media-only strategy and its "one-size-fits-all" strategy are both considered "revolutionary" in the retail market, and both will now be examined.

Research

The bodies of research most relevant to this case are brand identity and reputation management literatures. Each is discussed briefly below.

Brand Consumption/Identity

Brand consumption is a means that consumers use both to express themselves (i.e., value-expressive function) and to present themselves (i.e., social-adjustive function) in front of others (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen 2009). Hence, brand consumption can be thought of as a means for a consumer to perform her or his brand identity. The concept of consumer-brand identification (CBI), however, derives from social identity theory, and social identity theory states that people not only identify themselves in terms of their personal identity, but also by identifying themselves as members of different groups or social categories which can range from race, ethnicity, and gender to church affiliation, sewing clubs, and sports teams (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Social identity theory is relevant to understanding the relationship between consumers and organizations, or in this case consumers and their favorite brand, because although the individual consumer likely will not interact personally with other consumers, she still may consider herself to be part of that "social" group (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008)—that is a loyal brand purchaser in this case.

Reputation Management and Social Media

Waymer and VanSlette (2013) assert that "whether making product choices, career decisions, or even investigating investment opportunities, corporate stakeholders and publics often rely on organizations' reputations to aid in their decision-making processes" (p. 472). Given the focus of this case study, we first need to articulate clearly why reputation matters and how social media shapes an organization's reputation.

In what is considered the authoritative text on the topic of issues management, Heath and Palenchar (2009) have positioned branding and reputation as key topical domains of issues management. In a more applied, concrete example most relevant to the case at hand, Waymer, VanSlette, and Cherry (2015) have linked the branding and strategic communication literatures by focusing on celebrity image management, reputation management, and branding media strategies used by Miley Cyrus as she transitioned from child star to adult pop star. In this particular celebrity example, it is apparent how traditional and more contemporary social media were paramount to the success of Cyrus' brand/image campaign.

Demonstrating both the reach and power of social media in the realm of organizational reputation, Aula (2010) argues that social media expands the spectrum of reputation risks and can have notable effects on corporate-level strategic endeavors, which must be considered in order to be successful in the modern business environment. Hence, social media boost risk dynamics insomuch as they can and do play pivotal roles in both potential organizational reputational benefit and potential organizational reputational harm (Ott & Theunissen, 2015; for a definition of risk as a dialectic between benefit and harm, see Heath & Palenchar, 2009). In times of crisis, for example, which are often considered reputation threats, the changing nature of social media necessitates (in order to be deemed legitimate and to minimize reputational damage) crisis communicators disseminate safety messages to affected audiences quickly and in a manner that promotes maximum compliance (Freberg, 2012). Brandy Melville, however, is not yet an organization in crisis. As such, elements of leveraging social media toward the organizational benefit dimension of reputation risks seem most appropriate and most directly related to this particular case study (as opposed to focusing on reputational damage/harm).

In that vein, consider the work of Brown, Sikes, and Willmott (2013), who report that 56% of executives say digital engagement with customers is at least a top-ten company priority and that most marketers believe that social media goals are predominantly related to brand awareness. Drawing from the Brown, Sikes, and Willmott study, Allagui and Breslow (2016) present the following figures: 87% of marketers believe that the goal of social media is to increase brand awareness; 61% report that social

media improve a brand's or client's reputation; 40% use social media in order to increase sales; and 38% of marketers find that social media improve customer service. Despite the fact that marketers think of social media in terms of brand awareness and reputation management, Allagui and Breslow (2016) argue that effective use of social media in public relations campaigns can lead to other positive outcomes such as generating conversion, facilitating brand positioning, and maintaining continued brand sustenance. In this case study, we demonstrate how Brandy Melville uses communication and social media strategically to enhance its overall reputation, to get customers to first identify with the brand, and then get those customers to consume products.

With this foundation established, what we are seeking to present and analyze here are the two most apparent strategies Brandy Melville is employing to be successful: brand exclusivity through "one-size-fits-all" clothing, and aspirational models on social media.

Strategy

Without direct access to Brandy Melville leadership or public statements about the corporate culture or strategy (a challenge highlighted above), we do not have explicitly stated, measurable organizational objectives for this case. However, we do not see this as an insurmountable obstacle due to the wealth of publicly available documents, including visual evidence of the organization's social media campaign. Since the organization is promoting almost exclusively via social media, by analyzing their social media tactics, we infer the organization's goals, strategy, and objectives. Moreover, since we know that Brandy Melville is operating in the competitive teen apparel market space, we can infer their objectives are to 1) gain larger market share; 2) increase online traffic to their products; and 3) create an aspirational brand by using aspirational models on social media. We operate from these inferences to evaluate the execution of Brandy Melville's branding campaign as well as analyze and critique the ethics of their type of promotion. In describing their use of the combined strategies of exclusivity through "one-size-fits-all" clothing and aspirational models on social media, we coin the term "Country Club Approach to Brand Promotion."

Execution

The unique marketing approach taken by Brandy Melville utilized two tactics. The first is its "one-size-fits-all" product lines. Its product lines range from knit tank tops and sweaters to denim shorts and jackets, and includes accessories like purses and jewelry. One blogger describes the sizing she found inside the store during one visit:

> While some pieces, like a $28 sweatshirt with a square of floral print or a $21 deep green pocket tee, are explicitly labeled (the sweatshirt only comes in XS, the tee only in small), most just say "one size." A small selection of the more fitted bottoms have two or three size options. (Rubin, 2014, para. 8)

It's a sizing strategy that Brandy Melville has jokingly called "one-size-fits-most" (see Figure 1). Store owner Jessy Longo doesn't apologize for the brand's exclusive sizing: "We offer such a variety of clothing. I would love

Figure 1. A display in a Brandy Melville store in Toronto (Image source: BlogTO).

for everybody to shop at Brandy. … We can satisfy almost everybody, but not everybody" (Mills, 2014, para. 16).

One author tried to determine the size equivalent to the Brandy Melville small:

> The vast majority of the skirts available on the Brandy website list 12" to 14" as the waist measurement (capable of stretching to approximately 25"). Compare that to Urban Outfitters' size chart, and you'll see a garment that size would be labeled size 0. Brandy's extremely popular James Tank, available in over 11 different colors and prints, is 19" in length with an 11" bust. These fabrics are thin with an impressive threshold for stretch, but even a 35" bust, according to Victoria's Secret, is only the bra-size equivalent of a 34A. (Dumais, 2015, para. 4)

Most American girls are not a size 0 or 2, so technically one size does not fit most. In fact, one size does not fit many. Thus the brand is highly exclusive by nature. However, the target demographic, 15-25-year-old girls, is particularly inclined to want to lose weight in order to fit in. This makes Brandy Melville's sizing aspirational, and, again, this demographic is easily influenced by aspirational images related to body image. "Over 80% of 10-year-old girls are afraid of being fat. 60% of girls compare themselves to fashion models and 31% admit to unhealthy behavior like starving themselves as a strategy to lose weight" (Goodkind, 2014, para. 3).

The second unique approach taken by Brandy Melville is their lack of advertising (they have no advertisements) and their reliance upon social media, particularly Instagram (see Figure 2). The company does not use advertising and its executives rarely speak on the record. In terms of public statements by company executives, we only found two examples over the past six years (Scofield, 2009; Mills, 2014). The brand voice comes exclusively from social media. While they do use Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter accounts, Brandy Melville's primary method of promotion is Instagram. In fact, the @BrandyMelvilleUSA Twitter account
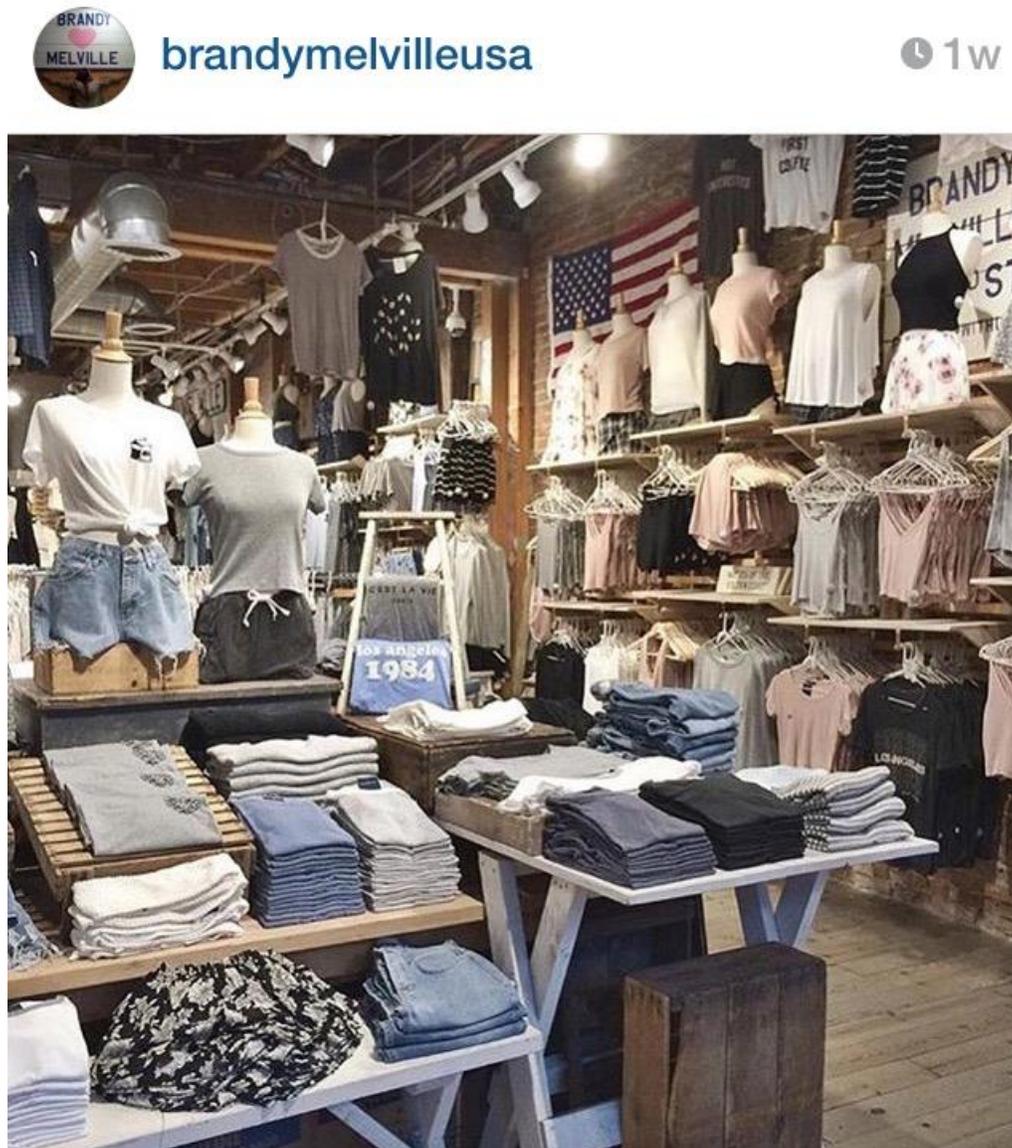
Figure 2. A post on the Brandy Melville Instagram account.

(not verified) is a stream of tweets of their Instagram photos. The company uses multiple Instagram accounts, representing various store locations. The @BrandyMelvilleUSA account currently has 2.9 million followers.

Just as Abercrombie & Fitch have done, Brandy Melville stores only hire girls that fit the brand image. The store employees are tasked with finding shoppers that exemplify the brand look. They then hire these "tall, skinny, long-haired California 'It' girls as their product research team" (Roth, 2014, para. 1) and those "Brandy Girls" then become models for the store's famous Instagram account (see Figures 3 and 4). Some of the Brandy Girls have been discovered through their personal Instagram accounts, where they had posted pictures of themselves modeling Brandy Melville clothing. If Brandy Melville employees thought they fit the brand look, they were recruited through Instagram. Because of the opaque corporate structure and culture, it is difficult to determine exactly who does the Instagram recruiting other than the in-store employees. It is not clear how many people are responsible for their social media presence. One former employee on Glassdoor.com explained what employees at her store were asked to do:

> You ask customers if you can take a picture for product research then ask for Instagram account [sic] to send to owners and see if these girls are worthy enough to hire. Pay is ONLY based off looks, girls will be paid anywhere between 9.50-14 if they are pretty enough. ("Horrible Work," 2015, para. 2)

The marketing team at Brandy Melville then promotes the models' personal Instagram accounts by tagging them in the photos posted to the store's account. Many Brandy Girls have become famous on Instagram just because of their affiliation with the brand. One Brandy Girl, now with her own huge following on social media, describes the way her social media photos got the brand's attention:

> 'They really loved the long hair look,' she says. 'They thought that was really cool and beachy and different. They started sending us stuff and reposting our pictures a lot. They were like, "Oh, if you could take a bunch of pictures in this clothing, we would love to promote you more." It turned into something way bigger than I could have imagined.'(Rubin, 2014, para. 19)

When the brand emerged on Piper Jaffray's 2014 survey on teen spending, Brandy Melville was listed first among brands that teens said they are starting to wear ("Taking Stock," 2014). The brand has created a devoted

Figure 3. An example of "Brandy Girls" on the [Brandy Melville Instagram account](#).

Figure 4. Another example of "Brandy Girls" on the Brandy Melville Instagram account.

following, and those who aspire to "Brandy Girl" status are very active on social media and Instagram, some Instagramming the Brandy Melville clothing in their closet or proudly posting selfies of themselves at the

Brandy Melville store, thus feeding the popularity of the brand (Bhasin, 2014).

In an interview with the *Huffington Post*, one teen fashion blogger highlighted the way the exclusivity of the store's small size offerings make the store more popular amongst its target audience:

> 'It's an exclusivity thing: Congratulations, you fit in the clothes! Join the club,' said Justina Sharp, a 17-year-old fashion blogger who runs her style site, A Bent Piece of Wire. 'There will always be the girls who will try to squeeze into it. They'll do whatever they can to fit in Brandy Melville.' (Bhasin, 2014, para. 4)

Evaluation

In terms of marketing success, sales and social media popularity will serve as proof of effectiveness. Sales numbers for this company are not publicly disclosed. However, based upon their recent expansions into new cities and enlargements of some of their existing boutiques, we can assume that sales are strong. Also, the company's appearance on the most recent Piper Jaffray's teen surveys is certainly encouraging. Lisa Marsh, a writer for Bloomberg Business has declared Brandy Melville "Instagram's first retail success" (Marsh, 2014).

In terms of public relations, however, it is fair to say that response to the brand in the media has been mixed and Brandy Melville has its detractors. As one critic points out, by using their target audience to shape their product lines,

> the store manages to stay completely in tune with what their customers want—and launches some girls' careers in the process. But on the flip side, this strategy can create an echo chamber that ignores how exclusivity, experienced from another perspective, is exclusion. (Bradley, 2014, para. 8)

Many other critics have warned of the damaging effects of the Brandy Melville marketing strategy on impressionable young girls. By implying that "most" girls can fit into the small clothes offered at the store, Brandy Melville is sending messages to those who don't fit the Brandy Girl image about how their bodies compare with the majority of their peers. One blog

discusses how, unlike luxury brands, Brandy Melville does not exclude by marking up their products (its prices are actually competitive with other teen retailers like Urban Outfitters and American Eagle):

> the brand has set the price of entry into its club at being very, very skinny. Now, instead of a teen blowing all her savings on a purse she really can't afford, she is pressured to go to unhealthy measures in order to fit the same size pants as everyone else. ("Too Fat," 2014, para. 2)

An 18-year-old girl blogged about her mixed feelings about the brand in an open letter to Brandy Melville that was published in the *Huffington Post*. In her post, Renaldo (2014) explains that she gets "excited each time [she] step[s] into the store"(para. 1), she has been able to purchase a few "one size fits most" items from the store, and that she aspires to one day model for Brandy Melville. However, she also points out that Brandy Melville only hires skinny Caucasian girls, and that when she and other women try on Brandy Melville clothes that don't fit, it makes them feel like "minorities and outcasts" (Renaldo, 2014, para. 8). She ends her open letter with a call for the brand to consider offering bigger clothing sizes.

Analysis and Discussion

We attribute the success of Brandy Melville's promotional campaign to two things: making their brand exclusive by offering only small sizes and making their most beautiful loyal customers famous on social media, thus making the brand aspirational for all those who hope to be a "Brandy Girl," too. But a key question is: How is the success of the brand linked to its promotion strategies?

While the answer to that question may be complex, it is safe to say that the social media strategy being used by Brandy Melville has positively impacted the brand, given that they use no other traditional means of promotion. Using the goals of social media campaigns discussed by Allagui and Breslow (2016), Brandy Melville has used Instagram to increase brand awareness, improve the brand's reputation, increase sales, generate conversion, facilitate brand positioning, and maintain continued brand sustenance. If consumers buy brands to express themselves (i.e., value-expressive function) and to present themselves (i.e., social-adjustive function) in front of others (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen 2009), it only makes sense

that Brandy Melville's loyal consumers would want to express themselves and present themselves on social media, and, in particular, the photo-sharing platform Instagram. By sharing photos and tagging @BrandyMelvilleUSA and #BrandyGirls, they are identifying with the exclusive group of girls who can fit into Brandy Melville clothes. Brandy Girls are performing their brand identities on Instagram. It follows, then, according to social identity theory, that these girls are identifying themselves by identifying as members of the exclusive Brandy Girls group online (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).We posit that Brandy Melville's social media campaign has been successful, but is this strategy of exclusivity ethical?

The Country Club Approach to Brand Promotion is a metaphor we use to critique what can be considered unethical promotional strategies of Brandy Melville. The metaphor obviously is inspired by the traditional country club, where members value the status they achieve from claiming membership to an exclusive club, and others aspire to one day join the club. We choose to problematize the ethics and social responsibility of this form of brand management.

Research has shown that the high rejection rates for selective organizations can actually boost organizational identification for members and increase the desire for affiliation among non-members. Moreover, researchers have also found that when consumers are made to feel socially excluded, they tend to spend and consume strategically in order to earn affiliation (Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn, & Vohs, 2011) or they embody the communicative power of consumption (Ball & Tasaki, 1992), whereby people send messages about themselves by strategically purchasing products that reflect the image they wish to portray. Relevant to this discussion is that threats and social rejection can also come from brands, and the rejection triggers the same desires to affiliate (Ward & Dahl, 2014).

More specifically, after threat of rejection by a brand (or a salesperson representing the brand):

> consumers have more positive attitudes [about the rejecting brand] and higher willingness to pay when (1) the rejection comes from an aspirational (vs. nonaspirational) brand, (2) the consumer relates the brand to his/her ideal self-concept, (3) s/he

is unable to self-affirm before rejection, (4) the salesperson delivering the threat reflects the brand, and (5) the threat occurred recently. (Ward & Dahl, 2014, p. 590)

Thus, when our ideal self-concept is related to an aspirational brand (or in this case an aspirational brand by proxy of aspirational models), and we experience rejection from a brand representative without mentally preparing ourselves for rejection, we are likely to admire the brand even more and become even more desperate to affiliate with the brand after experiencing rejection.

When an organization or brand caters to only a select few, to beautiful people only, to rich people only, it rejects a wide swath of people. When shoppers come in and try on Brandy Melville's "one-size-fits-most" clothes and they don't fit, those shoppers experience a form of brand rejection. As research has shown (Mead et al., 2011; Ward & Dahl, 2014), this rejection can actually strengthen the desire among those rejected to affiliate with the brand. This increased desire to affiliate enhances the brand reputation, which then can boost sales. Current members and customers certainly benefit when a brand's profile is raised and sales go up. Perhaps the best way for an organization to prove that it is responsive to its members is by making it clear that the organization cares most (and perhaps only) about supporting the needs and values of their current members. If an organization's strategy of exclusion serves to boost sales or enhance the reputation of the organization, then the organization is meeting the needs of its employees, its board of directors, and shareholders—a form of social responsibility (Friedman, 1962, 1970), also a form of gauging ethical behavior. So we leave the judgment and evaluation to you, the reader:

Discussion Questions

1. Like Brandy Melville's "Brandy Girls," do you ever express yourself through a brand? What does this brand allow you to express about yourself?

2. Also like the Brandy Girls, do you ever present yourself on social media as a loyal consumer of a brand? What tactics do you use on social media to connect yourself with that brand? What do you hope to gain from public affiliation with that brand?

3. Is the Country Club Approach to Brand Promotion, as evidenced by Brandy Melville's social media campaign, ethical? If not, under what conditions or circumstances is it not ethical?

4. In this case, the authors referenced a celebrity (Miley Cyrus) and a clothing brand (Brandy Melville) that have successfully used social media to enhance their reputations. What other public figures or organizations have used social media to enhance their reputation? Are there particular social media platforms that seem to be most powerful in terms of reputation management?

5. Aula (2010) argues that social media expands the spectrum of reputation risks. Can you think of any ways in which a purely social media marketing strategy could backfire? Discuss other brands that have been "burned" by social media.

6. Given the fickle, ever-changing nature of both teen preferences and social media, what changes would Brandy Melville have to make in the future to remain popular?

7. What brands are aspirational for you? Do they use social media as a part of their promotional strategy? Have you ever been rejected by that brand or a representative of that brand? How did that make you feel?

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