

AN EXPLORATION OF BRAND IDENTITIES:  
UNDERSTANDING BRANDS AND  
THE IMPORTANCE OF ADAPTATION

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

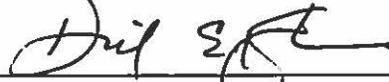
June 2016

**An Abstract of the Thesis of**

**Kate Rohrich for the degree of Bachelor of Arts  
In the School of Journalism and Communication to be taken June 2016**

**Title: An Exploration of Brand Identities:  
Understanding Brands and The Importance of Adaptation**

**Approved:**



**David Koranda**

Brands provide a sense of identity for people, products, and companies. The term “brand” itself has been used for centuries to denote property and form associations; however, as the usage of the term widened, there is disagreement as to its current meaning as well as what branding actually means in terms of advertising and development. While the idea of branding today is less literal than physically marking ownership, it still holds these associative powers and is used as a form of communication and quick recognition.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how brands come about their identities in the eyes of the consumer and then determine how brands can and have adapted to achieve further success. The findings from this thesis advances understanding of how brands are formed both in an internal and consumer facing sense, and additionally, how their meaning is a product of cultural reflection rather than a definitive and static identity. In order to gain a more comprehensive look at brand identities, several brand case studies will be explored within multiple categories of branding, including commercial, political, and personal. As a project component to reflect these findings creatively, I have also created a book that reflects associations with personal branding.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor Koranda for supporting me throughout the thesis process, always encouraging curiosity, and constantly providing interesting discussion. I would also like to thank Professor Alilunas and Professor Carey for being a part of my committee and providing encouragement and feedback, as well as teaching some of the most thought-provoking classes I have taken during my time at the university.

Finally I would like to thank my friends and family that have supported me throughout this process. To all my friends in Allen Hall, I appreciate all of the hours and love that we all have put into our work and it has been a privilege to learn and grow with you all.

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## **Introduction**

Throughout our lives, we are bombarded with communication from all directions. We mindlessly pass billboards while driving, posters plastered along the sidewalks, and our online spaces alone that fill hours of our time are inundated with product placements, click-through ads, and voices that are vying for our attention. Without really even being aware of it, we are under constant exposure to media communication from all angles trying to get us to support a certain cause, buy a specific product or simply be aware of something we weren't before. These are the things that make people groan when a commercial interrupts their show that they were even barely watching to begin with or try to skip YouTube ads before they really even start.

Advertising simply doesn't have that great of a reputation. But good advertising – effective advertising – is different. It's not just about what the product is or even what it does, but truly about what the audience gets when it interacts with it. And this is where the future of advertising lies – in engaging brand experiences rather than one-off prints. And of course, it goes deeper than that, which is what I aim to explore throughout the course of this thesis: how we truly interact with brands on a daily basis, how they affect us and how we affect them, and how brands can utilize this to create worthwhile engagements with their audiences.

While advertisements are often dismissed and rarely celebrated, brands are constantly subconsciously influencing our lives. We define ourselves on what brands we use and brands define their missions by the people that use those products. Every organization we support or institution that we attend has a brand identity that has been reshaped over time. Additionally, we all have our personal

brands that we have developed over time, whether it was done consciously or not. For some brands, there are dramatic shifts in this identity, while for others it occurs slowly and builds over time.

As an advertising major, the idea of presenting and identifying the brand is central to everything that we do. Understanding a brand is essential in interacting and communicating with it in any way. Each piece of communication that a company puts out is part of building a brand voice and influences how consumers see their brand. In fact, anything that relates to that company is part of it's brand: employees, customer reviews, logos, etc. All of these messages – regardless of where they are coming from – should be central to the themes, ideals, and values that the company has and then the brand has been formed and shaped as an interactive process with their consumers.

Brands are not formed overnight because regardless of what the company wants to be their sole identity, it always is under influence of how the consumer perceives it and then interacts with that information that is associated with the brand. The identity is subject to thoughts of their audience and then what those people share with their friends and so on. Companies and their audiences are both part of an ongoing system that is responsible for shaping and redefining brands, and we engage in this system subconsciously. This is what makes the idea of a brand so complex because while it is one entity that exists that is used to define a company, it is also an identity that exists as a product of the influence in the world around it, just as we are products of the cultures we are exposed to as people.

This is where advertising as a craft (and the field that I am just now entering) comes into play. Advertising can serve as an addition or perhaps even an interruption to this system, to give influence in shaping brand identity to one side over the other. The goal, though, is to make this seamless. While it will always take both sides to create a long lasting and successful brand, advertising is key in making sure messaging is effective and clear. If the company and people creating the advertising representing the company don't understand their brand, consumers definitely won't understand it and won't even be part of this system. And on the flip side, if both sides understand equally the goal of the brand and each party is communicating and interpreting in similar ways, then there is the potential for prosperity.

How brands are shaped over time determine their role in society and their overall success. Brands are essential in defining companies, products, and people, but these identities are almost constantly in flux and are shaped by a continuous process of influence.

## **Historical Overview**

Advertising has existed for a long time – at least 2500 years (Heath) in at least familiar form but people have been selling things for even longer – and for centuries, it remained fairly simple as a way to target individuals that a company wanted to buy its products. Advertising as a systematic sales activity is only about 100 years old though (Heath). So let's fast forward to around 100 years ago in the early 1900s. This is when advertising started to look a little more of what we're used to seeing today. But going a little farther, advertising becomes important in keeping companies afloat and starts selling ideas as well as products, which is when the idea of branding starts to resemble what we see today. Not only were ideas being marketed to the public to help war efforts, but in the later half of the century, the competition due to high amount of products and companies skyrocketed.

When consumerism heightened, so did the need for strong brand identities. Particularly after World War II, which is credited with lifting the country out of the Great Depression, Americans were taught to believe that what they needed to do was pump money into the economy. And how to do this? Keep buying.

During the war, American citizens were pushed to conserve materials for the war. Some materials were even temporarily banned and a period of government rationing was in effect (Library Index). Advertising during this period was not used to market products, but to encourage citizens to ration and to invest in government bonds. The government also had tight controls over what people consumed. Common items such as coffee, sugar, meat, butter and

canned vegetables were rationed, and gasoline, rubber, silk and fuel oil were all put to military purposes instead of consumer purposes. Americans were encouraged to plant their own vegetables in “Victory Gardens.” All of these tactics created a culture that revolved around the war effort and showed that a common citizen’s part in helping their country was founded in their purchasing habits.

This rationing dissolved after the war though and by the mid-1940s the economy was recovering and the gross national product had increased by at least 70% from 1939 to 1944 (Higgs). This is where spending became a necessity again and the spending conscious behavior of the past started evolving.

As soldiers returned from war, a need for new jobs was at hand and frugality was no longer necessary. In fact, “spending was promoted as a civic duty and a expression of patriotism rather than an indulgence” (Library Index). Advertising agencies took full advantage of this leverage and waited until the war was over to push markets. “Ad agencies focused on maintaining demand until the war was over and merchandise was available to consumers again” (AdAge). After the war was over, advertisers could again capitalize on this overproduction of products and need to cultivate the best lifestyle possible, which turned into a social responsibility as much as a patriotic one.

Leading into the Cold War, there was a widespread fear of communism that took hold of the United States and the next several decades revolved around a global conflict of capitalism versus communism, mainly between the Soviet Union and the United States. “These two superpowers were the major players in

the Cold War; however their battles were fought like a game of chess with smaller third-world countries being used as pawns by the careful chess masters of the United States and Soviet Union, who never actually directly confronted each other in battle” (Donat). Domestically in the United States, to contrast all possibilities of falling into the communism trap that Americans were so distressed about, citizens went the opposite route of communism, diving head first into pronounced capitalism, guided of course by the politicians of the time.

The threat of communism in the United States was ultimately guided from within. After the victory in World War II, Americans were rebounding confidently and affluent suburbs were developing quickly everywhere. The economy was booming and “material wealth defined prosperous lifestyle of the new America” (Donat). Communism had the potential to disrupt and destroy this lifestyle, and a sense of American paranoia shaped an overcompensation of materialism throughout the society.

United States politicians argued that widespread ownership of possessions would create greater social equality (Library Index). In this way, Americans were taught that their purchasing power was a direct foil to communism and would effectively help in the defeat of it.

There were three main purchasing tenants that really helped this idea of mass consumption: homeownership, automobiles and television. After the war, Americans were told what they needed and one of those things was a new house, which happened to be a mass-produced single-family home in the suburbs.

Between 1947 and 1953, the number of people living in the suburbs increased by 43%, and by 1960 62% of Americans owned their own homes (Cohen).

This new way of living prompted the necessity of automobiles. Car ownership became a requirement to citizens in the suburbs and reflected a serious investment because a new car was at least half of a family's typical annual income. This became a symbol of what Americans were working toward and soon enough, it was not good enough to just have one car, but having a second car was what was needed. With each new addition, came a new standard and a push on what was acceptable in defining capitalistic success.

In addition, television boomed into daily U.S. life and represented "one of the most important social, economic, and technological changes of the twentieth century" (Library Index). Television was advertised as a social equalizer and a necessity. While again televisions represented a large financial investment, if a family did not have one, they were not on the same playing field as others. This social equalizer also was promoted as reinforcing American capitalism over Soviet communism because of increased access to information and supposedly brought people together, despite class and social groups.

Americans were told what they needed and once the majority of the population had that item, it was the type and amount that came into play. The more you had, the better off you were. These items – homes, cars, and televisions – were no longer extras that were purchased out of choice, but as a way to assert oneself socially and reflect personal livelihood.

In addition to the three products that guided consumerism, new products were being released at astonishing rates. This new push for strong patriotic capitalism also gave rise to a new sense of competition of products and advertising agencies were utilizing new strategies to keep up with the demand and make sure that consumers thought that they were getting the newest and best to provide that social bargaining chip.

"The good purchaser devoted to 'more, newer and better' was the good citizen," Lizabeth Cohen explains, "since economic recovery after a decade and a half of depression and war depended on a dynamic mass consumption economy."

Advertisements also boasted of the features included in each new iteration of a product and were promoted with new names that sounded stylish and new. Each product was supposed to make life easier and better, often to get rid of a housewife's worries or cares. These advertisements drove capitalism and began the clutter that is the modern system of ads that we see on a daily basis.

I discuss American capitalism because advertising is at the heart of how our branding works in this country and therefore how we structure our lives. In *Seducing the Subconscious: The Psychology of Emotional Influence in Advertising*, Robert Heath explains how competition in the advertising industry and the subconscious persuasion that drives advertising is a well-kept secret; "Competitive paranoia is especially rife in the USA, where more money is spent on advertising than anywhere else in the world (Heath). Over the past several decades, advertising has become more sophisticated and complicated, and patriotic capitalism has driven our society to a point of extreme brand influence.

This persuasion is at the center of all that we do because of this culture of consumption and brands have played a part in perpetuating this system and making persuasion stronger, yet more subtle.

## **Current Culture and Industry**

The current industry is focused on understanding the millennial, a group of America's youth born between 1982 and 2000 and about one-quarter of the nation's population (Census.gov). Now surpassing baby boomers as the largest generation, millennials hold an incredible amount of purchasing power so it's no wonder that brands are vying for millennial attention.

Not only are millennial numbers large, but the group is also the most diverse generation, with 44.2 percent being part of a minority race or ethnic group (Census.gov) and they account for about \$200 billion in annual purchasing power (Schwabel). In one of many *Forbes* articles about millennials, Dan Schwabel points out that "companies have been struggling connecting with this generation because many of the traditional methods of advertising have proven ineffective at capturing their attention...many companies believe in certain myths about millennials that are just plain inaccurate" (Schwabel). This article continues to point out ten things that are markers of the millennial generation's purchasing behaviors including:

1. They aren't influenced at all by advertising.
2. They would rather buy a car and lease a house.
3. They review blogs before making a purchase.
4. They value authenticity as more important than content.
5. Their future inheritance won't change their buying behavior.
6. They want to engage with brands on social networks.
7. They want to co-create products with companies.
8. They are using multiple devices.

9. They are brand loyal.

10. They expect brands to give back to society. (Schwabel)

Now, these aren't all black and white at all, and aren't even that true depending on what study you look at. However, the trends surely are pointing in these directions.

Traditional advertising is less effective, probably not because millennials have better sense than to be influenced by them, but simply because there is so much clutter in the advertising world that it takes a really strong ad to even stand out, let alone make a lasting impression.

Many of these other trends point toward millennial desire to have support authentic brands that they can trust and that support causes that they care about. Though while brand loyalty seems to be important to this group, the generation also tries new products more than other generations (Lobos) and follow and create trends rather than follow what has been built up and expected. It seems that millennials want authenticity without the commitment – which is another barrier to unpack all on it's own – and brands must be able to adapt to constant change to keep up with the millennial mindset as well as the rapid changes occurring in digital technology.

This is affecting advertising in multiple ways, two of which I want to point out here. The first is that advertising as a whole is trending toward digital and experiential touch points in order to connect with the millennial audience. I see this as a positive for the industry as well as the consumer. The second is that in order to compete for this attention, brands are losing their unique voices and drowning in a sea of companies trying the same tactics and focusing not on building a standout brand, but one that does more of the same. This is obviously more of a negative.

As someone entering into this industry, both of these things present incredible opportunity. Advertising needs a shift in focus at this point in time to stop simply revitalizing ideas and instead start inventing. In his article “Specialising ourselves into irrelevance,” Gareth Kay asserts that the industry is trying to recreate itself in the wrong direction. “Marketers and their partners have become excellent at the wrong type of innovation. We relentlessly pursue and celebrate the latest new and original ways of doing what we have done before but rarely do we imaginatively find new types of things to do with our skills and creativity” (Kay). Kay jests that marketing departments are comparable to the dodo bird, becoming outdated and irrelevant to helping brands hold any meaning in our world. If a shift in thinking does not occur in the industry though, this analogy is not far off. The companies that are doing incredible work for brands have been working with this mindset and are much closer to inventors and problem solvers than conventional advertisers that are glorified in *Mad Men* or thought of by the typical person.

I had the opportunity recently to visit a media agency that does great work for brands, but doesn’t do anything in terms of what one would think of when saying traditional advertising. Not only just millennials, but the consumer base as a whole is now wanting more experiences than anything when it comes to interacting with brands. “Consumers today are broadly catching on to the notion that experiences make you happier and are as valuable – or more – than buying fancy things” (Schultz). These experiences not only enhance and add value to life, but cater to garnering more trust because of authentic experiences rather than sales pitches in order to connect. These experiences though also enhance and add value to our Facebook feeds and Snapchat

stories, a sad reality of consumer power being dominated by digital native millennials. These experiences are driving consumer purchasing because possessions are no longer driving social success; it's our social networks and digital presence (and curated personal brands) that are the source of value.

The company that I visited and is doing these things is called RadicalMedia, a production agency in New York that creates a wide range of media, self-described as “storytellers, artists and innovators, representing a great depth and diversity of talent. Bringing together the highest levels of creativity... we're proud to have so many global agencies and brands turn to us again and again, year after year.” The RadicalMedia Chief Technology Officer spoke to us about how anyone that works at the company has to be resourceful and basically an expert in figuring things out, listing some of the seemingly insane things that they had to discover and invent in order to make experiences come to life for certain brands.

One of the most notable and recent projects is The Museum of Feelings that “bring[s] emotion and scent to life through an engaging and immersive experience” (SC Johnson). The museum was a sensory journey that turned emotion and sense into real life, art, and an unforgettable experience – not branded, but all sponsored by Glade. This museum created an engaging experience to capture consumer attention, generate buzz, and create earned media as social channels were flooded with the shareability of the idea. This type of advertisement is an effect of marketers not looking at their jobs as marketing in addition to working with a team that has a diverse range of abilities. This idea of how production and creation for brands should happen leads to state of the

industry (conveniently enough also being driven by millennials): the generation of hybrid creatives.

Very recently, the University of Oregon got some attention from Adweek on this very topic of hybrid creatives. This new generation of creatives have multiple talents and areas of expertise and the industry is adapting to this in order to balance the demands from consumers on the other side of the equation:

A few agencies are starting to see the opportunities in hiring these young, diverse, label-resistant makers. One of them, Havas, has even committed to launching a new initiative called N8tive, a small incubator of recent grads who'll be free from the hierarchies, obstacles and job descriptions that many agencies impose on untested creatives. Instead the N8tives will report directly to GCD Paul Vinod and CCO Toygar Bazarkaya, who conceived the idea. They'll get access to the best briefs and an invitation to use their manifold skills to invent solutions. (Boches)

These methods of concepting brand solutions and the hiring process itself is still progressive in the industry and hasn't become commonplace. It may even seem unnecessary – good ideas are good ideas, right? A simple tagline or a great strategy can still be effective. However, it may just be what needs to happen or what is coming next regardless. Specialization no longer helps productivity, but being a hybrid is what is necessary. What once in the manufacturing age was beneficial because precise jobs meant more productivity and more profit actually means the opposite today. All that specialization does is “fragment[ing] brands into a million little pieces” (Kay) which has changed how brands interact in the world and the necessity in strategic brand

understanding and communication. Kay ends his article with the note, “We should not forget that marketing was born in a postwar manufacturing world but increasingly we are operating in a postmanufacturing world.” Brand identities as well as the industry that shapes them are constantly evolving, and those in the industry must be aware of these persistent changes in order to understand brands and their role in effective advertising in the current consumer landscape.

## **Brand Definition**

So then, what is a brand?

Brands are everywhere and are competing for our attention, yet pinning down a definition is difficult. Heidi Cohen, an expert on actionable marketing, put together a list of 30 definitions of branding (Cohen). Some overlap, but all are slightly different. Definitions ranged from “a design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” to “A brand is the essence of one’s unique story.” I personally like the definition given by Jay Baer: “Branding is the art of aligning what you want people to think about your company with what people actually do think about your company. And vice-versa.” This definition is closest to the idea that I am exploring here, that brands are an evolving system of perception between the company and the consumer.

Diving further into unpacking this idea of what a brand really is, we have to look at what forms a brand comes in because it lies beyond just simply for advertising and commercial purposes. It is human nature to brand things; the University of Oregon has a brand, the Clark Honors College has a brand, and we all have our own personal brands. Branding is how we define and navigate the world that we live in. Even before the term “brand” was used in the sense of advertising, a brand was a symbol of what something represented – it is the image that is being presented to the world.

In *A Master Class in Brand Planning*, Stephen King presents a series of interviews with housewives and asks them to imagine certain brands as people.

*Interviewer:* “What kind of person would you think Fairy Snow would be?”

*Housewife A:* “Well, I think it would be somebody older... somebody whose outlook on life was a little slower, most probably her children would be growing up, she would be a married woman again, I should imagine. Generally doing a slower run of life than would Mrs. Ariel.

*Interviewer:* “Tell me more about Mrs. Ariel.”

*Housewife A:* “I think she would be the sort of person who has got to get everything done, though very well and very efficiently, to have rather a good social life at the same time. Very sparkling, and would be sort who would always have a baby-sitter at the ready, to go out in the evening and take good care of herself; and who likes to keep young and follow trends.” (King)

There were several other brands noted in the book and all were easily and clearly defined in terms of what they would be like if it were a person. These brands had personalities that defined how they were seen and what brand was chosen. You can do this with any brand and then see who they draw in as their consumer base. One simple example is thinking about the companies Apple and Microsoft. Apple is sleek, innovative, stylish. Microsoft on the other hand is business oriented, software, computers. Clearly these two brands have two distinct personas that separate themselves from each other and create their brand identities that differentiate in a competing market. This has in part been due to advertising, but also in part to user opinions (perpetuated by ingroup bias) and our current culture. In a TedTalk about inspiring action, Simon Sinek speaks to why Apple is so successful. “And yet they’re just a computer company. They’re just like everyone else. They have the same access to the

same talent, to the same agency, to the same consultant, to the same media. So why is it that they seem to have something different?” The reason for this is that their advertisements and all of their brand communications “start with why” while other companies like Microsoft build out their communication from “how.” Apple advertising is again sleek, innovative, stylish – the same words I used to describe the brand earlier. Whereas Microsoft advertising tends to focus on what their products do and how they work. Because of this, it’s not surprising that Apple has been dominating in several markets and continues to do so. They are not branded as just a computer company like Microsoft is and their brand association extends much further than Macs or iPods. They’re brand is not about what they do, but about why they do it (Sinek).

As seen in this example, a brand is and should reflect back on what audience is communicated within that brand’s advertisements and become a cycle that reinforces a stronger persona over time. “One can often trace the sources of a brand personality -- here it is in advertising, there the pack, somewhere else some physical element of the product. Of course, the personality is clearest and strongest when all the elements are consistent” (King). It is the goal then to make all of these elements consistent to create a strong identity, because that strong identity means more loyal participants in the brand and a trust that is necessary for a company to move forward. A brand must be flexible and able to be redefined when necessary. Because brands can be thought of with human traits, we can also think of their lifespans like people: in order to have a long lifespan, a brand must be willing and able to adapt and be shaped by the people that support it.

Looking at all of these factors, a brand’s positioning can be determined by the things that differentiate that brand from others. And in terms of a brand’s personality,

it's the way the brand expresses and represents itself (Staplehurst). Millward Brown presented a study of why brand personality really does matter, showing that is a flexible institution that determines a brand's success. This success, as Brown shows, can be shown through archetypes based on several characteristics chosen by their test subjects and are shown to vary from country to country. This helps conceptualize the brand and then in turn understand how to relate to the audience. "By combining key outputs of BrandZ and CharacterZ and examining them in light of Geert Hofstede's model of the dimensions of culture, we can identify the brand characteristics that are most likely to ensure success in different regions" (Staplehurst).

While a fairly clinical sounding definition of the study, this information on brand personality can definitely be used by marketers in order to determine factors that will help in successful communication. Understanding how the brand relates to its audience helps to make effective messaging that relates directly to how the audience perceives the brand and can be shaped to how a brand wants to be perceived.

In this study, over 500,000 people were asked to describe brands using a set of 24 adjectives chosen to cover a wide range of personality characteristics. They then assigned brands to a certain archetypes according to its dominant character. "Developed using semiotics and both qualitative and quantitative research, these archetypes allow us to reduce a vast array of brand personalities to a manageable number of well-defined and recognizable characters" (Staplehurst). The characteristics that participants were able to choose from were the following: wise, trustworthy, sexy, desirable, rebellious, caring, generous, hasty, dishonest, brave, adventurous, innocent, kind, arrogant,

uncaring, fun, playful, straightforward, friendly, different, assertive, in control, creative, idealistic. These were then narrowed down based on responses to an archetype that described the brand best. These qualifications allude to how the brands are viewed and how they present themselves. “Some global brands are characterized differently in different parts of the world. For example, in Italy, Spain, and the UK, the Apple iPhone is viewed as a Seductress, but in Australia it is a Joker, and in Japan, a Dreamer. This discrepancy highlights the many factors that influence a brand’s personality” (Staplehurst). People perceive brands differently due to a variety of reasons, including values, traditions, and circumstances. A brand’s personality traits are cultivated through the “lense of their cultural conditioning” (Staplehurst). It should be a brand’s goal to find the root of how it wants to be viewed and then try to connect with that human truth that can potentially transcend all backgrounds. Easier said than done, of course.

## **Commercial Branding**

Commercial branding is a lot what I have been referring to thus far in regards to companies using brands to connect with their audiences and target consumers. To look at advertising this is the most relevant form of branding to look at. A brand in this sense can really make or break a company and their agenda. Some of the most iconic companies have built lasting brands that resonate with their audience beyond the product that they are selling. Apple sells innovation, not iPhones. Coca-Cola owns happiness, rather than soda. It is these big ideas that have led these companies to the top and are what is helping them stay there.

It is the goal then to create this value for the audience. In an article about brand value in startups, Thomson Dawson says, “Those entrepreneurs who eventually grow up to dominate their market represent a compelling ‘idea of value’ in the minds of customers that is simply not available from the alternatives in the category” (Dawson). The range of products in one category is so dense that creating a strong sense of brand value and brand association is vital in continued success, and then this brand identity must be malleable to change with an audience. In Forbes list of Most Valuable Brands of 2016 (Forbes), over half of the companies were technology based, which probably is related to the idea that they can adapt and change so quickly with their consumer. In fact, companies like Apple (#1 on the list) are leading this adaptation rate rather than following and at this point have been able to stay ahead of the game.

To show how brands change over time and how they work with consumers, I want to look deeper at a couple examples that point out different sides of brand adaptation. I mentioned briefly Coca-Cola, but want to look further at it because it is a

good example of a worldwide brand that represents a singular idea to its consumers. The brand has definitely grown and changed over time considering that it is over 100 years old, but has stayed consistent with the value and persona that it wants to portray. From selling nine drinks a day in one pharmacy to 19,400 every second worldwide (Moran), the brand has needed to evolve to stay relevant in the current culture as well as keep up with it's own growth. The global director of human and cultural insights at Coca-Cola has said, "For brands, staying relevant requires real engagement and attention to social impact" (Post). Coca-Cola has become iconic because of its ability to effectively do this. Even missteps like "New Coke" – a decision to change the formula for Coke for the first time in 99 years – are corrected immediately after listening to their audience. The new venture only lasted 79 days.

In general, Coca-Cola has been a brand that is an example of consistency that has led their brand image to be well loved and received, despite critiques. This consistency "takes time and repetition to forge a lasting imprint in consumers' consciousness, and Coke maintains long-term dedication to its campaigns (like "Have a Coke and a Smile"), marketing platforms (like *American Idol*) and identity elements. Note that, while Pepsi's logo design has morphed repeatedly, Coke's logo script has remained virtually unchanged since 1886 (Stengel). Not everything with the brand is perfect, of course, and there will always be consumers that don't align with the preferred brand strategies of the company. In many cases, customer conversations about heated topics can get out of hand. "Managing expectations is not the goal," said LaForge. "Trying to manage something that is unmanageable is not a winning strategy" (Post). Instead a brand must participate and engage in the ways that they can to

understand their audience, staying ahead of cultural trends and remaining in line with the identity of how they want to be perceived and how they are being perceived.

On the opposite side of brand adaptation are brands that have not been able to adapt well because they have lost touch with their consumers. One example of this is the Snapple brand, which has changed ownership repeatedly since it first began. Snapple was founded as a lighthearted brand that didn't take itself too seriously. The founders created unique flavors and we're authentically amateur in how they approached business. Consumers loved this contrast to large corporate culture (Holt).

Both Howard Stern and Wendy Kaufman helped establish Snapple's quirky voice (Holt). Stern was an unapologetic personality that aligned with a counter culture attitude, and Wendy reached consumers in an honest and unscripted persona. For years, Snapple remained this quirky and authentic brand that strayed from corporate tone, and consumers connected with it.

In the height of this period when both consumers and brand connected in the authentically quirky and sales were rising, the Snapple brand was sold to Quaker Oats in 1994. Then, a couple years later, Snapple was again sold to Triarc Beverage Group in 1997. And finally the brand yet again changed hands to Cadbury Schweppes in 2000. This was all before ending up merging to become Dr. Pepper Snapple Group in 2008. In this relatively short period of a brand's lifespan, Snapple managed to go from a beloved voice of amateur dreaming winning out over bureaucratic elite to "the Myspace of Drinks" (McCue).

During this time of shifting ownership, a lot of different marketing tactics were attempted, but conventional approaches, cutting flavors, and inauthenticity strayed too

far from the original brand voice that consumers loved and the value of the brand had been lost. During this period some tactics caught on, but were not sustainable and did not prove to have long term effect on the brand as a whole. In *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*, Douglas Holt examines the Snapple brand in the 90s, saying:

The buzz that Snapple generated was the consequence of the power of its myth. Simply getting people to talk about something – say, repeat a catch phrase from an ad– is not a particularly noteworthy event. Most such talk quickly fades from memory and, regardless, becomes detached from the meaning of the story.

Regardless of anything that caught on during this period, it did not resonate with the brand as a whole or its audience. Additionally, in conjunction with a weak brand voice, the ready-to-drink market –especially that of teas and juices– has seen an influx of new products and Snapple’s voice has faded from consideration. Snapple is fondly remembered as a unique personality within the market (McCue), but it no longer stands out because it did not adapt to changes, within the company, with its consumer, and current culture.

Another example of brand adaptation from a different angle comes with Lee Jeans, which created a new identity through advertising tactics and shifted brand persona by targeting and connecting with a consumer identity. Lee Jeans, founded by Henry David Lee in 1889 in Salina, Kansas shows how a brand can adapt to changing culture and increase longevity through change. The company did not become a household name though until 1913 when they produced the first full-jacket overall, the

Lee Union-All (Wilder). And then the mascot Buddy Lee was a doll used as a promotional tool for the company from 1920 to 1962. The mascot was brought back in 1998 and was used in many of the company's television advertising, which led to a crucial adjustment that helped the brand.

This revival of Buddy Lee shows a shift in identity in Lee Jeans triggered by an advertising campaign but then shaped by the audience that latched onto it. In 1998, ad agency Fallon McElligott brought back Buddy Lee and aimed their messaging to 17- to 22- year old males. This differed greatly from the previous audience for most of the century of farmers or work jeans. The campaign used guerilla marketing techniques and unique television spots featuring Buddy Lee as a character. Most notably was a mockumentary called "The Buddy Lee Story" that aired in segments on late-night cable television. The people who saw this advertisement were the young men that Lee was aiming for, but the series of advertisements was directed by the audience as the character gained a sort of cult following. While Lee Jeans had been worn by workers or mothers before, the new brand was considered fashionable because of how the identity was shaped over time, both by the initial campaign and then by the following and reception it received. Buddy Lee was the subject of a lot of youth pop culture segments including spots on MTV and in 2005 Buddy Lee was even promoted as a write-in presidential candidate for the 2008 election.

The brand identity went from the rough, dirty lifestyle of farmers to the adventurous grit of youth, and because of this shift in identity, young men were then more compelled to change their personal identities to what was considered fashionable. Through this adaptation, Lee Jeans has been able to change with culture and become a

lasting brand with a newfound value. In this case, consumer and brand worked together to create this persona that been successful for both parties.

The last brand that I want to discuss here in terms of adaptation is Burberry, which yet again went through a brand change that took a different form, though similar in many ways to a combination of the brands I have already discussed. Burberry was founded by 21-year-old dressmaker Thomas Burberry in 1856 (Burberry). In short, over time Burberry lost it's consistency and it's connection with its audience as it diversified and lost ground in terms of its competitors. But this is where the adaptation came that has made Burberry one of the most successful brands in terms of user experiences and brand engagement. The turnaround began when Angela Ahrendts became CEO in 2006 (Shapiro). After traveling globally to many Burberry locations, she found that the customer experience was inconsistent and not representative of the desired brand positioning, definitely from the company's side of things, but probably also from the consumer side as well. "Dog leashes were sold at one location, kilts in another, and the price point of the classic Burberry raincoat varied country to country" (Shapiro). This left the brand identity lost and unpredictable.

Ahrendts made strategic moves to change the brand's identity through consistency through centralizing design and reviving brand heritage. The combination of the two strengthened the value and messaging given by the brand and also built a stronger persona that appealed and stayed relevant with customers. In addition to these changes, the company has adapted to the digital culture that is now necessary in any product experience. The company has launched a succession of digital marketing initiatives, including Burberry Acoustic, Art of the Trench, and a partnership with

Google, which brought the brand “from the dusty attic to fresh relevancy with a new generation.” People were able to engage with the brand and it became an extremely approachable luxury brand.

It’s rare that a brand can so have such an integrated experience that is globally consistent. In *Forbes* article “Burberry's Blurred Lines: The Integrated Customer Experience,” marketer Scott Davis asked the question, “What company has so seamlessly integrated its online and offline experience that it never feels like two different companies? I’m looking right at Burberry.” Burberry is adapting to their consumer and blurring physical and digital worlds in order to transform from an aging and decentralized brand into a valuable and beloved luxury brand. And it shows in its sales, which tripled in five years (Davis). Through these digital experiences that resemble what one would see in store, customers have shaped their perceptions of the brand and shared in this transformation as well. This interactive process of brand and user engagement is entirely crucial to a brand’s success and a consumer’s willingness to buy into the brand’s value. Here, Burberry has accomplished this. Davis goes on to point out five things to consider for strong branding, all of which Burberry can be used to illustrate:

1. Declare what your brand will stand for.
2. Choose a target wisely.
3. Design an experience that delivers your brand promise to the target audience.

4. Create a branded experience, branded signature touchpoints and the organizational alignment to empower employees to bring the brand to life in unique and surprising ways.
5. Continue to innovate the experience and the brand. (Davis)

Because Burberry did all of these things, they created a customer experience that people wanted to be a part of. “It’s not simply a matter of fixing broken links in the customer journey, it is about understanding the customer’s needs and motivations and designing an experience that best meets that need” (Davis). The digital experiences of *The Art of The Trench* were a celebration of the people who wear Burberry and created all sorts of earned media of people sharing on Instagram or Pinterest. This created opportunity for the company in a way that was seamless with the brand values and consumer values.

For companies to see success and have sustainable growth, they must be willing to adapt with and for their consumer. As the consumer and culture is also adapting, there will be a perpetual need for new ways to engage in meaningful ways, making the job of advertisers that much more valuable and interesting.

## Political Branding

Political branding is very interesting, especially looking at it in terms of adaptation because politics as a whole is constantly evolving, much more so because of the people that are part of the process rather than the politicians at the face of everything.

Political branding, by definition, is how a political organization or individual is perceived overall by the public (The University of Auckland). The similarities between politicians and commercial branding is strangely clear, as politicians aim to be at the front of the public's mind and basically sell themselves as if they are consumer goods. This branding is undoubtedly shaped overtime and in a cyclical process of engagement by the public and the figure or institution, which is why political parties are not the same as they were decades or even just several years ago.

It's very difficult to cultivate a brand that is White House worthy and takes a lot of time and adaptation in the process. "Running for President of the United States means building a brand that at least 51% of the country is willing to buy on Election Day," branding strategist Laura Ries says on her blog, *Ries' Pieces* (Penhollow). "Not an easy task in a country as large and diverse as America. Too narrow a focus and you won't get a majority vote." Political stances alone won't be a driving force in winning a campaign, and the brand that resonates with the American public will likely win.

These political brands are built by techniques that are used in the same way as successful marketing for products and consumer brands. The product in this case is just a person and an idea or mindset instead. Political branding is especially interesting because of this ideological basis – it is constantly shifting with what the public demands

and is inherently unpredictable because of human nature. In the current 2016 presidential election, it is amazing the brands that evolved over the last year in competition for votes and for ultimately the nomination. The brands of these candidates vary drastically and are subject to so much outer influence. Whereas brands promoting products are in a system working with the brand itself, the consumer, and perceptions from each side, media coverage, social media, and a wide range of other things... political personas are in that same system but drastically heightened because of the importance and the range of political opinion.

In this election season, there has been scandal, fights, calls for drastic new policy, and so much more, but even these candidates who are in the election right now have been shaped from the process of adaptation and through this system of constant shifting in order to make themselves more appealing. While this topic alone could deserve many pages, I will simply provide an overview of this process and look at the political branding in association with the three candidates still in the race: Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders.

All three candidates are wildly different and represent ideas that have drawn wider and more diverse crowds than many other elections. I want to start with Donald Trump, who was one of the most unlikely candidates, now successfully grabbing the Republican nomination. Trump has already built up a personal brand as a businessman, author, millionaire, and television personality. He attaches his name to luxury products and is known for his money and his upfront attitude. The way he has captured so much attention is actually quite incredible, considering that he is one of the frontrunners despite so many awful statements that he makes. All of these things are part of Trump's

persona and objectively a branding success. As Trump has evolved over the course of the last year, so has the Republican party – although to many people’s dismay.

Trump’s campaign chief Paul Manafort suggested that “he gets it, and that the part he’s been playing is evolving” (Benen). His campaign has consistently been referred to as a part he has been playing, which is the more concerning side of branding. When does it overshadow what a person is actually doing? Or many more relevantly, which is more concerning – a brand that has taken over a candidate, or this candidate being the authentic Donald Trump?

Regardless, his branding has shaped a new era in Republican politics. His name recognition is 100% and many Americans are undecided about how they feel about him. He has been one of the most talked about people of the last year – being covered on the media every day around the country and world. If nothing else, he is getting exposure which is outweighing some other parts of the brand cycle that I have talked about. His brand image though is appealing to voters and in turn more voters are comfortable stepping out in support of him, which is an adaptation on the system in itself. According to brand experts and a *TIME* article on why Trump’s brand is so powerful, there are five traits that define his brand: he is an outlaw, a creator of wealth, a symbol of success, he speaks his mind, and he is authentic (Luckerson). It is likely that his success is not a marker of his political opinions at all, but of his personal brand that has been cultivating in the public eye for nearing 40 years (Weinstein):

It may not exactly be Trump’s platform that is attracting voters. He’s been purposefully vague on the campaign trail about how he’ll fix the many problems he sees in America. His campaign website appears to

talk more about his success as a businessman than his specific plans for the White House. (Luckerson)

Trump is gaining success purely through his brand persona, and his success in this presidential race thus far might just be an unfortunate attribution to the powers of brand influence.

On the other side of the political equation this year are Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. This evolution of the Democratic party brand has been much slower paced, but is happening nonetheless. As Bernie achieves more success and poses a real opposition to Hillary, the party as a whole is becoming more progressive on policies and Hillary as a candidate is becoming more so as well. This is a mark of her branding to try to achieve the necessary votes. However, despite shifting her brand and her persona to be more in line with what voters seem to want, it seems that in many ways this has achieved the exact opposite of the intent, at least on a personal level for her campaign. Hillary has been under constant scrutiny for changing stances on a number of policies and her brand is taking a hit on authenticity as a result. Hillary is also battling patriarchal system that is so heavily reinforced in this presidential process, and unfortunately her brand has been diluted by media that discusses not her policy, but her outfits and her demeanor.

Beyond these things though, Clinton's campaign lacks a lot of depth that voters want and need. Her branding furthers distrust toward her rather than repairing it, and shows that she doesn't just adapt to circumstances, but shifts drastically. Her campaign as a whole has no overarching theme for voters to grab onto, so there is a systematic communication breakdown between voters and the understanding of her brand

(Blaney). Clinton's slogans are "I Still Believe In A Place Called Hope" and "It's Time To Change America," which don't have the strength and clarity that Bernie Sanders has in his "A Future To Believe In" slogan, or even Trump's "Make America Great Again."

In fact, there are a lot of things working positively for the Bernie campaign and that reinforce his brand at each step. Much like the successful commercial brand examples, Bernie is consistent and has a seamless offering from messaging to voter interaction:

Bernie Sanders' brand, for example, is that of the progressive outsider and his message is that the political system is corrupt and built for the top 1 percent. His goal is to forge a political revolution, involving everyone's help to bring real change to government and help the disenfranchised believe that, as a force, they can make change. (Blaney)

It is important to be able to summarize a brand and its persona in a concise statement. If something needs to be explained more, it isn't strong enough to be memorable. Sanders consistently offers this same message and it is integrated in every aspect of his campaign (Hollis).

Bernie and Trump alike have strong brands that resonate with the American people, regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum. These political examples obviously extend much further than these explanations alone, but in terms of marketing the relationship between politician/voter is very similar to company/consumer and can be used to demonstrate how important brand image and adaptation is in success.

## **Personal Branding + Project**

Just as companies and political parties have opportunities to create brands to market themselves, so do people on an individual basis. Personal branding is the practice of people marketing themselves and their careers as brands, suggesting that professional opportunities come in part from having a recognizable personal brand (Patel).

In advertising, as well as many –if not most– other fields, relies a great deal on networking, which is why a strong and clear personal brand can be key when meeting and interacting with people. The goal is to be memorable (in a good way) and cultivate a brand that represents you, but also makes you hireable (Patel). This is what my peers and I, as advertising students, have been focusing on for the last year: building portfolios, cleaning up our social media networks, meeting people and going on informational interviews, and discovering what we even want our own brands to be.

As with any other brand, it takes time and a lot of thought to build a consistent brand. A personal brand is more than just online presence though. Going back to the root of what a brand is, it is everything that is related to you as a person, how you want to be perceived and then how you actually are perceived. “Your personal brand should represent the value you are able to consistently deliver to those whom you are serving. This doesn’t mean self-promotion – that you should be creating awareness for your brand by showcasing your achievements and success stories” (Llopis). This cycle of perception is incredibly important to be aware of because building a personal brand is happening at all hours of the day, and is who you want to be as a person rather than simply a marketing opportunity on the search to a job.

This concept is especially interesting to me as I have seen so many of the people around me building their personal brands, evolving as they go throughout the year, and adapting to feedback and experiences over time. In a way, personal brands are like smaller scale and quicker paced versions of large brand entities, and it's easier to see how they are constantly changing.

These ideas on personal branding are what led me to the project in conjunction with this thesis: a representation of personal brands that will showcase intended personal brand and perception of that brand. This will reflect the process of creating a seamless brand interaction and the evolution of a brand from its inception, adaptation, and the influence of outside perception.

I talked to about 40 students and asked them several questions:

1. How would you describe your personal brand?
2. How do you think other people would describe your personal brand?
3. In what ways do you exhibit the qualities of your personal brand?
4. If you were a commercial brand, which would you be and why?
5. What colors represent your brand?

The responses varied quite a bit and for the most part, it was clear that this was something we had thought about before. For many of the questions, answers came to mind right away because their personal brands had already been cultivated. I turned these answers for each student into pages of a book that artistically represent the personal brands of some of the people I interviewed.

As an additional part of this product, I listed ten brands and had each person list the 3-5 adjectives that came to mind when they heard that brand's name. The results were very interesting and I put the answers into word clouds to see which descriptions came up most often. Many times, these descriptions that represented the audience perception aligned well with what the brand is striving to offer. However, some answers made it clear that the brand does not have as strong of a brand voice and has more hurdles to overcome in order to be successful.

Overall, this project was very interesting and led me to some interesting discoveries about brand thinking and how brands are built over time and are cultivated very consciously and with purpose.

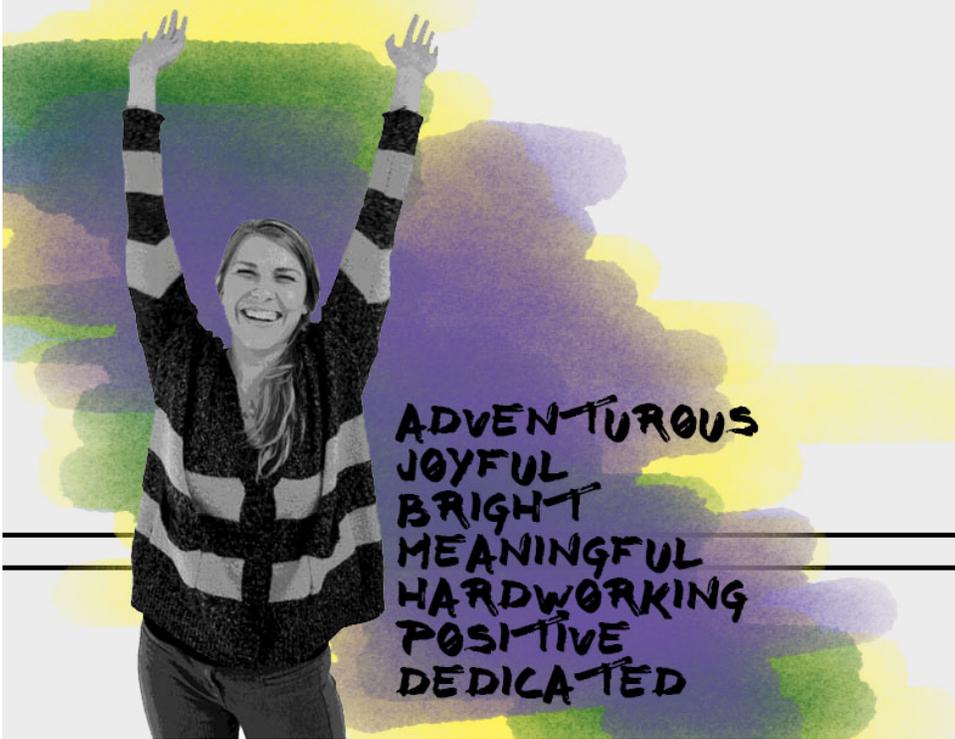
## **Conclusion**

In our current culture of technology, social networking, and experience branding in addition to the state of the industry, consumers have power in how brands engage with them. In this culture, branding is more important than ever to stand out among the crowd. One ad doesn't cut it anymore, but brands are now a system of things working together— their symbols, history, values, voice— and each one hold significance in how consumers view the brand and how they engage with it.

These interactions are a two-way conversation rather than a persuasion. This does make it more difficult for brands to stand out and be successful and proves plenty of challenges for those creating effective advertising. However, it also presents many opportunities and has led to a period of inventiveness and ingenuity in brand experiences that will be crucial moving forward.

## Project Part 1: Personal Brand Book Pages











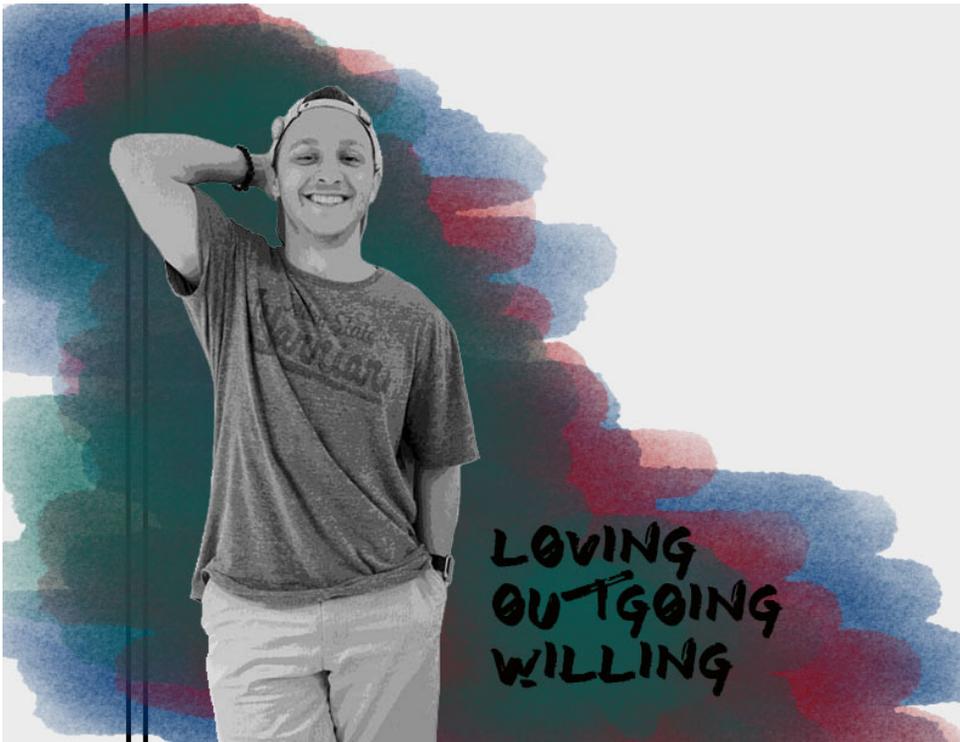






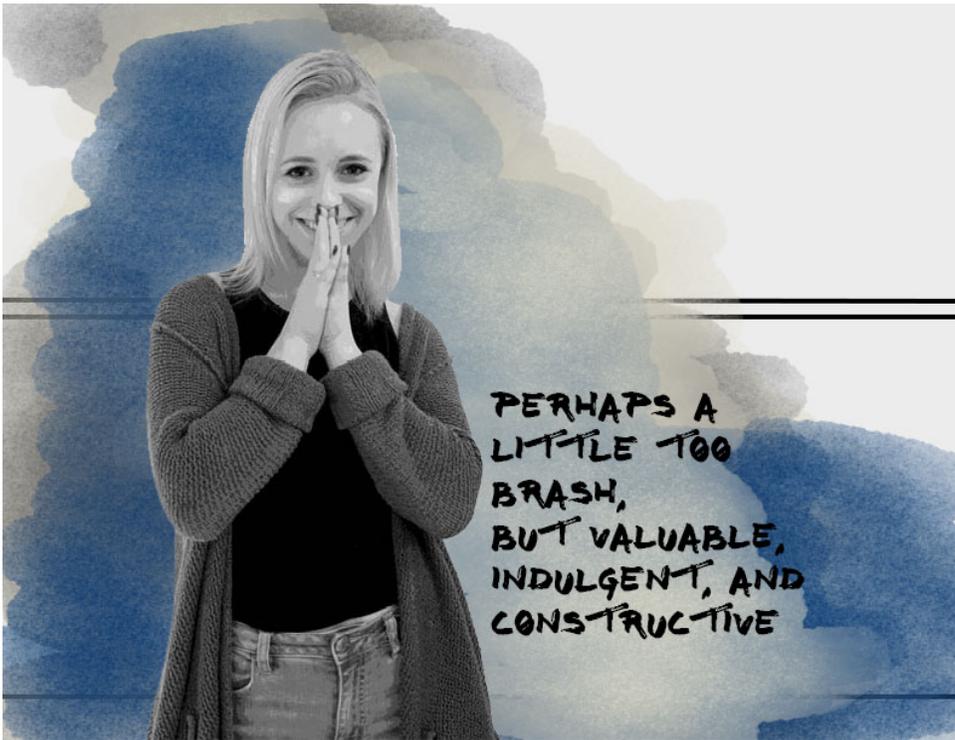








DARK  
INTROSPECTIVE  
STREET



PERHAPS A  
LITTLE TOO  
BRASH,  
BUT VALUABLE,  
INDULGENT, AND  
CONSTRUCTIVE



Our brands are who we are.  
Curated, not manufactured.  
In flux, always.

## Project Part 2: Branding Word Maps



Microsoft





terrifying racist  
bold liar shit  
evil ignorant  
hateful sexist  
discriminative  
stupid



old  
hopeful  
liberal wise inclusive  
socialist hip  
passionate truthful  
honest  
dope



pantsuit  
powerful strong  
old  
liar  
try hard  
aggressive  
fake loud  
demanding unreliable  
annoying

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