



TRAUB

THE MODERN PAGANS

A Study of Mindfulness in Consumerism Today

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TO UNDERSTAND THE AMORPHOUS GROUP KNOWN AS "THE CONSUMER", ONE HAS TO STEP BACK AND RECOGNIZE THAT CONSUMERS ARE PEOPLE. AND HOW PEOPLE ACT, INDIVIDUALLY OR AS A GROUP, IS DRIVEN BY HOW THEY FEEL.

We have long followed the mythologist and author of *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell, who was arguably the greatest student of, and expert on, mythology and legend. From the world's great religions, to the tribal beliefs of hidden peoples in the depths of rain forests, Campbell famously distilled them all into crystalline themes that tie humanity together.

One of his main themes was centered on the human need to explain the vastness of the universe through storytelling. Campbell believed that "the ego can't reflect upon itself unless it has a mirror upon which to read itself." The stories recounted by the hundreds of belief systems, tribes and religions are in fact a mirror in which human kind views itself and attempts to explain the quandary of existence and the vastness of the void.

When George Lucas worked with Campbell to write *Star Wars*, they effectively continued these stories into yet another mirror, all be it a modern one, in which a new generation could see itself. When pressed on whether they were attempting to create a new religion centered on the Force with the Jedi as prophets, Lucas would emphatically respond that *Star Wars* was nothing other than a continuation of the same pervasive and ancient storytelling traditions. The struggle between good and evil as well as with one's own demons.

In an interview about Campbell's writings Lucas said, "Myths show us our place to find our individuality. To find our place in the world. Hopefully reminding you that you are part of a whole. That you must also be part of the community and think of the welfare of the community above the welfare of yourself." He continued, "You can help someone. You can either treat people with dignity and compassion, or not. One way you become a hero. The other way you are part of the problem."

The tradition of the young hero is central to the thread that runs through these myths. The hero, young and naive, dressed in rags; fights for good by standing up to great perils and evil, all while battling his own self doubt and insecurity; and finally reaching salvation and enlightenment.

It is the Luke Skywalker in all of us and in every myth that resonates so deeply with us at the soul of *Star Wars*.

This same search for meaning and tribal codes is what is driving the underlying resonance of millennial consumer culture today in the United States. Like an echo from a mythological tuning fork struck across the ages, passing through *Star Wars* down to today, the storytelling of millennial brands is rooted in doing good, simplicity, striving for compassion and transparency; all while making an honest living.

The four goddesses that govern this realm are:

GODDESS OF NATURE
SUSTAINABILITY

GODDESS OF EXPERIENCE
EXPERIENTIALISM

GODDESS OF HEALTH
WELLNESS

GODDESS OF SIMPLICITY
MINIMALISM

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young generation of customers – millennials were born between roughly 1980 and 2000. The same values were once attributed to the once young, rebellious days of the Gen X and Boomer generations. However, the waters of nonconformity run deep amongst this latest crop of consumers. They have been raised to stand up and stand out rather than blend in and follow. Each individual is creating their own i-brand woven from personal values, beliefs and tastes; and sealed and reinforced by their digital interconnectivity.

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The emerging millennial customer today is looking for meaning in the way he or she spends his or her money. By touching brands with their wallets, the consumer is blessed with the values for which each brand fervently stands, and in so doing each consumer weaves his or her mythical quilt from a patchwork of ideals that become their own tribal chant. The Modern Pagan consumers.

While we recognize that this may be smoke versus fire for the time being, there is enough data to suggest that the shifts unfolding at the hands of this consumer are worth noting. We believe this is just the tip of a mountainous iceberg with much more to be studied and considered beneath the turbulent surface. At the same time, this is a



GODDESS OF NATURE: SUSTAINABILITY

"We salute you our Beautiful Gaia. You live within Us All and We in You! Living as One, Loving the All." – Tara Mary

With great knowledge comes great responsibility. Consumers are more educated than ever as they've taken advantage of the latest news and research being accessible within a simple click or tap. While some of the world's crises are beyond individual control, knowledge has fueled the modern generation to push for change from the ground up with the goal of making a meaningful impact for the greater good.

Second only to the oil industry, fashion is one of the worst offenders in the crime of industrial pollution. The largest textile recycler in the U.S. collects more than 70,000 pounds of secondhand clothing a day, equivalent to 25,550,000 pounds a year: just a drop in the bucket when considering the 10.5 million tons of clothing tossed into landfills annually.¹ What began as a plea from environmental agencies has spurred a movement of organizations devoting more time and energy to educating the consumer about the short and long-term impact of their purchasing decisions on the environment. The sound of the battle drum has only grown louder as more consumers and brands have turned their attention to reducing waste and furthering environmental awareness.

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Many of the industry's emerging digital darlings, our Davids, have been at the forefront of the movement towards transparency, sustainability and reducing industry waste. These environmentally-conscious brands allow consumers to understand exactly where products are sourced, how they're manufactured and how final pricing is calculated. Everlane has become a poster child for "radical transparency" and ethical production practices. Designed for timeless style versus today's trends, their products encourage customers to keep their pieces for years and reduce their contribution to textile waste. In addition, Everlane goes

through a detailed vetting process for its factories to ensure quality control and satisfactory worker conditions. The result is quality product, a more sustainable supply chain and full transparency for the customer: the company breaks down the cost of the garment at every stage and compares its full retail price to that of traditional competitors. Slow fashion at its finest.

For the retail goliaths, this is a tough proposition to replicate. Instead, many larger companies, fast fashion giants included, have recognized the weight of their actions and have implemented their own programs to reduce textile waste. H&M has been a strong leader both in action and awareness through its in-store customer garment recycling boxes and Conscious Exclusive collections made from sustainable materials.

Ultimately, it all goes back to the circular economy: reduce, reuse, recycle. The word is out and brands are getting creative as consumers continue to demand more ethical practices in apparel manufacturing. RE/DONE took advantage of the 90s retro resurgence by utilizing recycled vintage Levi's to create a luxury e-commerce denim business that restores individuality to luxury fashion, celebrates heritage brands and creates sustainable fashion. For the millennial customer, one-of-a-kind sustainable fashion is a win/win.

While awareness is at an all-time high and change is imminent, the question of the masses remains: will consumers pay up for sustainable fashion? Those vintage Levi's are not cheap in comparison to the originals. The hope is that as the movement continues to become more widespread, the price gap should come down making sustainable fashion more affordable for all shoppers. In 2016, a survey from Euromonitor stated that more than 14% of US consumers looked for apparel and accessories made from natural materials, up 13% from the prior year.² The data also showed that shoppers and millennials in particular are increasingly looking for clothes made of higher-quality materials. The desire is there: consumers are seeking long-lasting, quality products as well as demanding the full story. To today's customer, a purchase is no longer just an exchange but an indication of support for the broader brand narrative. Brands that tell a story and own their mission resonate deeply amongst the modern consumer. The collective battle cry grows louder.

THE GODDESS OF EXPERIENCE: EXPERIENTIALISM

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages. – William Shakespeare

Though the wounds of the Great Recession have long since healed, the scars have left a lasting mark on today's retail consumer. Material possessions that were once collected in abundance are now carefully considered purchases. The wealth of lasting memories spent with likeminded friends and documented for all to see on Instagram and Snapchat, however, appear well worth the time and money.

As millennials have come of age, their preference for experiential spending has catalyzed a tide of retail disruption. More than three in four millennials (78%) would choose to spend money on a desirable experience or event over a physical purchase.³ In contrast to their parents who took pleasure in materialistic spending, millennials grew up in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The enduring impact has resulted in the intrinsic value of an experience taking precedence over other consumer goods purchases. Experiences have the power to cultivate enduring happiness, satisfaction in new knowledge and a renewed zest for a life.

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Included amongst this group of experience-driven consumers is the “aspirational class”, a subset of modern consumers identified by Elizabeth Currid-Halkett in her book *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*. Currid-Halkett believes the aspirational class has replaced the leisure class in terms of elite status. However, this new class isn't defined by their income level but rather by the life choices and the experiences in which they choose to participate. Through thoughtfully considered lifestyle decisions around wellness, education and parenting, the aspirational class has redefined the terms of social status and created a new elite class bonded together by shared cultural capital. The organic foods they buy, fitness classes they indulge in, media they consume and childcare they employ are discreet yet telling to those who are culturally aware enough to pick up on it. Through inconspicuous consumption, the aspirational class “reproduces wealth and upward mobility, deepening the ever-wider class divide.”⁴ By shifting their consumption habits away from material possessions towards subtle expenditures that indicate status, Currid-Halkett believes “these transformations influence how we all make choices.”⁵

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In addition to their lasting value and indications of social status, experiences have been propelled to the forefront of consumer spending by another powerful societal force: the age of social media. For the first time, the virtual self is just as important, if not more so, than the physical self. Life's experiences are on display not just for those around you but by friends, family and followers near and far that tune in on a daily basis. As a result, experiences live beyond those with which they are shared and are no longer hidden on a dusty shelf or lost in a folder on the desktop. Experiences are shared with the world in real time, making them a decidedly more rewarding investment than the outfit purchased which was ultimately lost in the awe of the energy of the crowd, the sound of the base or the sight of the last perfectly plated dish.

What does this mean for retail? Brands have the opportunity to foster an experience centered around their product and brand values. An unforgettable brand experience that engages its community and speaks the language of their shared cultural capital results in a reason to return beyond the next season's collection. Why browse generic shades of lip color when you can visit Bite Lip Lab, customize your shade and watch it made in front of your eyes? Why scour the racks when you can visit Knot Standard and customize your next suit while you sip a drink at the bar? While not every brand can offer customized products, they can work to curate a one-of-a-kind experience, rather than a one-size-fits-all. The power has shifted: brands can no longer rely on pushing product to consumers. It is the consumer that gives their seal of approval and pulls brands into their lifestyle through experience and procurement.

THE GODDESS OF HEALTH: WELLNESS

“The body is your temple. Keep it pure and clean for the soul to reside in.” – B.K.S. Iyengar

Good for the body; good for the soul. The health and wellness movement, initially appearing to be a trend, has proved to be a lasting societal lifestyle shift amongst millennials and the cohorts that they influence. As the antidote to a constantly connected culture, wellness encourages taking care of your body and mind, inside and out, for a longer, happier and healthier life.

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The cause of the shift from the bar to the barre? Consumer education on nutrition, fitness, natural ingredients and overall health is much more readily available and disseminated than ever before. Furthermore, as previously referenced, Currid-Halkett’s aspirational class has defined wellness as an indicator of social status. A yoga class followed by a trip to the farmer’s market for locally grown heirloom tomatoes is not only a great health choice but it also indicates awareness, knowledge and unspoken cultural capital. In the words of Jason Wachob, Founder &

CEO of Mind, Body, Green, “Balance is the new achievement.”⁶

The pursuit of health and balance doesn’t begin and end with a gym membership and a trip to the nearest Whole Foods. Wellness has permeated all aspects of consumer lifestyles as its value and importance has prospered. Fostering a healthy mental state through meditation, sleep analysis, breath exercises and brain training has never been easier or more mainstream. Whether it’s thirty minutes in a studio or five minutes in an app, the benefits of mental wellness in combating stress and harmful physical ailments are now widely disseminated and intently sought. According to Pinterest researcher Larkin Brown, “Self-care searches are up 121%.”⁷

Meditation studio, INSCAPE, was a first mover in bringing secular guided meditation to the masses. INSCAPE delivers immersive meditation and relaxation experiences together with others in their NYC studio or individually via their iOS app. Using guided meditation and sound, INSCAPE offers visitors to the sometimes rare opportunity to pause, breathe, relax and connect inwards in an otherwise hectic world. The studio was intentionally designed to fuse modern design and technology to deliver a multi-sensory meditation experience using light, sound and scent. INSCAPE’s mission is simple: “to inspire and empower you to connect with your best self, find balance and live life to your fullest potential.”

Socially, millennials are more often turning down a night out in favor of “nesting”: staying cozy in their carefully-designed abodes dripping in self-expression and Zen. The home has become a coveted sanctuary for much needed rejuvenation and me-time or, alternatively, a healthier and more casual approach to quality time with friends. Other social wellness phenomena, outside of the obvious fitness class, include wellness retreats curated by industry leaders and sober clubbing with a green juice in hand to jumpstart the morning.

In terms of consumption, the proliferation of natural and better-for-you brands in both food and beverage and beauty is a testament to the revered value of health and wellness for today’s consumer. Natural products are now widely distributed and easily substituted for the consumer intently seeking health and longevity.

Wellness has so far infiltrated the minds of the consumer that brands, retailers and restaurants have been quick to collaborate and flaunt their support of the movement. This was witnessed first through the influx of healthy juice bars, restaurants and cafes positioned carefully next to popular fitness studios and followed quickly by the activewear brand explosion. Today, food, fitness and retail are merging with brands offering in-store workouts, or fitness studios endorsing and selling their favorite brands and products in the lobby. Wellness is a full 360° and consumers are spinning.

THE GODDESS OF SIMPLICITY: MINIMALISM

"Keep only those things that speak to your heart. Then take the plunge and discard all the rest." – Marie Kondō

In the age of overstimulation and overconsumption, it is no wonder that one begins to crave some form of simplicity from the past. While inbox clutter seems insurmountable, seeking minimalism in the physical world suddenly appears to be utterly achievable and a high priority. Born from the excessive consumption of past decades and rising digital clutter, minimalism questions what is actually essential in an era of extreme accessibility. Consumers are going to back to basics and are becoming champions of less is more.

The fashion industry has responded with garment solutions to streamline the clutter: less variety and higher quality. Companies like Cuyana have made minimalism their mantra by encouraging "fewer, better things" all procured from the most reputable fabric sources for clean lines, lasting wear and timeless style. They are a breath of fresh air in an era of endless choice. Not only does simplification calm the mind and pad the wallet, it buys the consumer more time, today's more precious and rare commodity. With less choices, the decision is easier and quicker which leaves coveted time left for a yoga class, dinner with friends or a second bedtime story.

Similarly, Orchard Mile's My Mile is designed to save time by allowing shoppers to see full collections in one destination with one simple checkout versus browsing an interminable number of open tabs on their phone or desktop. My Mile allows shoppers to then curate their own shopping environment by adding favorite brands, categories or products for a more customized and efficient experience. Or as they describe it: a stress free way to shop.

Beyond fashion, other consumer lifestyle changes reinforce the movement towards minimalism. The sharing economy, from Uber to Airbnb to Postmates to TaskRabbit, is booming with 44% of Americans engaging in some form of peer-to-peer sharing services as users and offerors.⁸ Traditional companies are taking notice: General Motors invested \$500 million in Lyft recognizing that millennials don't feel the need to own a car when they can rent or ride share for a fraction of the cost. Access over ownership is a key part of the less is more phenomenon.

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As the world around continues to evolve, consumers will embrace the change with excitement while finding an opposite and equal balance in their personal lives and life choices. Millennials are striving to keep it simple one checkout and one ride at a time.

CONCLUSION

"Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose." – Yoda

While this report might imply that the emerging generation of consumers will "let go" of their desire for consumption, that is not the message. In fact, the opposite is more probable: that this set of shoppers will vote passionately and repeatedly with their wallets for goods and services that allow them to feel that they are building a meaningful life. A life knitted through the patchwork of decisions they make about the way they accessorize themselves, their entourage and journey.

¹ Lewis, Robin. "What Do Michael Kors, Under Armour and Bonobos Have in Common?" The Robin Report. September 2016.

² Euromonitor Survey. November 2016.

³ "Millennials Fueling the Experience Economy." Eventbrite Survey. July 2014.

⁴ Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

⁵ Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

⁶ Wachob, Jason. "10 Wellness Trends to Watch." *Mind, Body, Green*. January 2015.

⁷ "Top Wellness Trends of 2017." *Well and Good*. January 2017.

⁸ Steinmetz, Katie. "Exclusive: See How Big the Gig Economy Really Is." Time. January 2016.

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