

**Focus Group
Patagonia, Inc.**

Group 4 | Woah! Communications

**Sutton Cavalcire - Moderator | Sara Young | Caroline McClatchey | Maris Whitley |
Caroline Willard**



Background

One thing that sets Patagonia apart from other outdoor clothing brands is their dedication to brand transparency and social responsibility, specifically concerning preserving an environmentally-friendly mission. Our team is addressing the issue of whether Patagonia's focus on sustainability and cause marketing strategies are effective for consumers, specifically the key public of young adults.

Upon simple observation, we noticed that a large portion of Patagonia consumers are young and do not necessarily fit the consumer profile of an extreme hiker or outdoorsman who takes sustainability practices seriously. Within our focus group, we wanted to first explore whether this observation was correct and if young Patagonia customers wear the brand for its intended purpose. Another primary research question was to test Patagonia's cause marketing and to determine whether the brand's consistent alignment with environmentalism contributes to whether our key public chooses to purchase from the brand, possibly over other brands. Finally, we wanted to see if Patagonia's other advertising efforts, not necessarily promoting the purchase of their clothing, but a change in lifestyle, affected consumers and prompted them to develop more sustainable habits.

Method

Our focus group was conducted in the Freedom Forum Conference Center, a large classroom located in the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. It took place on Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2019, lasting from approximately 4 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. We had five participants of a similar age. Age was the most interesting and relevant key demographic characteristic of our group since the participants were particularly knowledgeable about the young adult perspective of Patagonia's brand. Additionally, all participants are majoring in the same field and are members of the same research course at the same institution. Our procedure involved asking questions to the focus group about their knowledge of Patagonia. Questions centered around the brand itself, sustainable brand practices and the typical customer. All participants answered the same set of questions and had the opportunity to elaborate if desired.

Results

There are three major divisions of our findings. These include consumers' purchasing behavior, attitudes towards the Patagonia brand and lifestyle. Across all of these categories, reported behaviors were remarkably similar.

Firstly, participants identified their purchase history with Patagonia. Eighty percent of focus group participants owned some amount of Patagonia products. The items owned were exclusively garments or accessories. These items ranged from cotton tee-shirts to backpacks and heavy-duty puffer coats. Despite owning a variety of items from Patagonia between the group, the participants identified that they had not purchased from Patagonia since middle school or high school.

"I was in middle school and some people had those cute little Patagonia sweatshirts so I started buying them too," admitted one participant.

When asked about the key considerations for purchasing outerwear and outdoor clothing, the most important factors were price, trendiness, style and occasion. Participants were then asked whether sustainability and environmental friendliness was a factor of consideration. Sixty percent of participants said that it was not a factor but was on their radar. Twenty percent

reported that sustainability was a bonus. The remaining participants said that it was “good to hear but didn’t mean much.”

Participants were then asked about how they perceive the Patagonia brand image and what they imagined their core customers to be. Participants identified Patagonia’s brand as outdoorsy, positive, environmentally friendly, generally well-received, adventurous and suitable for cold weather. When asked to describe the characteristics of the average Patagonia customer, they described the Patagonia persona as earthy, outdoorsy white people who play outside and are financially well-off.

“They have to be well-off because their products are extremely expensive,” critiqued one of the participants.

Lifestyle questions were used to address whether the participants, as Patagonia owners, were in some way part of Patagonia’s key demographic. In this set, they were asked to identify what outdoor activities and environmentally-friendly practices they incorporate into their routines. The group identified that they participate in little to no outdoor activities, except for occasionally running and participating in organized sports. The group reported that, although they engage in some environmentally-friendly practices, they do not consistently recycle, limit single-use plastic or use reusable shopping bags.

Discussion

The original purpose of conducting the focus group was to develop a deeper understanding of how consumers envision Patagonia as a brand and as a whole. Our results fulfilled this purpose for a variety of reasons. Hearing about what the focus group members thought of when they heard the name of the brand gave us some insight into how customers think of Patagonia. All of the group members, except for one, were familiar with Patagonia as a clothing brand. Because of this, we were able to hone in on what the consumer thinks of the brand overall.

One takeaway from the focus group is that members would still purchase Patagonia products if sustainability was not part of its mission. In fact, the majority of our focus group members did not instantly pair sustainability with the Patagonia brand; instead, they thought of “adventure” and “the outdoors.” Although “environmentally-friendly” was later mentioned by one member, that phrase did not come to mind for most of the focus group members. Patagonia’s sustainability efforts are considered simply a bonus to their products, according to our focus group. Sustainability is a staple of Patagonia’s brand, so this information is beneficial for Patagonia’s marketing team. By readdressing messaging and campaigns, their advertising for sustainability might be able to reach more consumers and educate them about Patagonia’s true identity.

Another important takeaway is focused on why our focus group felt compelled to purchase the products. Of the four participants that owned various Patagonia products, all of them identified that they bought those items because it was the “popular” thing to do. Ultimately, advertisements and messaging were not what led participants to buy the product. The fact that it was trendy at the time, prompted our group’s purchases. This confirms our need for further research and validates why Patagonia’s marketing strategy should be reconsidered to maximize the efficacy of these campaigns.

The dynamics of our focus group were positive. Each member listened respectfully and attentively. None of the members dominated the conversation and the majority of the members were engaged. There was one member who was not as aware of Patagonia, but she did not take

away from the group discussion. The professionalism and engagement from the group facilitated a productive conversation about Patagonia. The main limitations of our focus group were the small sample size, that our participants study the same major at UNC-Chapel Hill and have similar career goals. Although these focus group limitations were unavoidable, we will seek out participants from a wide range of experiences in the future to receive a broader scope of answers. These people were also in our class and thus had heard our research question before the focus group. Even with limitations, our focus group gathered copious amounts of information regarding our topic. However, there is still potential for ways we could probe further in future research. For example, we could dig deeper into how our target demographic shops and whether the online or in-store shopping experience is more communicative of Patagonia's brand message. Overall, we gathered a plentiful amount of insight regarding opinions surrounding Patagonia and we have the necessary building blocks for many future research discoveries.

Moderator Guide

Introduction:

Hello, I'm Sutton, and I will be the moderator. This group discussion will focus on your experience with Patagonia, the outdoor clothing and gear brand. We want to gauge the attitudes, shopping habits, and preferences of the young adult demographic, of which you all belong, to determine whether it is consistent with what Patagonia views as their key public. We also want to see how you all view Patagonia's primary mission and what the brand could do to get its consumers to carry a similar sentiment.

Ground Rules:

- This is an open and safe space. While there may be differing opinions, there are no right or wrong answers.
- If you do not agree with someone's statement, you must listen respectfully. In your reply, please respond why you do not agree with them in a calm and civilized manner.
- Do not speak over one another. We would like to hear what everyone has to say, so please only have one person speaking at a time.
- Finally, please do not use or have your cell phones visible.

My role as moderator is simply to guide the discussion; talk to each other. My assistant would like to audio record this session if everyone consents to that. She will also be taking a few notes and finding the key takeaways from our discussion. Let's get started!

Opening Questions:

- Say your name, year and major.
- What activities do you do in your free time?
- Describe your everyday style.

Engagement Questions:

- Did anyone not know what Patagonia was before today?
 - How did you learn about Patagonia?
- Do you own any Patagonia?
 - What items?
- When is the last time that you purchased something from Patagonia?
 - What about outerwear in general?
- What three words come to mind when you think of Patagonia?
 - Write it down then share.
- What color comes to mind when you think of Patagonia?

- Why?

Exploration Questions (Transition/Key):

- Going back to those who have purchased Patagonia, why did you choose this brand in particular?
- What influences your outerwear purchases?
- What are some characteristics of the average Patagonia consumer?
- How much does sustainability and environmental impact affect how you choose articles of clothing?
- Is environmental-friendliness a primary concern when you are purchasing clothing?
 - If yes, how do you gauge a company's environmental impact?
- Would you still buy Patagonia if environmental-friendliness was not a core part of their mission?
- Did you know that Patagonia has a blog?
 - Patagonia runs a blog called "The Cleanest Line," where they discuss outdoor culture, environmental activism, corporate social responsibility and more.
 - Do you think that Patagonia having this platform for thought leadership makes their efforts more genuine? Why or why not?

Exit Questions:

- Do you participate in other environmentally-friendly practices?
 - *Some examples may include using reusable straws, recycling, limiting single-use plastics, using reusable shopping bags, etc.*
- Do you participate in any outdoor activities or sports?
- How would you get your peers to care more about sustainability and being environmentally-friendly?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about why you do or do not purchase Patagonia products?