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Capstone

Prospectus

Introduction

Coach released a sub-brand Coachtopia in the year 2023, as a way to be more environmentally friendly by using scraps of leather that make the original purses Coach sells and repurposing the leather into new purses. This all is for the Coach brand to showcase how it is recycling the leather that is left behind during the making of the bags in a way that makes the brand seem sustainable. With this information, two of Coachtopia's Instagram videos will be discussed, which both videos show how the brand's bags are made. One video shows the creation of the "Alter ego shoulder bag", while the other video shows the making of the "Coachtopia leather". The Coachtopia website will also be analyzed because of the words that are being used to describe the bags, and how they are sustainable.

Tanner.leatherstein is a social media content creator, who regularly reviews the quality of leather products, and discusses the authenticity of different luxury brand bags. He has built a reputation on being trustworthy to his audience, by showing that he is legitimate by using his own money, and taking the bags apart in front of the camera. On January 9th, 2026, tanner.leatherstein released an Instagram reel, stating "Coach just scammed their customers with sustainable leather claims, and here's the proof"(tanner.leatherstein). In the video he starts with a leather Coach bag, and a Coachtopia bag made with "Coachtopia leather" He then begins to take each bag apart, and discusses the quality of the bags. During the video of the bags being taken apart, the Coach bag remained in condition while the Coachtopia bag crumpled into pieces.

Tanner.leatherstein concludes that Coachtapias leather is plastic leather, with glued fibers keeping the bag together, with some leather fibers mixed in and not recycled leather that the brand claims to use. Tanner.leatherstein makes the statement that the Coachtopia bag has “zero performance, zero durability, zero value”(tanner.leatherstein). He goes on to say that the original coach bag is more sustainable, because the bag is made of “Durable leather that lasts decades is more sustainable than plastic marketed as eco-friendly”(tanner.leatherstein). The video concludes with tanner.leatherstein encouraging his audience to buy the original Coach bags, instead of the Coachtopia bags. “They will outlast the greenwashing by decades” (tanner.leatherstein).

The responses to tanner.leatherstein's video are in favor of what he is saying, and against Coachtopia. Many of the viewers are against the fake leather, while others reminisce about the original Coach leather bags' quality. One viewer wrote in the comments of the video, “I bought one of those bags!!! Its cute! But them saying it was made from scraps of their other leather made me buy it. Now to know its not even leather, and will be crumbling in a few years pissing me off even more. I stick with Coach leather bags because of their history. Not good @Coachtopia not good at all.....”(@pammiliciousone)

This research topic is important, because it follows how an audience can not only be persuaded by a luxury brand with the promotion of sustainability. But also the same audience can turn on that brand because of the claims of greenwashing from an alternative source seen through social media. My research is looking at how the Coachtopia website is presenting these sustainable claims, and the two videos on the coachtopia instagram. tanner.leatherstein's video, and his audience's reaction to the greenwashing claims will also be in my focus. This will be to see and understand how his audience is reacting to his claims against the brand. I will also be

doing in the project a critical analysis of how Coachtopia is appealing to Gen-Z by using sustainability claims, along with other forms of marketing.

Lit Review

Marketing to Generations

Using Marketing and specific ways of advertising to hook a specific audience or generation is a key concept of branding. For using a specific type of marketing, the brand has to know their audiences preferences and needs. “Apart from motivation stemming from processing an informative ad, Gen-X and Baby Boomers (high NFC) understand that the object that they value, i.e., their health (egoistic concern) is inextricably linked to the environment and saving their health means to behave pro-environmentally.”(Muralidharan). Knowing whether a generation will care, or understand a message is key to generational advertising. As well as the technology used to promote the marketing, “The technology usage, culture, and language of the society in which all cohabit with the spirit of the time shape individuals perceptions are crucial”(Karanfiloğlu). Such as with how brands cater to Gen-Z, such as with using slang or music, and having celebrities promote products.”Post-millennials are intrinsically liberal and are the most racially and ethnically diverse adult generation in U.S. history. They see increasing racial and ethnic diversity as a good thing for society”(Leiva). Brands are also more likely to advertise on social media, such as Instagram, to reach their younger audience. By using the Instagram platform, brands also have to account for the personalities of the Gen-Z audience, so that they may connect with as many viewers as possible. Whether this be through green advertising, fashion, or social media trends. “The Instagram advertising platform has extensive data from individual profiles, including demographic information and psychographic preferences. By using this information, advertisers can personalize the depth of advertisement, which refers to how

closely an advertisement matches consumers' interests, as well the breadth of advertising, which refers to how completely these interests are reflected”(Hazari). Advertising and marketing by these brands also have an emotional influence on generations, leading to consumerism that is based off of those emotions whether they be something that promotes a happy or serious message. “Most Consumers from Generation Z have a favorite attitude towards online TV advertising, and they appreciate this form of promotion. They consider advertising as a relevant source in the decision-making purchasing process. They are sensitive to the truth of the advertising message”(Gajanová).

Anti-Influencers

The idea of anti-influencers appeal to Gen-Z because they are seen as against society, such as how tanner.leatherstein goes against Coach. An article by Prandan titled “Influencer marketing: When and why gen Z consumers avoid influencers and endorsed brands” goes into detail to how Gen-Z ethically sees influencers as a negative affect on companies, or even a blanket for companies mistakes. “Members of Gen Z view any moral transgression of influencers negatively (Xie et al., [84]) because they expect brands to take responsibility for the actions of their stakeholders, such as suppliers and agents (Amaeshi et al., [4]). Irresponsible corporate actions beget negative reactions toward brands”(Prandan). While influencers have been seen in the past as a positive influence on society, that image is slowly changing with the growing idea that these social media presences are no longer relatable to the public. “ Perceived congruence, or match-up, between the endorser and the endorsed entity, plays an even more critical role in influencer endorsements compared to celebrity endorsements (Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget [56]). Unlike celebrities who achieve fame through their professions, influencers gain recognition through their presence on social media. The content they produce plays an active role

in conveying meaning to shape consumer attitudes”(Ceylan). For both influencers and anti-influencers there needs to be a message through what they are promoting or against, these messages will affect how the brand is perceived by their audience and is affective through memory, as explained in the article by Kunz “Studies suggest that the creation of brand meaning through endorsement follows principles of associative learning (e.g. Miller and Allen [63]). The theory of associative memory suggests that meaning is represented as a network of nodes connected by links (Osselaer and Janiszewski [65]). The links between two objects, such as a brand and an endorser, become stronger when these objects co-occur. In this way, meaning associated with an endorser can be transferred to a brand”(Kunz). Emotion is also a way that social media influencers and anti-influencers invoke a crowd to their message. “If the storyline of the digital content arouses positive emotions for consumers, a higher possibility of further shares, reposts, comments, and action-taking exist (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan [52]). The reverse is also a possibility in in avoiding further engagement in the event of negative emotions arousals”(Odoom). If an influencer is spreading a message that is either positive and negative about a product, the audience reaction is taken into consideration for how their video will be perceived and liked. This also goes to how the audience interacts with the brand because of the influencer. However, if the influencer is seen to be acting immoral or with the wrong intentions while giving the message, they can be seen as not honest or trustworthy. “immoral behavior undermines consumers' trust in a source. A transgression could also cause influencers to lose not only many followers but also trust and partnerships”(von Mettenheim).

Consumer Response

Brands rely on the reactions of consumers, as do social media influencers. Posting a video about a product, whether it be a positive experience or not, will generate a response that

follows what the audience views as ethical. “consumers use moral balancing (moral licensing and moral cleansing) to define their future behaviour based on their past ethical or unethical behaviour”(Hassan). Consumers can be easily influenced by what is being produced around them, such as if a brand is given a negative review. Or if a company makes a public and large change, consumers will voice their opinion and dislike how the brand is marketing. The change a brand can make can also affect consumers who are committed to the company, and have only positive feelings towards the brand. “committed consumers appear to exhibit ostensibly varied responses to brand transgressions, making it difficult for marketers to anticipate which transgressions may alienate its most committed consumers.”(Montgomery). Consumers will be able to interact with the environment that is created by the brand. If the conditions put forward by the brand are negative, then the recovery of the brand will come into question. “unless the employee’s non-workplace transgression is in some way intended by the company, it will have little influence on consumers’ judgments.”(Johnson).

Luxury, Sustainability and Greenwashing

Luxury brands are not considered to hold sustainable practices. More often than not, luxury brands are seen to have products that are sustainable in that they will last a long time. But, with the changing in time and new technologies, luxury brands are expected to become more sustainable in their practices. “Because of the greater feasibility and resources that luxury companies have, consumers anticipate them to be 'responsible luxury'”(Kang). While these brands are expected to practice sustainability, they cannot form a plan for greener practices as quickly to what society expects of them. Instead brands will come up with ways to advertise greener practices with no actual change. This is otherwise known as greenwashing, which is frowned upon by consumers who buy for sustainability. “This tactic seeks to take advantage of

consumers' growing interest and sensitivity towards environmental problems, promoting products, services or corporate images that suggest an ecological commitment that does not correspond to the reality of their practices or impacts”(Prieto). The consumer's reactions are generally negative to the false claims of sustainability that come from greenwashing, because the practice is seen as a lie and a scam to those willing to spend money on a product that follows their beliefs. “Beyond masking the environmental impact of production, processing, packaging, and shipment, green advertising can also ignore the social justice issues involved with the production and marketing of green products”(Prody). With the false claims of sustainability, the intended audience these luxury brands are advertising for will not continue to purchase from these brands. Because the brands are using false information to hide from a bigger concern that their audience is a part of. Instead of growing as a company to fit societies' need for change, the companies choose instead to grow in marketing and consumption.

Methodology

I will first be reviewing the first two videos on the Coachtopia instagram page. The first being of the “Alter ego” bag being created. Then I will look at the second video of how the Coachtopia leather is created. With these two videos, and the quote that is found on the Coachtopia website titled “More sustainable bags from Coachtopia.” The quote says “Step into the world of Coachtopia. Our diverse range of more sustainable bags offers something special for every fashion and environment enthusiast. Made with recycled materials, each piece in the Coachtopia more sustainable purse collection is a testament of our dedication to environmentally friendly fashion. Our handbags are crafted with sustainable and recycled materials without compromising on style. When the weight of the world gets to be too heavy, our more sustainable bags will help carry some of the weight for you.” (Coachtopia). With these videos and quotes I

will be analyzing how Coachtopia as a brand is advertising sustainability to Gen-Z, with using methods such as persuasive wording that relates to the age group and the video styles of taking the audience behind the scenes of production, so that they can get a first look into the production of the products.

After the Coachtopia website, I will then be looking at tanner.leathersteins video, “Coach vs Coachtopia”. The video focuses around the sustainability claims made by Coachtopia, and if they are true. In the video tanner.leatherstein makes arguments against the campaign made by Coachtopia and calls the products greenwashing. With his video, I will be analyzing his audience's reaction to his claims, and the general reaction of how he as an anti-influencer is affecting the Coachtopia brand, and the overall marketing to the Gen-Z audience. How Coach is using their advertisements in a way that is viewed as greenwashing will also be analyzed. The Coachtopia instagram videos will be looked at from a perspective of greenwashing, because of tanner.leatherstein’s claims in his video.

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