

Going Off Course: A Case Study on
the Marketing Strategy of Patagonia

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Jamie Drawbridge

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ABSTRACT

GOING OFF COURSE: A CASE STUDY ON
THE MARKETING STRATEGY OF PATAGONIA

JAMIE DRAWBRIDGE

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In recent years, society has seen a shift in marketing practices from traditional to non-traditional strategies in order to stand out amongst competitors and connect with customers. This is especially true of the outdoor gear industry. With participation in outdoor recreation on the rise, companies in the outdoor gear industry must come up with marketing strategies as active as its consumers. The purpose of this study was to examine the marketing strategy of Patagonia. The research for this study was conducted using a case study matrix, created by the researcher, in order to evaluate Patagonia's marketing strategy. This study found that Patagonia is effective in its marketing efforts. In order to continue its commitment to the environment and its customers, Patagonia should remain true to its unconventional and sometimes controversial tactics.

Keywords: Patagonia, marketing, outdoor gear, outdoor apparel, sustainability, corporate responsibility

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

The average consumer experiences almost ten thousand brand messages a day, including everything from printed advertisements and social media to word-of-mouth (Saxon, n.d.). This makes it increasingly difficult for companies to stand out amongst their competitors, which is why many of them are beginning to rethink their current marketing strategies. One of the most effective ways companies are accomplishing this is by incorporating experiential marketing or non-traditional marketing alongside more traditional tactics. Unlike traditional marketing strategies, which can get lost in the clutter, experiential marketing is a decision consumers make (Coffee, 2017). While live brand experiences are not limited to one particular industry, outdoor apparel companies are beginning to implement these strategies alongside traditional marketing techniques and are reaping the benefits.

With just over 144 million Americans participating in outdoor activities in 2016 alone, outdoor adventure is on the rise (Outdoor Foundation, 2017). Higher participation in outdoor recreation has led to an increase in demand for outdoor gear and apparel, whose industry is expected to reach 180 billion dollars by the end of the year (Lieber, 2015). Companies such as REI, the North Face, and Patagonia aim to provide their customers with high-quality outdoor gear while inspiring them to get outside. Because they promote an active lifestyle and target active individuals, it is no surprise that their marketing is more active as well. Through these non-traditional marketing strategies,

outdoor apparel companies give their consumers the opportunity to test out products, meet employees, and form brand loyalty. Combined with more traditional marketing practices, outdoor gear and apparel companies set an example for marketing to a particular target audience in order to increase brand loyalty and sales. The purpose of this study was to examine the marketing strategy of Patagonia.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: ABI/INFORM, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, and Google Scholar. This review of literature is organized into three topic areas: marketing strategy, the outdoor recreation and gear industry, and the outdoor recreation and apparel industry's use of marketing strategy.

Marketing Strategy

Many have heard the phrase, "If you build it they will come." This may have been the case during the Production Era (1870-1930) when supply was low and demand was high, however once production began to increase and buyers had more power, companies had to turn to marketing to keep their businesses afloat (Fullerton, 1988). It was not until 1985 when the American Marketing Association (AMA) released its definition of marketing which quickly became the most widely accepted view, referring to it as "the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchange, and satisfy individual and organizational

objectives” (Coviello, Brodie, & Munro, 1997, p. 501). This definition is based on the traditional “4 P’s” view of marketing, which emphasizes product, price, place, and promotion, commonly referred to as “the marketing mix”. This view of marketing includes methods such as newspapers, fliers, television commercials, and radio advertisements, otherwise known as traditional marketing.

According to Schmitt (1999), traditional marketing relies on four key characteristics: a focus on the product’s features and benefits, a narrow definition of the product category and competition, a view of customers as rational decision makers, and the use of analytical, quantitative, and verbal methods. Each of these factors work together to create a very methodical approach to marketing that has been used for decades. One of the primary reasons traditional marketing has remained unchanged is due its simplicity and effectiveness. In fact, the straightforward nature of the marketing mix has aided in the recognition of marketing as a global practice (Addis & Podestá, 2005). Some of the main benefits of this type of marketing are greater exposure, new audiences, personal connection, and tangibility (Murphy, 2017). When used in conjunction with other forms of marketing, traditional marketing helps increase a company’s reach by appealing to consumers who may not have access to the internet or who prefer the tangibility of a printed advertisement.

With the introduction of cell phones, laptops, and social media, many may argue that traditional marketing is a thing of the past. After all, most people do not look up from their phones long enough to notice an advertisement in the window, and more Americans subscribe to Netflix than cable television, making commercials nearly obsolete (Huddleston, 2017). Because of this, more companies are moving away from the

structure of the “4 P’s” in favor of more flexible, non-traditional methods. This change has been caused by an overexposure to traditional marketing, increased competition within the global market, and a consumer shift toward a more hedonistic lifestyle (Cleff, Lin, & Walter, 2014). Since consumers are no longer seen as purely rational decision makers, companies must appeal to their customers more emotional side in order to gain brand loyalty. This can be done through the use of non-traditional strategies such as social media and life brand experiences that allow companies to break through the clutter and stand out amongst competitors.

Unlike traditional marketing, which gives companies complete control of their messages, non-traditional marketing is far less predictable due to its ability to provide two-way communication (Stokes, 2009). The introduction of social media and websites such as Amazon and Yelp have allowed companies to connect with customers in a way like never before. The ability to access thousands of online reviews and post questions and comments directly to the company has given consumers more power than ever. Tired of being marketed to, consumers are looking for brands they can form a personal relationship with (Stokes, 2009). Once this relationship is formed, consumers are more likely to post a positive review or rave about it to their friends and family. This makes word-of-mouth increasingly more important, despite being one of the least understood marketing strategies (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Being able to grasp these concepts and provide consumers with memorable experiences is key to successful marketing, especially among some of the larger industries.

Outdoor Recreation and Gear Industry

With more and more attention being drawn to America's issues with obesity and addiction to technology as well as increased efforts from the government to decrease public land, it can be hard to believe that outdoor recreation is on the rise. However, nearly 144 million Americans participated in a total of 11 billion outdoor outings in 2016 alone, with running, jogging, and trail running being the most popular (Outdoor Foundation, 2017). The same study revealed that many Americans prefer outdoor recreation such as hiking or camping over more traditional sports and fitness activities (Outdoor Foundation, 2017). In fact, Americans spend nearly 887 billion dollars on outdoor recreation each year (McCoy, 2017).

While participants of all ages reported engaging in an outdoor activity of some kind, those ages 6 to 24 averaged eleven more outings per person each year than their adult counterparts, with camping being among the most popular (Outdoor Foundation, 2017). What was once a platform for self-discovery and solitude has transformed into a new social gathering place thanks to millennials (Gaukel, 2015). Now making up over 25% of the population, millennials are identified as those born between 1982 and 2000 (United States Census Bureau, 2015). These individuals are changing the industry by taking on the outdoors and bringing their friends and family with them.

This increase in outdoor recreation has led to a rapid spike in the demand for the gear necessary to perform these activities. The outdoor gear industry, which consists of apparel, footwear, tents, and sleeping bags, had reached nearly 80 billion dollars by 2000 and is expected to grow to over 180 billion dollars by the end of the year (Raymond, 2000; Leiber, 2015). Because of this, brands like Nike, Adidas, and Lululemon are trying

to get in on the action by expanding into the outdoor industry (Leiber, 2015). Other key players in the outdoor industry include Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI), Leon Leonwood Bean (L.L. Bean), Patagonia, Columbia, and the North Face.

Marketing Strategies in the Outdoor Gear Industry

Overflowing inboxes and new outdoor brands popping up every day make it difficult for companies to differentiate their marketing messages. Because of this, marketing efforts have become increasingly important in the outdoor apparel industry. According to Raymond (2000), there are three primary motivations for outdoor recreation: fun, fitness, and family, and understanding them is key to a company's long-term success. Use of multiple marketing tactics is also an essential part of a successful company as they can build off of one another to create a more expansive marketing strategy (Duffy, 2004). One example of this is REI, an outdoor gear company that makes use of search term marketing, shopping portals, and affiliate marketing, as well as many other tactics (Duffy, 2004).

Since most brands within this industry preach quality and offer similar products, companies must rely on brand personality and marketing to differentiate themselves. In order to do this, many of these companies have begun using disruptive marketing, which catches people's attention by taking risks and providing unique content. This includes Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" advertisement and REI's "#optoutside" campaign. Both of these tactics rattled the industry by urging customers to think about their purchases, protest consumerism, and help support the environment (Prater, 2016). Considering their ties to the outdoors, it should come as no surprise that many of these companies' marketing strategies revolve around activism and sustainability.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the marketing strategy of Patagonia

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What traditional marketing strategies does Patagonia employ?
2. What non-traditional marketing strategies does Patagonia employ?
3. How effective are Patagonia's traditional marketing strategies?
4. How effective are Patagonia's non-traditional marketing strategies?

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the marketing strategy of Patagonia. This chapter includes the following sections: description of organization, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Organization

A case study was conducted on Patagonia. Yvon Chouinard founded Patagonia in 1973, however he began making his own climbing equipment as early as 1957 under the name Chouinard Equipment (Patagonia, n.d.). By 1970 Chouinard Equipment was the largest supplier of climbing hardware in the U.S, however its popular climbing pitons were causing environmental damage by chipping away at popular rock climbing spots. The company began looking for alternatives and quickly developed more sustainable solutions as well as adding clothing into the mix. As he added more clothing to his catalog, Chouinard decided to name the clothing line Patagonia to separate it from his line of climbing tools. Now Patagonia designs, manufactures, and markets outdoor clothing and gear such as jackets, pants, sleeping bags, and backpacks. Its headquarters are located in Ventura, California along with a service center in Reno, Nevada and 32 retail stores across the US. The company's mission statement is "Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis." Patagonia strives to reduce its harm on the environment and encourages customers to do the same.

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a case study matrix developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The instrument was created after synthesizing aspects of marketing and corporate responsibility from the review of literature. The instrument displays various areas of practice, a description of each practice, and a section for additional comments. A pilot test was conducted on the North Face on February 10th, 2018. After the pilot, the researcher altered the instrument by expanding the corporate responsibility section to include customers, employees, community, and environment as well as add an additional section for comments.

Description of Procedures

A case study was conducted on Patagonia. The instrument utilized in this study was a case study matrix developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). Research for this study was conducted during a two-week period during February 2018. Both quantitative and qualitative information was used in order to explain all aspects of the practices. The researcher primarily used the Patagonia website to gather information. The company's "Shop" tab was used to find information on the types of products sold and the pricing. The "Inside Patagonia" tab was used to access the company's mission statement, history and sponsorships. The company's "Corporate Responsibility" tab was utilized to find information on the company's current actions to reduce its impact on its customers, employees, community, and environment. In addition to the company website, third party websites including Hoovers and Forbes were visited to further examine the marketing strategies of Patagonia in the past few years.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the marketing strategy of Patagonia. A case study approach was utilized to examine Patagonia. This chapter includes the following sections: traditional marketing, non-traditional marketing, and corporate responsibility.

Traditional Marketing

As a billion-dollar company, it is surprising to hear Patagonia's Vice President of Marketing admit that advertising is not a priority. While its marketing efforts are minimal, the company still participates in some form of both traditional and non-traditional marketing. Although, even Patagonia's traditional marketing strategy is far from traditional. The company continues to spark controversy and gain attention through its unconventional tactics.

Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign was an advertisement run in the New York Times on November 25th, 2011. It featured a black and white photo of one of the company's best-selling jackets along with the words, "Don't Buy This Jacket" in large font at the top of the page. Appearing on Black Friday, this advertisement sparked a lot of controversy. While many stores were slashing their pricing and encouraging consumerism, Patagonia was asking its customers not to buy its clothing—or anything they don't need, for that matter. Underneath the advertisement, the company explained its decision. The description stated that the human population is currently using more

resources than the planet can handle long-term and that major steps will need to be taken to reverse the damage. The article goes on to explain that even Patagonia's R2 Jacket, made from recycled materials and meant to last a lifetime, requires 135 liters of water to make, enough to meet the daily needs of 45 people. To take it one step further, the company donated 100% of its Black Friday sales to organizations that help the planet in 2016 and has continued every year since.

Another controversial campaign was the company's "The President Stole Your Land" advertisement. On Monday December 4th, 2017, President Trump released a decision to cut back public land by reducing the size of two of Utah's national monuments. The result would diminish Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by approximately 46% and Bears Ears National Monument by over 85%, totaling almost two million acres. Shortly after this decision was announced, customers visiting Patagonia's website were surprised to find a black screen reading, "The President Stole Your Land". Underneath, the description explains the President's decision to reduce the size of two of Utah's National Monuments in the largest elimination of protected land in U.S. history. Just months before, the company released its only commercial since its founding 44 years ago. Unlike most commercials, the goal of this message was not to boost sales. In fact, the commercial never even mentioned the word Patagonia or any of its products. It does, however, feature the company's founder discussing the importance of public land and warning its viewers of the lands' endangerment.

Non-Traditional Marketing

Because Patagonia likes to push the boundaries with its unorthodox marketing strategy, non-traditional marketing is where the company thrives. Beginning as a series of pop-up events, Patagonia's "Worn Wear" campaign has expanded to include a short film, a mobile tour, and online website. The 30-minute film features stories from eight loyal customers including a surfer, a long-distance hiker, a cyclist, a young family, an organic farmer, a wildlife photographer, a backcountry skier, and a climber. Each of the individuals interviewed recalled some of their favorite memories while wearing their Patagonia gear, some of the products they have owned for up to 33 years. Rather than encouraging customers to buy new clothing, this video demonstrates the importance of buying well-made clothes that last a lifetime. Although Patagonia already offers returns, repairs, and trade-ins on all of their products, the company wanted to take it one step further and change the way people view their purchases. On March 31st, 2015, it launched its mobile "Worn Wear Tour". Traveling around the country in a solar-powered, biodiesel-fueled camper made from salvaged wood, employees offer free repairs, regardless of brand, along with food, drinks, and live music. The company's mantra "If It's Broke, Fix It!", is so important, Patagonia will even repair competitor's clothing in order to keep it out of the landfill. This tour was so successful, Patagonia created a permanent "Worn Wear" website in which customers can purchase used Patagonia gear in addition to finding tips on how to repair and care for their own garments.

Few people understand the long-lasting quality of Patagonia products quite like the company's brand ambassadors. Made up of 93 athletes from seven different sports, the company's brand ambassadors put their gear to the test. From climbing and surfing to

skiing and snowboarding, these athletes personify the brand and inspire customers to get outdoors and get active. The ambassadors page features photos of each of the athletes, their story, and some of their career highlights. Not only do these athletes tell their fellow athletes about the products, but amateurs in the sport will see leaders in the industry supporting the brand and choose to do the same. This idea expands far beyond the company's ambassadors, as word-of-mouth is one of the most important aspects of Patagonia's marketing strategy.

Another unique aspect of Patagonia's marketing strategy is its differentiation between stores based on location. While most of their stores offer the same general products, in a similar layout, the company gives each store a slightly different personality and attempts to appeal to the target market of the area. Its store in Encinitas, for example, showcases a large rack of surfboards and tables full of board shorts and bathing suits to match the beachy feel of this surf town in Southern California. However, when entering one of their stores in Colorado, customers would see much more snow gear along with images of the mountains and extreme snow sports.

Corporate Responsibility

When a company's marketing strategy is so focused on environmental sustainability and creating radical change, it is important that the company lives up to its own standards. In this case, Patagonia's actions are just as important, if not more important than its words. Corporate responsibility requires a company to take responsibility for its actions in order to protect its customers, employees, and

environment. From its sustainable practices and environmental support to its employee activism, Patagonia emulates its motto in everything it does.

Starting with its manufacturing process, Patagonia works with suppliers around the world to source the highest quality materials that can be traced back to environmentally and socially responsible mills. Each new material, from fabric to trim, is quality tested for durability, functionality, and sustainability. The company's laboratory may go through as many as 70 options before selecting the one fabric that meets or exceeds its high standards. Suppliers are also required to complete a sourcing questionnaire, so the company is able to trace materials and assess their environmental and social impact. Since the company does not have its own factory, careful consideration is made to find manufacturers that share its values. As a founding member of the Fair Labor Association, Patagonia screens new factories, mills, and farms for social and environmental compliance including hiring practices and recycling policies.

In addition to the company's own environmental work, Patagonia also encourages its employees to do their part through its employee activist programs. In 1993, the company decided to create its Environmental Internship Program. Inspired by the company's passionate employees, Patagonia allows each of its workers up to two months off from their everyday jobs to work for an environmental group of their choice, all while continuing to earn their regular paycheck and benefits. This year alone, 34 employees took advantage of the program, volunteering almost 10,000 hours for 43 different organizations. Patagonia understands the huge value its employees can bring to small, grassroots organizations and believes employees will come back with new inspiration and a greater commitment to the environmental cause. Employees have also helped launch

the company's annual 5K in Ventura, benefitting non-profit, environmental groups, and their yearly Bike-to-Work Week, which donated one dollar for every mile ridden to local bike advocacy groups. In addition, Patagonia recently sent 55 employees to Chile, at the company's expense, to help create what will soon become the country's newest national park.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Patagonia is a well-known outdoor apparel brand whose marketing strategy can act as a model for other companies. It has successfully marketed its product through unconventional and sometimes controversial techniques all while staying true to its mission of creating high-quality products with limited impact on the environment. This concluding chapter will include the following: a discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, and implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Extensive research and examination of multiple marketing practices provided evidence of three major findings: the importance of traditional marketing, the importance of non-traditional marketing, and why corporate responsibility is essential to the outdoor gear industry.

While Patagonia doesn't utilize many traditional marketing strategies, the few techniques it does take advantage of are far from traditional. The researcher found the company's top approaches were the company's "Don't Buy This Jacket" advertisement, "The President Stole Your Land" campaign, and its very first commercial advocating for the protection of public land. These strategies play off of current events, take strong political stances, and spark controversy. Although this may discourage some more conservative buyers, Patagonia understands its target audience and uses it to its

advantage. By gaining mutual ground and trust, Patagonia participates in a form of relationship marketing, which allows it to form a bond with its consumers (Coviello et al., 1997). Not only does this help establish authenticity but increases customer retention as well. As more and more outdoor gear brands emerge, it is important for the company to stay true to itself and continue to utilize some of its more unconventional traditional marketing techniques. In order to educate those more unfamiliar with the brand on its efforts to limit consumption and support the environment, Patagonia should implement more traditional marketing strategies that continue to emulate the company's mission and values.

The company is more known for its non-traditional marketing practices such as short films, mobile tours, and brand ambassadors. These techniques focus more on protecting wildlife and decreasing consumption than on the product itself. For Patagonia, the goal isn't to sell more product. In fact, it wants customers to avoid buying new clothes, unless absolutely necessary. The company's short film and mobile tour encouraged consumers to get more involved in their purchasing decisions, as it provided memorable conversations with previous customers and the opportunity to repair any beloved articles of clothes. The ambassador program allows individuals to see themselves as part of the brand and hear from athletes who utilize the products on a daily basis. These experiential marketing strategies create memorable experiences and spark word-of-mouth marketing. With many studies showing a decrease in effectiveness for traditional marketing, word-of-mouth is extremely effective with its lower cost and fast delivery (Trusov et al., 2009). In order to keep up with the active lifestyle they promote, brands must get creative with their marketing efforts and increase live-brand experiences. Not

only are these methods key to showcasing products, but they form a relationship between the customer and the brand that will ultimately increase loyalty and lead to more sales.

Patagonia implements its values into every aspect of the company. Extending beyond marketing alone, the company ensures its actions to speak louder than words through its comprehensive corporate responsibility plan. From the way its clothes are made to the actions it takes to help support the environment, Patagonia is fully committed to its mission. The company establishes transparency by explaining its choice in factories and mills and detailing the materials that go into each of its products. It also increases its mission's reach through employee activism such as its Environmental Internship program and the creation of a brand new national park. By publishing these actions on its website, Patagonia transforms its corporate responsibility into another aspect of its marketing strategy. According to Duffy (2004), using multiple channels of marketing is an essential part of a company's future success. While the study only focuses on three online components of multi-channel marketing, the idea that additional channels enhance one another reigns true. Using Patagonia as an example, other brands should realize the role the environment plays in the industry and do their best to help protect it. Not only will this help them connect with their target audience but ensure the industry can continue to thrive.

There were several limitations that impacted this study. First, utilizing strictly online resources to conduct research could limit the scope of Patagonia's marketing strategy for the researcher. Because not all of the company's marketing campaigns can be found on their website, some strategies may have been overlooked or dismissed. In addition, the effectiveness of Patagonia's marketing strategy was difficult to analyze due

to the lack of quantitative data on the topic. Finally, the researcher could have been influenced by a personal bias in favor of Patagonia due to a loyalty to the brand and a strong belief in the company's mission. Despite these limitations, the study provided quality information about Patagonia's marketing strategy.

Patagonia is a leader in the outdoor gear industry for quality and sustainability. Through its innovative technology, creative marketing strategies, and commitment to the environmental crisis, Patagonia has established itself in the industry and developed a loyal customer base. Although its unconventional tactics may discourage a more conservative audience, staying true to its brand personality and values helps Patagonia gain and maintain customers who sympathize with its mission and values. Other companies can look to Patagonia as a leader in the industry and implement specific practices to their own marketing strategies. Patagonia is unique in that they implement their values of sustainability in every aspect of their company.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Patagonia uses several traditional marketing strategies, including print advertisements, web-based marketing, and commercials, that are far from traditional.
2. Patagonia employs non-traditional marketing strategies such as short films, mobile tours, and brand ambassadors to interact with its customers and encourage them to lead a more sustainable lifestyle.

3. Patagonia's traditional marketing strategies encourage its customers to limit consumption and fight to protect public land.
4. Patagonia's non-traditional marketing strategies educate consumers, provide alternatives to limit consumption, and develop a strong brand personality.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The outdoor gear industry should have an excellent understanding of its reliance on nature and work to reduce its impact on the planet.
2. Patagonia should remain true to its values through the continued creation of unconventional and thought-provoking marketing tactics.
3. Patagonia can implement more traditional marketing in order to educate those more unfamiliar with the brand on what they are doing to help limit consumption and support environmental efforts.
4. Patagonia can expand its product line or increase technology to make sustainability more accessible to the masses while maintaining high-quality and environmentally-friendly products.
5. Future research should analyze the effectiveness of Patagonia's marketing strategies using quantitative data.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument

INSTRUMENT

Areas of Practice	Description of Practice	Additional Comments
Marketing		
Product		
Price		
Place		
Promotion		
Traditional Marketing		
Experiential Marketing		
Social Media		
Corporate Responsibility		
Customers		
Employees		
Communities		
Environment		