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Branding in Today's Society: I Do Care

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Branding in Today's Society: I Do Care

Writing Process

For this assignment, I was required to critique a literary work by Kathleen Norris, a best selling poet and essayist. I chose her essay called "I Don't Care," which outlines that people should not care about what brands they buy. However, I believe there are several reasons for people to care about what brands they buy. That being said, I picked three of the most important reasons why people should care and used these reasons to critique Norris' essay.

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When asked about their preference of brand for a certain item, most people can immediately come up with an answer. Whether they prefer Nike shoes, Dove soap, or Honda cars, people almost always have a strong opinion when it comes to brands. On the other hand, there are also people who are indifferent about what brands they buy. If the product gets the job done, they would rather not be bothered with the issue of choosing a brand. Nonetheless, branding plays a significant role in American society – especially in the realms of ethics, product dependability, and corporate responsibility. Consumers need to be conscious of the purchases they are making, and for this reason, people should, in fact, be particular about brands.

Kathleen Norris, a bestselling poet and essayist, wrote a piece titled “I Don’t Care,” throughout which she outlines that not-caring is the most prophetic way of life. She begins by discussing Thomas Merton, an American monk, who, when asked by a store clerk about what brand of toothpaste he preferred, responded with “I don’t care.” Merton was somewhat concerned with the clerk’s surprised reaction, because Merton was “...supposed to feel strongly about Colgate or Pepsodent or Crest or something with five colors” (Norris 108). All the different brands claimed to have a secret ingredient that supposedly made the brand more desirable than others, but he didn’t care. This philosophy can be explained by Merton’s experiences with monastic life, as he was always required to use whatever hygiene products were supplied to the community. Fifty years later, Merton’s indifference in brands of toothpaste is

viewed as prophetic by the Benedictines, or monks who follow the order of St. Benedictine. Marketing is everywhere in American society and many people view it as acceptable. Americans also spend a lot of time and energy searching for the best brands and services. However, "...the monastic's reply is, always has been, and ever shall be, a resounding, 'I don't care'" (Norris 108). Since the mission of the marketer is for people to see their products as a part of their identity, it is very important for consumers to counteract this ideology and not care about branding. When people wear brands that signify socioeconomic status, they tend to view themselves with greater confidence. Some people don't even bother to question why they allow certain products to determine their self-worth, or why they have let themselves become slaves to the marketing industry. People's obsession of brands has become so excessive that "An urban teenager—white, black, brown, it does not matter—murders another for his desirable brand-name jacket or athletic shoes" (Norris 109). To keep things as just "things", people need to carry out Merton's "I don't care" philosophy. "We can call on the monastic virtue of humanity to remind us that advertising does not aim to reach our better selves, but our inner idiot" (Norris 109). However, monasteries are a place that people can go to get away from marketing and the inner ignorance of people. Monasteries provide an opportunity for people to immerse themselves in silence together. "Silence, as Merton understood it, is foundational to human freedom and psychological well-being" (Norris 109). Silence is essential to contravene marketing and the ignorance of people who fall for marketing traps.

Despite Norris' argument that brands do not matter, there are actually a handful of reasons that one should have a preference in brands—one of which is the ethics behind a business. People are more likely to buy from brands or services that agree with their morals, as opposed to brands that don't. People want to support businesses with a good conscience,

especially since “There is now a greater desire for accountability with business practices, but also in supporting communities outside of the financial side of the business” (Foster). The ethics of a business are important to consider because there are some brands that don’t use moral means when making their products. For example, some brands in the cosmetics industry, including Covergirl and Mary Kay, test their products on animals. The effects that these tests have on the animals are painful and inhumane. If one does not support these tests being done on animals, then they should resort to a brand that does not test on animals. Although Norris believes that brands are irrelevant, people should make it a point to buy from brands with honorable ethics because businesses deserve to be rewarded for their good consciences.

In addition to ethics, product dependability is also an important factor to consider when choosing between brands. People want to purchase products that will give them the best bang for their buck. More often than not, “Recognized brand names typically have shown a consistency in product quality that has contributed to the evolution of the brand. Often, consumers rely on prior experiences or public word-of-mouth when selecting brands” (Kokemuller). Whatever a person’s need may be, the dependability of a brand can heavily influence the decision of the consumer. For instance, when my brother got his license, my dad was trying to find the right car to buy for him. My dad chose to buy a fairly new SUV with extremely high safety ratings. People called my dad ridiculous for buying such a nice car for a new driver, but about a year later, my brother was in a very serious car accident and the car was totaled. If my dad would have taken Norris’ advice and bought any car with a working engine, my brother could have been very badly injured. But, because my dad took the time to find a brand with extremely high safety ratings, my brother was just fine. When making a purchase with the issue of product dependability in mind, finding the right brand could make a world of difference.

Finally, consumers should factor the corporate responsibility of different brands into their decision when making a purchase. Companies have a responsibility to their customers even after the purchase is made. Matthew Foster, the Content and Online Public Relations Executive for Search Laboratory states, “I am loyal to brands that provide consistent quality and service. They back up their products and provide after-sales service. They are reliable and honest. This makes me want to continue doing business with them” (Foster). Customers should be attentive to the reputation of a company’s customer service when choosing a brand because there are some brands that don’t offer quality post-purchase service. For instance, if a person buys a new phone that breaks after three days and the manufacturer does not take responsibility to replace the phone, the customer would have to spend hundreds more dollars to buy another new phone. For this reason, it is important to make sure that a brand has trustworthy customer service. Brands that provide quality customer service will provide refunds when something goes wrong with a product, or offer assistance with products when needed. Instead of following Norris’ “I Don’t Care” philosophy, consumers need to be conscious of the honesty and reliability of a brand’s customer service so shoppers can avoid falling into marketing traps.

Overall, marketing plays a significant role in American society, and people should care about the different brands that they choose. Different brands have many different things to offer, but ethics, product dependability, and corporate responsibility are the reasons that consumers should choose their brands carefully. Consumers should buy from businesses with honorable morals, safe and quality products, and reliable customer service. If consumers buy products from any brand just to get a job done, they run the risk of making a faulty purchase. If consumers take the time to research different brands and see what they have to offer, they will have much more security and satisfaction in their purchases.

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