



forward thinking series

WE GOT A CRUSH ON YOU(TH)!

INVOLVING INFLUENTIAL GEN YERS FROM 15
GLOBAL CITIES TO LEARN WHY SOMETHING IS
COOL

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IT'S SO UNCOOL TO THINK YOU'RE COOL

At the end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s youth marketing was on the rise. Marketers were in search of new segments and target groups to conquer and to them the young consumer was a rather easy target. If only you shouted hard enough through specific youth media like MTV that you ought to use brand X to be a cool hipster or sexy chick, your success was guaranteed. Commercial media were relatively new, global brands were by definition cool and young people loved to submerge in consumerism. Buying stuff made them feel independent and grown-up. And yuppie culture endorsed the glamorous appeal of brands that dictated how to dress, behave, walk and talk.

Today, twenty years later, things have dramatically changed. This new youth generation, called Generation Y or Millennials, has been bombarded with commercial messages from their birth. They have learned to filter out all those loud marketing messages and their parents empowered them to have an opinion of their own and never merely believe

whatever somebody is proclaiming. But the global brands are still there. So are the commercial media. And there must be countless times more choice of both. To survive in a cluttered and fragmented world flooded with products and alternatives, today's youth uses collective peer wisdom and social connections. They believe in what their best friends and parents are telling them and self-consciously explore the roads they want to take rather than follow whatever the next image advertising wants them to believe.

And what are brands to do now? They have lost their role model or oracle status. Although the current youth generation still embraces cool brands, the ones that just claim they are cool won't even reach their radar. They decide themselves what's cool and what's not. "Coolness" is not a brand personality trait that you can deliberately plan or chase. You have to earn the status of 'cool brand'.

THE CRUSH MODEL AS A BACKBONE

In How Cool Brands Stay Hot. Branding to Generation Y, Joeri Van den Bergh and Mattias Behrer describe a model, based on years of youth experience and quantitative Gen Y research in several European markets, to connect with this new generation of consumers (Van den Bergh, Behrer, 2011). The brandCRUSH model (see figure 1) summarizes the five aspects that are key in developing branding strategies with Generation Y.

The five components of the CRUSH model are:

1. *Coolness*: What does it mean to be a cool brand for this generation? How do you achieve a cool status and why should you bother?
2. *Realness*: Brand authenticity is a key aspect

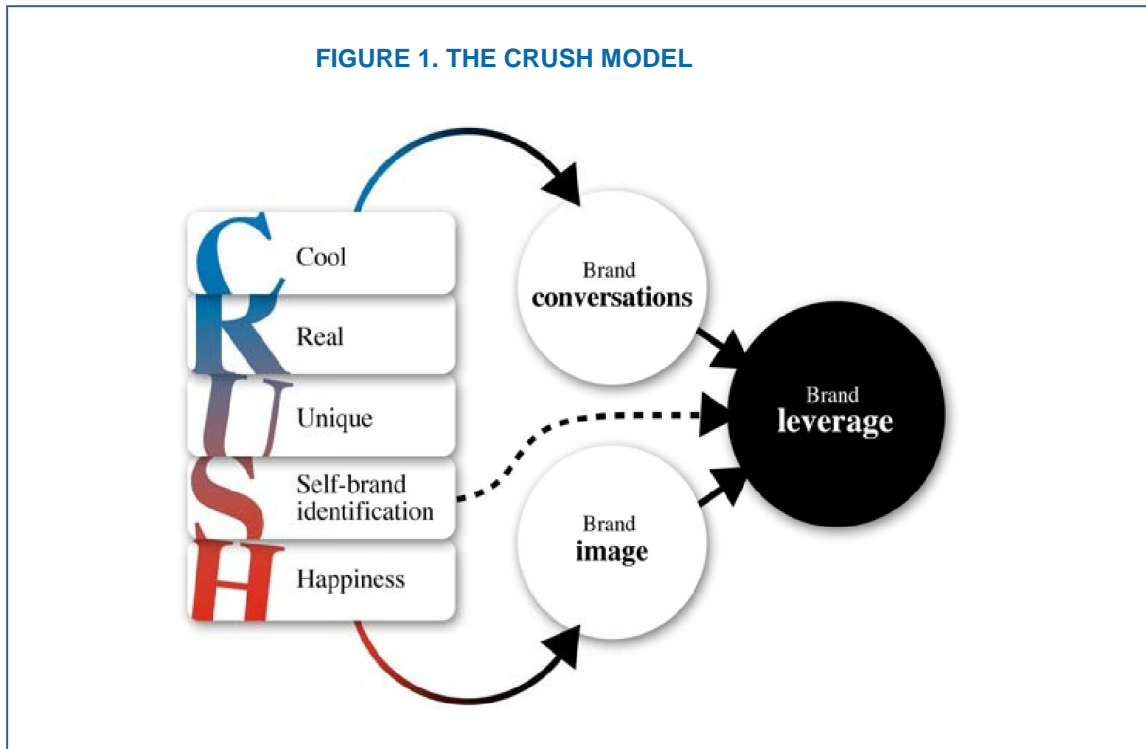
that discerns long-term winning brands from fads. With Generation Y, authenticity is attained in another way than the traditional approach of claiming origin, heritage or history.

3. *Uniqueness*: A clear positioning based on a sustainable brand DNA will increase impact among youngsters. This generation is craving for anchor brands in a fragmented world. But how do you assert uniqueness when most innovations are copied within a couple of months' time?
4. *Self-identification with the brand*: Gen Yers will only feel emotionally connected with your brand when it feels like a friend to them. This implies that your brand should reflect their diverse lifestyles. A better understanding of their identity construction will make your brand fit in with youths' lives

while embracing diversity.

5. *Happiness*: Popular youth brands know how to leverage from positive emotions and avoid arousing negative ones.

Based on their research work, Van den Bergh and Behrer concluded that brands that are highly rated on each of the CRUSH elements by Generation Yers are more likely to experience increased word-of-mouth and a more positive brand image eventually leading to a better NPS (Net Promoter Score).



Since the model was developed using European data, MTV Networks (present in many developing and global markets) wanted to find out how these five components are translated regionally around the world. Are they valid to explain why youth in America, Asia, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe perceive something as “cool” or “likeable”? To enhance its connection with the current youth generation around the world, MTV was looking for inspiration and input to challenge the new global positioning and brand brief consisting of other-evaluated brand values and brand personality. Exploring the CRUSH dimensions in a mere qualitative diagnostic way would help MTV to further shape its brand positioning and brand focus while InSites Consulting could investigate in what way the five dimensions could be operationalized for future qualitative research approaches through consumer communities.

HOW WE DID IT: A GLOBAL ONLINE COMMUNITY OF INFLUENTIAL YOUTH

To obtain an answer to these questions, InSites Consulting and MTV Networks teamed up to create “Crushed Ice”, a global online community of influential youth discussing whatever they are observing around them in their local cities during six consecutive weeks. We started from 150 carefully selected urban recruits, aged 18-29 years and living in 15 cities around the world (in alphabetical order: Amsterdam, Berlin, Cape Town, Dubai, Istanbul, London, Mumbai, New York, Paris, Rio, San Francisco, Shanghai, St Petersburg, Stockholm and Sydney). Recruitment sources were panel brokers as well as cool blogs such as holycool.net and contributors to the MTV global Sticky panel. All of them had to pass a TOEFL test to make sure they could fluently communicate with each other in English. To ensure all of the participants would be rightfully placed to feed our objectives, we used innovator-gatekeepers standardized scales as well as open ended questions tracking their leisure time activities, sports, frequently visited websites and social networks as well as

devices owned. Half of the participating Gen Yers were studying, the other half were already working. Each of them had to have an active interest in at least one out of the five topics we were about to discuss in the community:

- > shopping and fashion;
- > in-home entertainment (movies, games, technology);
- > going out;
- > food and drinks;
- > travel.

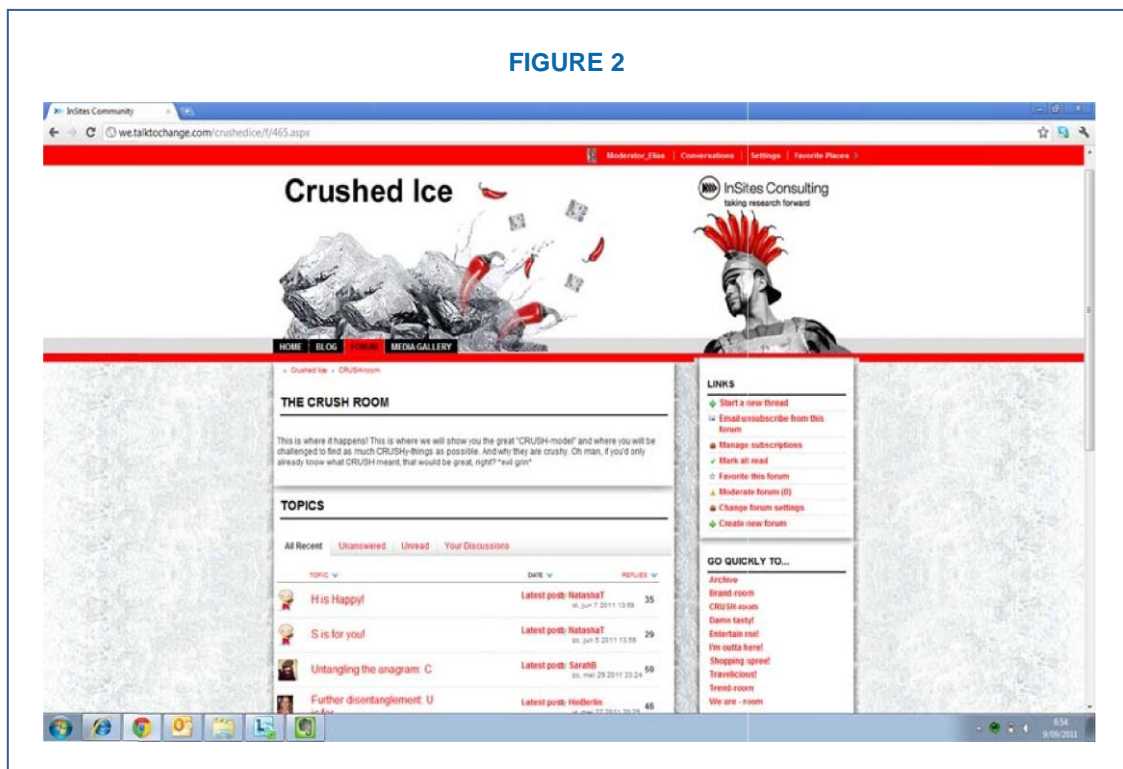
Together the participating Millennials from all five continents have produced 1,589 posts. The community platform was 'live' after a kick-off session in the second half of April 2011 until early June 2011. The platform consisted of five different rooms and a blog section (see figure 2). The five rooms in the research community were the following:

- > the *We Are* room: where we got to know the participants, the different cities they are living in and their own cultural background;
- > the *Crush* room: where we tried to understand what products, brands and hotspots they were linking to our

CRUSH dimensions. The core idea was to understand the reason-why something would be perceived as cool, real, unique, like themselves or bringing happiness as well as to detect which consumer trends are related to each of the different components;

- > the *Trend* room where we asked global youth what trends they would name as well as the ones they feel are completely dead at present;
- > the *Brand* room in which we confronted our participants with stuff that we thought was cool or uncool and just wanted their critical view on;
- > the *Secret* room: this was a section of the site only accessible to the participants who were selected as being interested and an expert in one of the five themes of the community stated above. So we actually had five secret rooms not accessible to all participants but just to the happy few that were selected by us, well by themselves actually...

FIGURE 2



The blog section was used to enhance community feeling and boost intrinsic motivation of all participants. Every week at least two blog messages were posted: a video message of

the moderator or client involved and a hot/cool gimmick we discovered and wanted to share with the participants to receive their feedback.

Elements of Gamification

More and more effort is currently being focused on trying to engage people for longer periods of time in certain initiatives.

These can be marketing-related, but also link to social or environmental purposes. A number of authors and speakers use the term Gamification for this (Gabe Zicherman, Sebastian Deterding), and operationalize this renewed focus on engagement through the use of techniques that stem from the world of gaming. In the 'Crushed Ice' community, a number of these game mechanics were used to boost participation and longer term engagement. A system of points (granted for each meaningful post) that add up to levels (five in total) that become gradually harder to reach, was in place. When reaching a level, a reward under the form of access, power or status was given. Access was granted to hidden pieces of amusing content, for instance by playing on the meme of how cool brands stay "hot" and giving a small visual that explains how spiciness of peppers (= "hotness") is measured by the Scoville heat scale. The aforementioned secret rooms were only accessible to a limited amount of content experts, from a certain level on, which is also an access-reward. The power reward consisted of getting the right to write blog posts on the blog section, which is normally only reserved for moderators. We played on a feeling of status by having a leader board showing the name of the person and the number of points and level that he/she has on the homepage. Furthermore, we motivate respondents to do a certain number of special actions/posting under certain topics, by granting them a badge. Badges are "virtual goods" – digital artifacts that have some visual representation – which are awarded to users who complete specific activities as soon as they did so (Antin and Churchill, 2011). We used badges for activities such as posting self-made pictures from their city, and also rewarded badges for every letter from the CRUSH acronym. This way we also induced respondents to keep on participating, playing on the human desire for completion (collecting all five letters).

FINDINGS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

The findings of the research community can be grouped into two different areas. From the

substantial amount of posts we were able to derive some general Generation Y insights. They are a collection of typical traits and evolutions describing the daily lives of this youth generation. Furthermore the five CRUSH dimensions from the brand model were intensively discussed in the community resulting into a global qualitative exploration of the key dimensions of cool brands, places and events for this generation. We will describe both results in the following paragraphs.

Understanding Generation Y

The downside of being a technology generation

Pew Research Center (Taylor, Keeter, 2010) found that the majority of generation members believe they own a unique and distinctive identity. When Generation Yers are asked to describe their own generation, they will indicate that they are the first "technology generation". Technology to them means so much more than just a collection of gadgets, they have fused their social life into those gadgets. Although they still remember how life before the internet was, they came of age in a society packed with mobile, digital, interactive, social and online technology and they are hooked to it. The virtual unlimited access to information allows them to make more deliberate choices. While it is often said that "Google makes us smarter", and professors at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA have actually found proof that searching online is beneficial for the brain (Small, Vorgan, 2008), most youngsters realize the information society comes with a trade-off in terms of attention span. Infobesitas, being overwhelmed with information, is a reality nowadays even for media savvy youth and being constantly connected feels so good that it's addictive. If they are in situations without internet or mobile (textmessage) access, most youngsters experience feelings of loneliness and depression. Media have even reported that they would rather miss sexual intercourse for a month than being deprived from access to Facebook. From a social perspective, the constant connection made deep genuine and personal interactions more difficult. After all, everyone already knows what you did yesterday through your status updates or

tweets, so what do you talk about when going out with a friend? Most messages that are exchanged using social media have to be condensed to one-liners on Facebook, mobile text messages of maximum 160 characters or even tweets with only 140. So although the frequency of being in touch with peers has dramatically increased, contacts are more superficial and relationships are changing.

We don't have to worry about the present, we worry about the future

Youth today have high expectations in life. Their Babyboomer parents taught them how to value their own opinion and strive for achievements. Media often portray successful 20-something CEOs like Mark Zuckerberg endorsing the "you can be anything you want to be" mythos. The increased importance of self-esteem in society has clearly affected youth's attitudes and behaviour. Psychologists like Dr Jean Twenge found that the number of college students with a high narcissism score has risen by two-thirds. The professor mainly blames our education systems designed to raise the self-esteem of youth. (Twenge, 2006) In her book *The Narcissism Epidemic* she even suggests treatments for what she deems an epidemic (Twenge, 2009). This generation has a high trust in itself and is open to try many different things as youth don't accept being stuck in a certain situation whether it's a job, housing, or relationships... All of them are easy to change in their view. They work to live instead of the other way around and express a clear need to be stimulated with a variety of working experiences rather than find depth in their career. Gen Yers understand what kind of big opportunities are ahead of them and are willing to work hard if necessary.

Being called "lazy" infuriates them. Often older generations criticize this generation for taking the shortest route to get what they need. But that's simply the way they were educated: attaining the objectives with the least possible efforts in a smart and quick way. Most youngsters will express a strong work/reward ethic. They believe you will get rewards in life when you work hard enough. Failure is assumed to stem from laziness. Most teenagers will only select role models and celebrities that have really earned their success by working hard. In MTV's *Youthopia* study, Barack Obama and Britney Spears were often quoted as people who are admired for their

work ethic and for achieving great things from humble beginnings by overcoming adversity to maintain their success (Rose, 2010). Gen Yers feel they don't have to worry about the present, since most basic needs have been fulfilled as opposed to how their grandparents were struggling. On the other hand the negative aspect of their status anxiety is an increased self-imposed pressure and a fear of failure. Their ability to shape their lives the way they want has urged them to take up the responsibility to make the most out of it. The social network voyeurism and exhibitionism with live streams of what friends are experiencing and achieving leads to benchmarking stress and quarter-life crisis replacing the good old mid-life one of previous generations.

Real trends cross borders

In the global village, Gen Y feels that local trends don't even exist anymore. If anything is a real trend, it will immediately cross borders via social media and youth around the world will pick it up. A recent example of this evolution is the series of so-called internet memes that was rapidly spread across borders. First there was 'planking', young people taking Facebook pictures lying stiff like a plank of wood (see figure 3). The trend hit the headlines when a young Brisbane man in his twenties fell from a balcony in an attempt to take the perfect planking picture. Soon over 600,000 planking fans imitated the silly behaviour all over the world. But after only a few weeks the meme's popularity faded, perhaps because even Gordon Ramsay got involved with it ... and, it was suddenly replaced by a new meme 'owling': imitating the position of an owl, for instance on a fence or roof or, why not, on top of your office desk. Then 'tilting' came up, 'leisure diving' and who knows what's next ...

FIGURE 3. PLANKING



That said, when discussing trends with young people on the global community, they did come up with a list of interesting Gen Y evolutions:

1. Social media as their most important news channel.

Social media is the most up-to-date news channel and also the most tailored and targeted since you choose yourself who you follow or what kind of information you want to receive. In the same way brands should empower Gen Yers to tailor their product experience to their wants and needs.

2. Minimizing environmental impact
This generation feels ecological responsible. Organic and green products will find a more interested audience in this age group and they stress the importance of locally produced stuff. Responsible branding is also about people. Creating safe working places and offering a fair wage instead of exploiting them are synonyms to social branding. They like companies that put clear societal goals forward and act up on them without bragging. They dislike companies that actively communicate about CSR programs, which is seen as “green washing” with McDonald’s as a bad example. Because eco-claims became just another advertising strategy in the first decade of the 2000s, Gen Yers are very cautious in really believing what a brand is telling about protecting the environment. When

sports fashion brand Puma worked together with Yves Behar’s Fuse project to design a shoe box that would reduce the ecological footprint, many of them reacted sceptically on blogs. Puma’s viral movie explained that using a bag instead of a box reduced the cardboard by 65%, eventually resulting in lowered usage of paper (trees), energy, water and lower emission of carbon dioxides. But youngsters called it brand propaganda, questioning the positive impact of the design, uttering that 77% of the carbon footprint in shoes come from raw materials (leather, rubber and cotton) and only a mere 5% from the packaging. To win credibility with CSR programs to this generation, there are three things brands and companies should keep in mind:

- > Gen Y will rarely deliberately choose a brand because of its charity or ecological programmes. A brand’s socially responsible image will never make up for poor quality or other basics. Rather than communicating green aspects, they want brands to focus on how an innovation made the product itself better and at the same time it happens to be produced in a responsible way too.
- > What really makes a difference is

when a company is advocating responsible actions to other players in the industry and becoming a change agent. Examples are: Cadbury for using fair trade in all products, Mars committing to become exploitation-free by 2020 through Rainforest alliance and UTZ certification, Bodyshop (for its values), Sainsbury (fair trade), and Johnson & Johnson (minimizing environmental impact).

- > Gen Y doesn't like to be marketed to but likes marketing with: instead of bombarding young people with programmes, they want to make a difference themselves by owning the values and choosing themselves how and where charitable contributions will go. This was also already found in other ESOMAR papers (see for instance: Namiranian, 2006).

3. Renting and sharing property

Economic downturn on one side and exponential house pricing on the other have spurred youth to rent properties rather than buy them and even share flats to cope with the high costs of living. Sharing expensive stuff is not only smart but also has positive side effects on the environment. That's why recent start-ups like Buzzcar in France (to share cars) or Frents in Germany (sharing and renting belongings whenever you don't need them) are getting the attention of youth worldwide. Gen Y will embrace brands that show the same type of smart thinking. Think of the way Apple is positioning all its innovations as cutting edge examples of smart and efficient design.

4. Working or studying a semester abroad

Life is all about experiencing something extraordinary or new. Young people have always been involved with exploring the unknown, but today they have so many more possibilities to make that happen. Studying at least a semester abroad or starting an international career is seen as a must to obtain language skills and improve intercultural understanding. Taking a gap year is much more common today than it was for past generations. Brands that radiate this cosmopolitan feeling, connecting youth from all parts of the world with shared interests and passions will hit a sensitive spot of Gen Y.

5. Settling down late

As stated before, Gen Yers want to get the best out of their lives and really enjoy it before getting married or leaving the family home. The 'Hotel Mum' trend has been boosted by the

economic recession. It has also led to an increase in 'boomerang children', returning to parental homes after a period of independent living. In 1980 in the United States, 11% of the 25- to 34-year-olds were still living with their parents. By 2008, this figure had already risen to 20% (Robert, 2010). For brands targeting Gen Y, this means they're often also targeting parents of Gen Y since they are still very much involved with the buying decisions of their children.

6. Reality TV

It's been on every possible channel in every possible format since the start of the new Millennium and yet it still doesn't really get boring for the Millennials who grew up with reality TV content such as Big Brother, Expedition Robinson (a.k.a. Survivor), the Osbournes or Pop Idols. As Rose and Wood stated in the Journal of Consumer Research, the popularity of these shows on TV can be seen as a quest for authenticity within the traditionally fiction-oriented entertainment industry (Rose, Wood, 2005).

7. Urban cycling

From the colourful scraper bikes craze in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, to the cheap fixed gear bikes painted in bright colours ("fixies") in Jakarta or even the more organized urban bike renting in cities such as Barcelona or Paris: urban cycling is big. It's the easiest way to get from A to B without traffic jams or the need for scarce parking spots and as Graham Brown mentioned in his Youth Marketing Handbook: it's all about reclaiming the social space in busy city centres around the world (Brown and Al, 2011). Nike has launched some brilliant campaigns (Run Unleashed) to activate leisure running with Gen Y. In a number of cities like Stockholm and Antwerp the brand set up a competition between runners living in different districts of the city and "take Stockholm". The campaign was an enormous success.

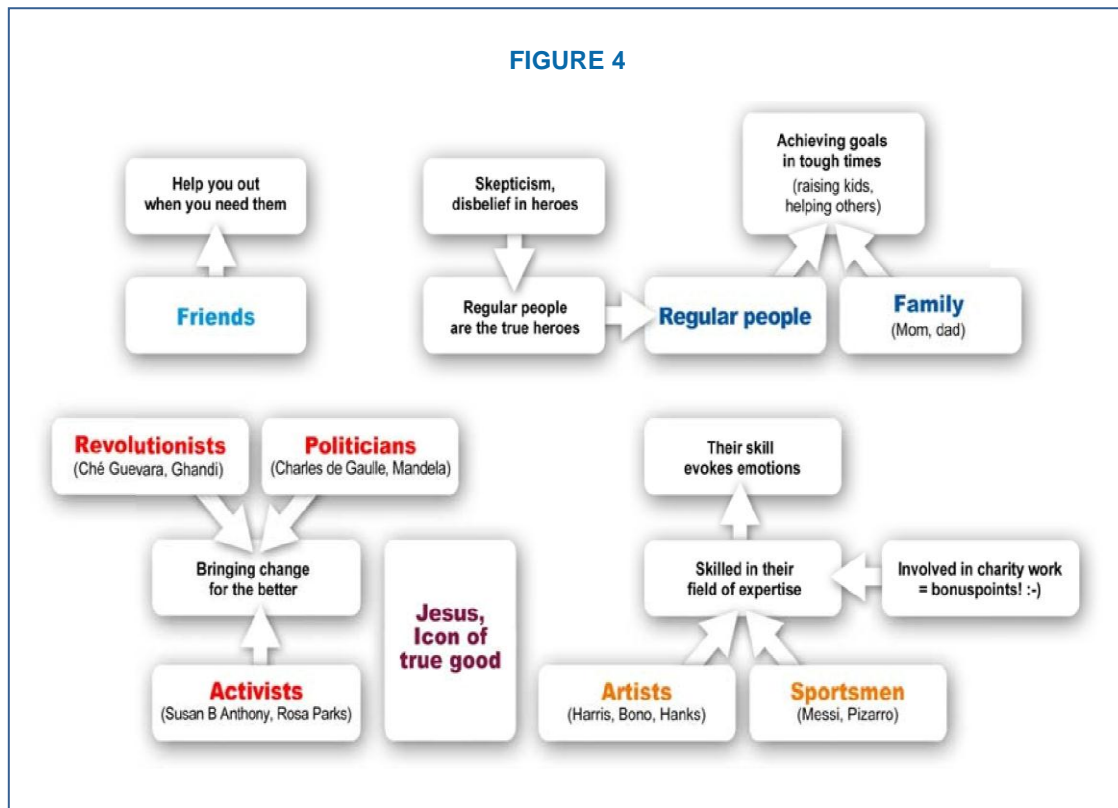
8. Customizing, co-creation and smart crowds

Generation Y believes in the social economy. If they had to start up a business today, it would incorporate social networking. They believe in this medium since involving and engaging them individually and communicating with them on a real one-to-one basis to build a sustainable and meaningful relationship is essential. It's about giving the brand back to the fans/consumers. Gen Yers firmly believe that both products and marketing actions should be co-created and they feel the crowd will always outsmart the individual. Peers are the most trusted source of information, which explains why user ratings are very important to them and will always be consulted before making purchase decisions.

Their favourite brands are the ones that offer customization of their products and communications. Ben & Jerry's in the Netherlands, for instance, co-created their Facebook fan page with Millennials.

9. True heroes are close to them
For young people emotional connection (closeness and friendship), real humanity and achievement are the most important aspects of "heroes" (see figure 4). They are rather

sceptical about traditional celebrity role models. They see their friends and parents as the real heroes: the former because they can always rely on them personally, and the latter because they were capable of raising their children in more difficult and challenging times. This shift means that brands should be careful when picking celebrity-endorsed campaigns, and think through how they can use the feeling of closeness, humanity and achievement in communications.



If they talk about other types of potential heroes, who are not so close to them, other criteria are important:

- > They bring change for the better in the world. Illustrating examples are Ghandi and Nelson Mandela, together with other activists, revolutionaries and politicians.
- > They are extremely skilled in their field of expertise, to the extent that their skills and achievements evoke real emotions. Examples here are sports men (at least as long as they are capable of staying top of the bill).
- > They are involved with charity work, for instance Bono.

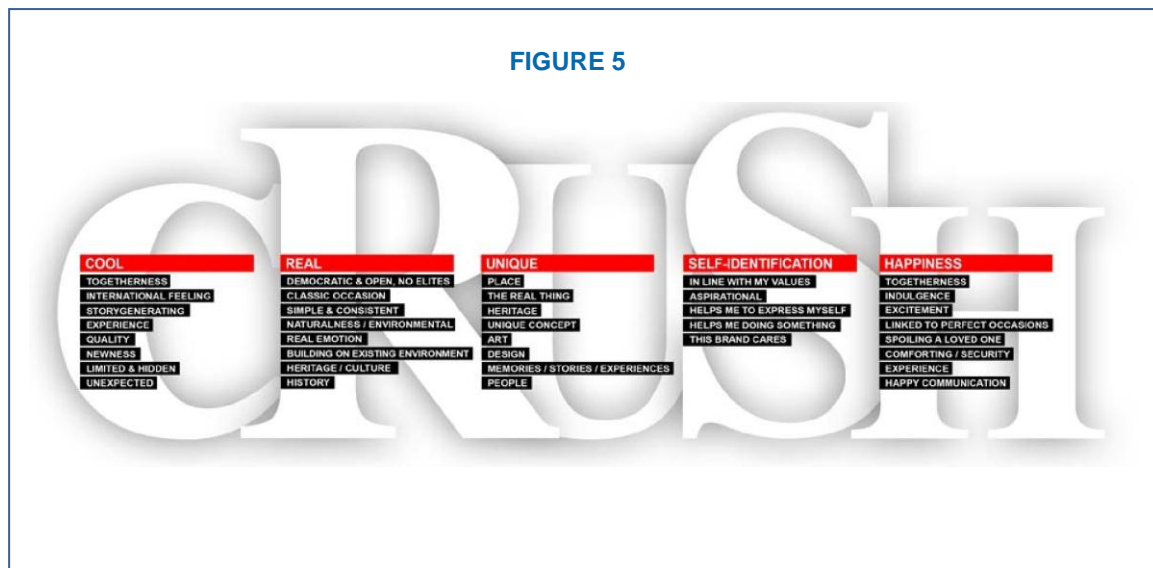
10. Everything starts with an E(xperience)
Gen Y is an emotions-driven generation and more emotional than previous generations.

Especially the quest for happiness is key in their lives (Van de n Bergh, Behrer, 2011). Leisure time activities such as going out, food and drinks, travelling will all need a strong emotional component that allows them to escape and relax from everyday reality. They are looking for both indulgence as well as adrenaline provoking thrills. The trend of "gamification" of society, offering competition and challenge, fits perfectly in this experience driven life. Brands should challenge their young target groups and position their products as achievements or a moment of indulgence or escape after hard work.

A qualitative exploration of the CRUSH model

In the global Gen Y community, we discussed each of the five components as explained with figure 1. We were looking for intermediate dimensions that would explain why something

was to be found cool, real, unique, just like them or creating happiness. This would allow us to better understand both Gen Y thinking as well as drivers for the brand attributes that we had found to be important in previous quantitative research studies. All sub-dimensions are summarized in figure 5.



Coolness

In *How Cool Brands Stay Hot*, Van den Bergh and Behrer state that 'coolness' today surpasses its historic links with resistance or rebel attitudes. For this generation, cool brands are attractive and appealing brands that are popular in their immediate social circle and bring a sense of novelty, surprise or originality. For companies, it means they have to reinvent themselves continuously but not by looking at what other players are doing but by developing from within the heart of the company or brand. This grassroots thinking has nothing to do with chasing coolness but it's about creating and maintaining relevance for the stimulus-addicted Generation Y (Van den Bergh, Behrer, 2011). In our global Gen Y community we discussed what youth sees as cool places, brands and stuff to understand what the foundations of this brand relevance are for them. We found eight different dimensions of coolness with youth around the world:

- > **Togetherness:** Young people are even more social than previous generations. Brands or places that are capable of connecting youth socially will have a competitive edge.

After all, life is all about meeting friends and new like-minded people and sharing moments and experiences. The coolest places and moments are those where friends are involved and they can build shared memories. Togetherness can mean partying hard but also relaxing with a movie, chilling in a beach bar or just hanging out in the city and shopping.

- > **International feeling:** Youngsters feel they are citizens of the globe. In Istanbul, for instance, Turkish youth go to Club Babylon to watch live gigs of musicians from all over the world. Brands that radiate this cosmopolitan feeling will be seen as more cool. The fact that H&M has stores in Asia and the United States makes the brand more appealing, because if youth is buying H&M in Tokyo too, it's a guarantee for Europeans that it is a truly cool brand.
- > **Story-generating:** The stimulation junkie generation is always looking for great stories and memories. Memorable events or experiences will set the tongues wagging. While New York is the city that never sleeps,

Shanghai is so fundamentally weird that you stumble upon little treasures every time you visit the city. It is just one big story generator, you never run out of little things that amuse, and so you never ever get bored. Cool brands regularly bring new stories and generate conversations by their actions and point of view. This generation of consumers do not passively receive brand stories told by companies anymore, they co-create the meaning of brands. The Keller Fay Group found that youth have on average 145 conversations a week about brands. That is twice the rate of adults (Hein, 2007).

- > Facilitating life and delivering experiences. One respondent explained how the “Chrome to Phone” app on her Android Nexus S mobile made her life easier. The app sends websites, phone numbers and Google roadmaps automatically from a website online to your own cell phone with one single click. The technology and “always too busy” generation is keen on innovations that help them to organize life, do things in a better and easier way and save time in a seamless way. Having the opportunity to customize the product itself and have it just the way you personally prefer it is another aspect of cool brands experiences. In the Cereality bar in San Francisco, for instance, customers choose from their favourite cereal brands and customized toppings (nuts, fruits, candy, raisins, chocolates) and type of milk to create their own perfect breakfast. The staff is dressed in a pyjama uniform to make the experience complete.
- > Quality. Superior product quality is still one of the core aspects of cool brands - especially when it's unexpected. For instance, food trucks are normally seen as serving mediocre or bad tasting fast food, but the “Off the grid” gourmet food trucks as seen in San Francisco brings a variety of delicious food. They make it easily accessible and also offer free side events of music and craft, creating unique markets.
- > Novelty. Brands have to stay up-to-date and have to innovate continuously, bringing fresh aspects of their products under the attention of youth in order to stimulate conversations:
- > Limited and hidden. A limited

availability of products makes something more cool for young people. This can relate to the feeling of scarcity or uniqueness (e.g. events on specific nights) or the fact that you have to be ‘in the know’ before you can enjoy it.

- > Unexpected. As mentioned before, Gen Y likes positive surprises. Brand and store concepts that are built on a great creative idea like The Icecreamists, a pop-up ice cream store linked with Selfridges in London, are good examples of creating unexpected experiences. The shop is targeting adult ice cream fans and has a sexy/kinky interior and waitresses. They have been known to create buzz with Viagra ice cream (not really using Viagra as an ingredient but claiming to have similar positive effects for consumers) and the Baby Gaga taste, supposedly made of breast milk (and banned after three hours). A fusion of different styles also enhances the feeling of unexpectedness. The Burgermeister burger bar in Berlin is located in a former art deco toilet stall under a bridge and it's a fast food burger bar. People reclaiming the urban space in global cities for instance by using a scaffolding in Berlin as a balcony to enjoy the nice weather, street dancing in Paris or guerrilla knitting in several cities are an unexpected surprise for youngsters and therefore deemed ‘cool’.

Realness

In our experience economy, brand authenticity became more important - not only because authenticity helps brands to differentiate from the many alternatives but also because consumers value “realness” in a world flooded with imitations and staged experiences. To the new consumers of Generation Y, the classic interpretation of authenticity: origin, history and heritage, as defined by Gilmore and Pine in the book “Authenticity. What Consumers Really Want”, is less appealing and less relevant. In most cases young people are not even aware of these types of brand personality claims. To them, the modern interpretation of authenticity: being honest to yourself (the brand's DNA), to youth (transparency) and to society (CSR) is more in line with their expectations fed by their education (Van den Bergh, De Ruyck, Van Kemseke, 2009). In our global qualitative exploration of the authenticity concept, both history and heritage of brands were only seen as “real” when the projected brand culture fit with the DNA of the brand. For instance, the

Japanese retailer Muji is known for its simple and beautifully designed products. The brand's culture is distinguished by its minimalistic design with emphasis on recycling and avoiding waste in production and packaging. The retailer has a no-logo and no-brand policy and the name Muji is derived from the first part of 'Mujirushi Ryohin', which can be translated as 'non-branded quality goods'. Muji shops have a Japanese character that you feel the minute you enter a store. All items are plain and pure, away from show off and just humble and polite like the Japanese culture. Another example is the hippie American spirit and heritage of the Ben & Jerry's brand, that even today when it's part of the multinational Unilever is translated in both the product, variety names and packaging but also in the campaigns and CSR programs. This consistency is an important aspect of authenticity. Dunkin' Donuts and Budweiser, for instance, were seen as brands staying real for ages by simply delivering the same simple products and messages. When youth sees a fit between what a brand is claiming and its historic DNA or an existing culture or environment, it is perceived as not fake but real. Classic occasions are real because of what they represent, for instance the Christmas tree at the Rockefeller tree is "real" because it's a real tree but mainly it stands for so many years of shared memories and emotions, it became THE icon of Christmas in New York. Real emotions support brand realness. Riding a Harley Davidson motorcycle is more than just the cliché American stereotype of freedom. It is feeling the emotions of the wind whipping through your hair and the ability to take in all of nature's beauty around you.

Another aspect of realness is being democratic and open, available for everybody, not for elites. One respondent in Brazil made the comparison between Copacabana beach and Ipanema beach. They are both in Rio de Janeiro. The first is known from songs, movies and has the image of the ideal perfect beach. But the latter, just around the corner from Copacabana, is definitely the real thing for youth. Ipanema beach gathers people from all social classes, all sexual orientations and everywhere in the world. To quote one participant: "The walls separating the tribes on the beach are invisible and can be crossed anytime you want. The only passport you need to enter the area from a different group is simply the smile on your face. Ipanema summarizes the authentic carioca spirit: it's democratic, easy going and ... marvelous." Levi's curve ID jeans offering perfect fitting jeans for all sizes and female curves were mentioned as an example of how brands can be democratic as well.

Respect for nature and the environment was also mentioned as a source of "realness". LUSH Cosmetics, for instance, takes care of youth's health and the environment by only using natural and organic ingredients: fruit, vegetables, essential oils and no animal fats. They are against animal testing and their packaging is 100% recyclable, compostable or biodegradable. LUSH is a supporter of protest groups and animal rights operations and has introduced the 'Charity Pot' body lotion of which the full purchase price goes to charity.

Uniqueness

In an effort to reduce choice complexity, Generation Yers, like any consumer, group products together in a so-called consideration set. Brand salience or uniqueness is the most important factor for brands to become part of the consideration set (Ballantyne, Warren, Nobbs, 2006).

Many young people link the unique things around them to specific places or locations, it is "something that exists nowhere else". German participants of the community talked about 'Ampelmännchen' and 'Ampelfrauen' in Berlin (traffic light figures wearing a hat). They were introduced in 2005 and have since then spread like a meme across several cities of Germany to the east side of the country. Other examples combine place-bound uniqueness with heritage-based realness like a beautiful metro station in St Petersburg, French baguette or the German Club Cola. Club Cola is cola soft drink that was originally manufactured for the Socialist Unity Party of Germany at the end of the sixties so that East Germany could have its own cola similar to the taste and appearance of those sold in the Western world. It was extremely popular with the East Germans. Today, Club Cola is still available in Germany and because of its DDR heritage it became a cult drink over the years. The brand's slogan, built on uniqueness, is "Nicht für jeden. Nur für uns".

Of course innovation, and creative segments of culture as for instance art and design, are key drivers of a brand's uniqueness. Art and design are seen as true craftsmanship, meaning it automatically embodies a unique artist's approach. When young people receive a crafted gift from one of their friends for their birthday, it is seen as a unique and very valuable piece. So working together with artists or designers, as Beck's recently did with an augmented reality piece of art by Arne Quinze on top of the statue of liberty in New York, automatically adds uniqueness to the brand. "Handmade" as a label does the same. Another option for brands is stimulating personalization of their products,

because when youngsters are customizing their Eastpak bag or their own Nike shoes, they become unique designs and thus more valuable.

The last dimension of uniqueness is linked with people, the human side of brands. There's nothing more unique than a person, and brands that are linked with specific persons, for instance Facebook, Virgin or Apple, are therefore more unique than brands with which youngsters can't link a human face. In a broader perspective, you could also see this human face of brands as the employees or staff working for the brand and representing the brand's value and personality to consumers. Whether it's the store personnel, the help desk staff, or just employees talking about their job on the train, they are the human face of a brand and will support (or ruin) a brand's uniqueness.

Self-identification

Consumers choose brands to develop, extend or portray their self-identity. For adolescents who are still in the process of constructing their identity, this is even more prevalent than for other age groups. Brands, styles and products deliver tangible ways of meaning transference and are chosen to reflect the values, interests and opinions (Tuten, 2007). In the CRUSH brand model (see figure 1), youth's self-identification with the brand has a very strong direct effect on brand leverage. It is crucial to obtain a good connection with Generation Y and keep a cool brand hot for the long term (Van den Bergh, Behrer, 2011).

For this generation of consumers, image advertising and the old-fashioned way of shouting brand personality through mass media is not doing the trick anymore. Brands need to have a strong point of view and act upon these values to convince the marketing savvy generation that it's not just a gimmick or campaign but truly a part of the brand's DNA. Brands that strongly advocate certain values that are in line with your own will enhance identification. Nike, for instance, is all about personal achievement, competition and success with a "yes you can do it" mentality. The brand was created by athletes and is still devoted to the athlete community and spirit. However, if the values of a brand go against your own, it will easily turn into a "hate brand". Think of BP after the oil spill disaster or Roger David clothes boycotted after it had launched a T-shirt line "promoting" rape.

Since Generation Yers are on the urge to achieve something in their young lives, aspirational brands that radiate positive energy

will be easier to identify with. "Apple is smart and creative, just like me" said one of our more humble community participants. There are three levels of aspired identification a brand can use to connect with youth:

- > "I want to express myself and my style": brands that are representing certain lifestyles, for instance Billabong or Roxy for surfers;
- > "I want to do something better": brands that help youngsters to actively experience their passions, like Gatorade, offering pre-workout and post-workout electrolyte hydration formulas are helping them to engage with sports;
- > "I want to make the world a better place": brands that are change agents in their market like fair trade brands, Bodyshop or Lush reflect the concerns of certain parts of the youth population.

Happiness

Studies on emotional attachment to brands have found that evoking positive emotions is crucial for brand engagement. Brands should induce affection or warm feelings like love, joy or happiness. They should arouse passion and make Gen Yers feel excited, delighted or captivated (Thomson, MacInnis, Whan Park, 2005).

The most important ingredient of happy feelings for this social generation of youth is bringing togetherness. Hanging out in malls or just spending some time with friends in IKEA for instance are simple and adored ways of having a good time. This social part of happiness is also seen in the many young participants commenting on the fact that happiness spreads like a virus and that making other people happy by spoiling them for instance will bring personal happiness too. Happiness is also related to the five senses and indulgence. For some participants eating a Vegemite sandwich (as in that song) or Cadbury chocolates makes them happy. So, apart from spoiling taste buds, how can brands find entrances to happiness? Our participants found five areas of brand happiness:

- > excitement: brands like Lonely Planet, North Face (outdoor clothes and equipment), BMW are all linked with the thrill of danger, speed or the unknown;
- > occasions: some brands are linked with happy moments in life like drinking a Sam Adams beer on a summer Saturday afternoon;
- > comfort/security: you can rely on a brand when you need it, for instance

- Starbucks coffee as a hide-out, offering the perfect coffee in all places around the world;
- > experience: some brands offer a true delight to work with their products, designers couldn't live without Adobe's software programs Photoshop, Indesign, Dreamweaver;
 - > marketing actions that make you smile: some brands know how to make people smile, think of Coca Cola nurses giving massages or Ola offering free ice creams on the first summer day or a Russian Juice brand decorating bus stops like part of a jungle in summer.

CONCLUSION

To stay hot and follow the current evolutions among this youth generation as described in this paper, cool brands need to connect on a deep and individual emotional level with Generation Yers. Research communities such as the 'Crushed Ice' we did for this paper offer the unique opportunity to engage with them for a longer term than traditional focus groups or in-depth interviews. Youth will love to engage with brands that feel as close to them as their best friends and they are eager to help marketers and researchers go the extra mile based on their valuable input. Gen Yers want to be heard and they want to change the world (or as many would phrase it "dominate the world"). Brands that are willing to put them into the driver's seat will benefit from the insights.

With this generation, brands first need to deserve trust and affection. Successful Gen Y brands don't dictate or shout, but empower and leave control in the hands of youth. The main difference between shouting and having a conversation on equal levels is actually listening. And isn't that the job of marketers and qualitative researchers? Brands that are truly capable of listening to the assertive voice of this generation, not just to pre- or post-test existing ideas but to re-evaluate their brand's core positioning, products and campaigns (like MTV did), will find their relationship gaining strength.

It is our belief that the brand-building model we describe in this paper, summarized by the CRUSH acronym, combining coolness, realness, self-identification with the brand and happiness, is a powerful way of looking at the challenges a brand faces when connecting with the new consumer. I would like to end with a quote from Gert Kerkstoel, the former global business director of Nike SB: *"Strong brands always had a more interesting and unique point of view to share with consumers. But today the depth and the authenticity of the stories behind the brand, and the skill with which they are told, have become much more important because they became part of everyday conversation, be it real or virtual. The key to brand survival over generations is authenticity and connectivity. The essence is to let the organization BE the brand. You need a true relationship with the current Generation Y to understand their spirit and let that guide the creative evolution of your brand. That is very different from just trying to catch the next trend."*

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