

## **ABSTRACT**

PATRICK, KATELYN VICTORIA. Exploring Generation Y Consumers' Consumption of Fitness Clothing: A Means-End Chain Approach. (Under the direction of Dr. Yingjiao Xu.)

Thanks to the growing health awareness and the trend of athleisure, the fitness clothing market has been substantially growing. Major sportswear brands, as well as retailers, are expanding their offerings to meet this increasing demand from the market. Generation Y consumers are one of the major segments for the sportswear industry in the U.S. Gaining insights of Generation Y consumers' behaviors toward fitness clothing will be of strategic importance for the industry to serve this growing segment. This study, using the widely adopted means-end chain (MEC) model, is designed to uncover the driving values behind Generation Y consumers' fitness clothing consumption and uses for fitness clothing. Data collected from 35 subjects via laddering interviews was analyzed following the means-end chain model. As a result, a product attribute-value hierarchical matrix was generated to reflect the preferred product attributes, perceived consequences, driving values, and the connections among these variables. Aesthetics and price seemed to be the most salient attributes identified by the subjects, followed by durability, performance, fit, breathability and wick-ability. Brand names and fiber contents were also mentioned. Examples of perceived consequences were economic value, comfort, avoiding embarrassment, image, and efficiency. Seven driving values were revealed in this study, but due to the minimal mentioning of happiness only six values were used in the creation of the Hierarchical Value Matrix (HVM) for fitness. These six values included self-esteem, security, social recognition, accomplishment, freedom, and physical well-being. More importantly, unique paths were identified connecting the preferred attributes to the desired values sought by the consumers. Such understanding of Generation Y consumers' consumption of fitness clothing, in terms of

their desired product attributes, perceived consequences, and driving values, will provide great managerial implications to the practitioners in their product development, marketing, and customer relationship management. In summary, by using the MEC model this study uncovered the driving values for Generation Y consumers' consumption of fitness clothing and its predominant usages.

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Exploring Generation Y Consumers' Consumption of Fitness Clothing: A Means-End Chain  
Approach

by  
Katelyn Victoria Patrick

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APPROVED BY:

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Dr. Genessa Devine

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Dr. Marguerite Moore

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Dr. Yingjiao Xu  
Chair of Advisory Committee

## **DEDICATION**

To my dad and mom for always believing in me and telling me I can do it when I needed to hear it most. I love you both so much! Thank you for being amazing parents and pushing me to pursue my dreams no matter what they are! To my friends who were always by my side throughout this process. Lastly, to Mark and Alfi. I don't know what I would do without my goofballs who at every chance made me laugh and gave me constant love and encouragement! I love you two with my whole heart!

## BIOGRAPHY

From the time I was born on August 29, 1991 until this present moment I have been lucky enough to be born and bred a Wolfpacker - thank you daddy. My dreams of attending N.C. State and receiving a Master's degree have come true. The icing on the cake was attending the number one college of textiles in the world. Upon completing my undergraduate degree of Fashion Textile Management with a concentration in Brand Management and Marketing I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to continue my journey at N.C. State by working toward a Master of Science in Textiles. As my journey continues, this college and university will always have a special place in my heart.

*“Where the winds of Dixie softly blow  
O'er the fields of Caroline,  
There stands ever cherished, N.C. State,  
As thy honored shrine  
So life your voices! Loudly sing,  
From hill to ocean side!  
Our hearts ever hold you, N.C. State--  
In the folds  
Of our love and pride.”*

– N.C. State Alma Mater

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enjoyed getting to know you better throughout my time here. Thank you for not only being there for me, but for the entire College of Textiles student body.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Fitness Clothing Industry

As of 2011, the United States (U.S.) led the world in the largest and most developed market for sports and fitness clothing (Global Industry Analysts, 2011). A part of the U.S. sportswear industry is the fitness clothing market, which is predicted to increase 11% and grow to US\$88.7 billion by 2017 (Euromonitor, 2013). Fitness clothing generally refers to apparel products primarily used for activities such as working out, recreational use, sports and the growing use of casual wear (Griffin, 2013; Sports and fitness clothing, 2013). Traditionally, the fitness clothing market has targeted more active, sports and outdoor oriented consumers. However, the fitness clothing market is expanding their scope from just being worn in a gym to being paired with a nice pair of shorts for a dinner out (Fitness clothing- US, 2011). This idea of wearing fitness clothing as everyday clothing is also referred to as “crossover wear” or “athleisure” (Park, 2006; Salfino, 2013). Companies like Adidas, Nike, and Under Armour have bridged the gap between competitive sports and fitness clothing migrating toward the trend of athleisure (Park, 2006).

Originally, fitness clothing was mainly designed to be worn while working out, participating in a physical activity, or for outdoor leisure (Dictionary.com, 2014; Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Salfino, 2013). The amount of fitness clothing being purchased has increased attributable to substantially growing selections and the awareness of an active

lifestyle and health values (Griffin, 2013; Sherman, 2014; Textiles Intelligence, 2013). However, consumers purchasing fitness clothing have diversified (Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Griffin, 2013; Sherman, 2014). The trend of athleisure reflected the fact that fitness clothing consumers have diversified greatly (Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Griffin, 2013; Park, 2006; Sherman, 2014) in the sense that consumers who do exercise regularly and consumers that don't exercise regularly both purchase fitness clothing using it for different purposes (Fitness clothing- US, 2011). While the majority of the market hinges on active consumers, who participate in exercise regularly, there is an opportunity for growth in the fitness clothing industry with respect to non-active consumers, those who don't exercise regularly (Cotton Inc., 2012).

Additionally, the growth of awareness among consumers to improve their well-being has helped sustain the fitness industry altogether (Griffin, 2013; Sherman, 2014; Textiles Intelligence, 2013). Consumers overall are beginning to see a need for a healthy lifestyle (Cohen, 2014; Krol, 2012; Let's Move, 2014). Particularly, Generation Y plays a critical role in the growth of the fitness clothing industry (Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Krol, 2012; Palmieri, 2013) due to their health and fit consciousness and accordingly their involvement in exercise. Generation Y consumers are those ranging from age early twenties to mid/late thirties. Research showed that Generation Y consumers are more likely to work out longer and more frequently due to their stamina and drive for physical results (Krol, 2013; Mintel, 2014). With this generation being more active and its strong purchasing power, retailers are striving to accommodate their needs for fitness clothing (Fitness clothing- US, 2011;

Palmieri, 2013; Park, 2006). The insight of Generation Y consumers behavior toward fitness clothing will be of strategic importance to the practitioners in their endeavors to serve this growing segment.

Responding to the growing trends of crossover wear and the awareness of the health value, mass retailers have increased floor space for fitness clothing and related products by 15% over the last three years (Salfino 1, 2013). The increasing supply of fitness clothing is vital to capture the non-active consumers penetrating the market and contributing to its recent and increasing growth (Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Salfino 1, 2013). Not only are product offerings of fitness clothing increasing, but they are becoming more innovative (Global Industry Analysts, Inc., 2013; Sherman, 2014). Companies like Nike and Under Armour are creating technologically advanced garments and accessories. Additionally, companies are actively advertising and using social media campaigns to drive consumers to purchase fitness clothing and to exercise more (Sherman, 2014; Under Armour, 2014).

All factors considered, the awareness and importance of improving health, the growing number of retailers in the industry with increasing product selections, and the diversified consumer, the fitness clothing industry has seen extensive development, igniting impressive growth rates of fitness clothing in 2012 and continuing into 2013 (Euromonitor, 2013; Global Industry Analysts, 2011). Thanks to these three trends, the fitness clothing industry will continue to grow (Cotton Inc., 2012; Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Krol, 2012; Park, 2006; Sherman, 2014).

## 1.2 Significance of this Study

Marketing research has suggested that a consumer's decision to purchase a product is not solely based on its discernible physical characteristics. Rather, it is the functional and psychosocial benefits its use provides, and how these benefits help the consumer attain life goals and values that are the greater motivator (Olson & Walker, 1991). Hence, consumer value is the end goal a consumer desires from a consumption situation and plays a critical role in all marketing activities (Holbrook, 1999).

While immense amounts of literature revealing Generation Y consumers' characteristics, prevalent values, and general consumer behaviors (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1986; Gong, Li, Wu, & Zhang, 2002; Hawley, Norum, & Ko, 2009; Hong & Kim, 2011; Olson & Walker, 1991) is available, limited research has been conducted on investigating and understanding Generation Y's behavior toward fitness clothing. Therefore, knowing that consumers strive to find products or services that satisfy their functional and psychosocial needs as well as physical aspects, this study will aim to unveil underlying values driving the consumption of fitness clothing. This insight can lend to managerial implications for companies in their efforts in successfully satisfying Generation Y consumers' needs for fitness clothing.

## 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate Generation Y consumers' fitness clothing consumption in terms of preferred product attributes, the driving values, and the links

between the two. Specifically, this study is designed to investigate Generation Y consumers' consumption of fitness clothing in terms of preferred attributes and driving values. As limited literature is available regarding Generation Y consumers' behavior toward fitness clothing, this study took an exploratory qualitative research approach. This study explores the salient product features that Generation Y consumers look for in fitness clothing products and driving values behind purchasing and using fitness clothing.

A means-end chain approach (Gutman, 1982) with laddering interview technique was adopted to guide the design of this study. Through the laddering method, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 35 subjects recruited from a large, mid-Atlantic university in December, 2014. The results of this study provide a great insight of Generation Y consumers' consumption of fitness clothing, in terms of the desired attributes, perceived consequences, and driving consumer values.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Growth of the Sportswear Industry

The sportswear industry is expected to see tremendous growth within the next five years. The global sportswear market is likely to attain \$178 billion by 2019 (Sherman, 2014) and specifically, the U.S. sportswear market is projected to reach \$88.7 billion in 2017 (Griffin, 2013). The sportswear industry encompasses performance/competitive clothing, sports-related attire and fitness clothing (Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Griffin, 2013). The performance and competitive clothing market of sportswear includes clothing used by individuals and teams to compete in collegiate, amateur, and professional sports or activities (i.e. American football, cycling, running, or golf) (Griffin, 2013). Whereas, sports-related attire is more generally targeted to the general public and sports fans to represent a hobby, their hometown team or alma mater. Fitness clothing refers to apparel products primarily used for activities such as working out, recreational use, sports and the growing use of casual wear (Griffin, 2013; Sports and fitness clothing, 2013). The sportswear industry has transformed the clothing industry altogether as fitness clothing, in particular, has become the recent uniform contributing to the booming trend of athleisure (D'Innocenzio, 2014; Pasquarelli, 2014).

Sales of fitness clothing have been increasing on an average of 20% since 2000 (Park, 2006). The trend of yoga becoming more popular among Americans contributed greatly to the growth of the fitness clothing industry. Nearly 20 million Americans practice yoga,

representing a 29% increase from 2008 (Sherman, 2014). Yoga began to have a strong presence and started to capture the attention of active individuals in the late 90s. Today the fitness clothing industry and the market segment of yoga has significantly evolved making “this not [only] a fashion trend, [but] a lifestyle trend” (Cohen, 2014). The yoga market segment is not the only segment growing. Fitness related activities and markets such as outdoors activities, swimming, cross-fit training, running, and amateur/collegiate/ professional sports are also growing substantially as well (Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Griffin, 2013; Sherman, 2014).

Over the course of 2013 the fitness clothing industry’s sales rose 7% from the previous year (2012), whereas traditional clothing companies’ sales only rose 1% (Pasquarelli, 2014). In 2014, the women’s fitness clothing market accounted for a US\$14.5 billion business and men’s fitness clothing equated to a US\$14.2 billion business (Salfino 4, 2014). It is clear to see that the fitness clothing industry is a growing segment of the sportswear industry and has “outpaced the growth of other traditional [clothing] companies” (Sherman, 2014).

### 2.1.1 Leading Companies in the Fitness Clothing Market

Fitness clothing has expanded vastly from just being worn in a gym to being paired with a nice pair of shorts for a dinner out. This idea of wearing fitness clothing as everyday clothing is referred to as “crossover wear” or “athlesuire” (Park, 2006; Pasquarelli, 2014; Salfino, 2013). Companies like Adidas, Nike, Champion, and Under Armour have bridged the gap between competitive sports and fitness clothing migrating toward the trend of athlesuire (Park, 2006). A pair of Nike Flyknit running shoes are being paired with the latest pants or

skirts walking down the fashion runways (Sherman, 2014). Specialty retailers like Lululemon, Gap Athleta, and Victoria's Secret are also increasing their fitness clothing product offerings along with the number of store locations to keep up with the fast-paced; growth of this industry (Sherman, 2014). The make-up of the fitness clothing industry is diverse and products are made readily available so that consumers can buy fitness clothing from a variety of retailers (Fitness clothing- US, 2011).

There are a plethora of retailers joining the fitness clothing industry. Some of the retail outlets carrying fitness clothing are company owned stores (i.e. Nike Town Stores, Columbia, Lululemon, etc.), sporting goods stores (i.e. Dick's, Sports Authority, etc.), specialty retailers (i.e. Gap, Old Navy), department stores (i.e. Macy's and Belk's), and/or mass retailers (i.e. Walmart, Targets, etc.) (Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Griffin, 2013). Each type of retailers is providing products to meet different market segments' needs in terms of fitness clothing.

For example, department stores like Macy's are expanding their fitness clothing offerings with the goal of attracting more Generation Y consumers (Palmieri, 2013). Macy's has strategically increased offerings from a variety of brands like Nike, Under Armour, and The North Face (Palmieri, 2013). In the past, they have offered more clothing brands whose target market is Generation Y consumers and saw success (Palmieri, 2013). Therefore, with the recent growth of the fitness clothing industry, Macy's saw this strategy of expanding their fitness clothing offerings as a competitive step to attract more active consumers (Landsman, 2013).

Retailers and brands are also becoming more competitive in hopes of differentiating themselves from similar brands. For instance, Under Armour (UA) has created a new lifestyle collection for men, *35<sup>th</sup> & O*, integrating fitness clothing technology with clothing appropriate to wear into the office (Pasquarelli, 2014). To appeal to women, Under Armour has also created a campaign called *I Will What I Want* that sets out to empower women of all ages to wear and do what they want (Under Armour, 2014). Currently, Under Armour has six female celebrity endorsers ranging from a model and ballerina to a pro surfer and downhill skier (Under Armour, 2014). This diversity in sport and in race reflected in their endorsers helps develop a sense of camaraderie among all female athletes and their fans (Under Armour, 2014).

One of Under Armour's biggest competitors, Nike, teamed up with one of the biggest and youngest fashion designers in Brazil, Pedro Lourenco, to release a couture-training fitness clothing line in November of 2014 (Nike, 2014). The goal of the couture training line is to showcase the latest in performance technology and innovation (Nike, 2014). The line seeks to create original styles with new cuts, shapes, and details not used before on women's fitness clothing (Nike, 2014). Through the blending of fashion and function retailers are able to provide consumers with functional clothing in which to exercise and capitalize on the growing athleisure trend.

Similarly, specialty retailers like J.Crew and luxury designers such as Tory Burch are offering versatile clothing options and creating fitness clothing lines to join in on the athleisure trend and to drive sales while drawing in new customers (Pasquarelli, 2014). With the variety

of retailers stocking fitness clothing it becomes accessible to consumers with different price points and different motives to purchase fitness clothing (Griffin, 2013; Salfino 4, 2014).

### 2.1.2 Factors Contributing to the Growth of the Fitness Clothing Industry

The fitness clothing industry is continuously growing. In 2013, the U.S. fitness clothing market generated \$33.7 billion in sales (Pasquarelli, 2014). As of June 2014 fitness clothing sales represented 16% of all apparel sales (Pasquarelli, 2014). Several factors in the U.S. market are driving this growth, including: the growing health awareness and the increasing number of retailers offering fitness clothing at great selections, which contributes to the next factor, the trend of athleisure (Cotton Inc., 2012; Fitness clothing- US, 2011; Krol, 2012; Park, 2006; Sherman, 2014).

*Growing Health Awareness.* Individuals in the United States are beginning to see the need for a lifestyle change (Salfino 4, 2014). The Center for Disease Control reported in 2013 that at least 20% of every state's population was categorized as obese (CDC, 2013). Nike Inc. recently released their *Designed to Move Report* providing statistics of decreasing physical activity that influences individuals' health and quality of life (Nike, Inc., 2012). Research has shown that in the past 40+ years physical activity of the total population has dropped 32% in the United States (Nike, Inc., 2012). Physical inactivity can lead to major health risks such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, depression, and cancers (Nike, Inc., 2012). Physical activity directly impacts social, intellectual, and financial capabilities of an individual (Nike, Inc., 2012). Being active can improve the mood,

energy level and focus of consumers (Nike, Inc., 2012). Consumers are, therefore, beginning to understand and value the importance of leading a healthier lifestyle (CDC, 2013; Nike, Inc., 2012)

The recent growing awareness of being healthier is in part due to First Lady Michelle Obama's campaign "Let's Move." The goal of the campaign is to conquer childhood obesity together as a society (Let's Move, 2014). The simplicity of the campaign's name encourages physical activity without intimidating or isolating the population. While the campaign is geared toward children, it can also apply to adults as 35% of U.S. adults are obese (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). The First Lady's campaign is about making simple changes that will help children and our society have a healthier lifestyle and understand the importance of taking care of one's body.

With the economy still recovering and unemployment rates still looming, individuals without health insurance look at exercising as a way to ward off illness (Krol, 2012). Also, employers are encouraging individuals to become healthier and exercise more as it can lower health insurance expenditures (Krol, 2012). Exercise activities will vary based on different backgrounds and level of experience with a particular activity. While some may take part in activities that require more exertion and a range of motion (Fitness clothing- US, 2011), other individuals simply enjoy walking or hiking for exercise, as it is less expensive, easier to participate in, and can be done from anywhere (Krol, 2012; Salfino 4, 2014).

As more individuals understand the importance of making healthier lifestyle changes

the fitness clothing industry will be further fueled (Cohen 2, 2014). More and more individuals are understanding that the outcomes of exercising and eating right are better than just eating right, hence more consumers are being active and purchasing fitness clothing to help encourage their lifestyle changes (Cohen 2, 2014; Salfino 4, 2014). The awareness among consumers of the benefits of exercise, especially indoor exercise, has attributed to the widespread increase in fashionable fitness clothing (Textiles Intelligence, 2013).

*Great Product Selections.* On top of consumer awareness, the rising availability of fitness clothing products is another important reason why the market has grown (Global Industry Analysts, Inc., 2013). Observing the athleisure trend, even traditional and fast fashion clothing companies have begun to create fitness clothing lines. As mentioned earlier, retailers such as J.Crew, Tory Burch, and Nordstrom along with companies like Champion are either increasing or creating fitness clothing lines, or are partnering with designers to expand their fitness clothing offerings to reach a bigger target market (Salfino 4, 2014). The fitness clothing market and individuals are beginning to see big name fitness clothing companies (i.e. Adidas, Nike, Puma, etc.) team up with fashion designers like Stella McCartney or Pharrell Williams to produce innovative designs and offer stylish options. Forever 21 launched a fitness clothing line in 2010 and other fast fashion retailers such as H&M have followed suit in observation of this trend (Sherman, 2014).

*Athleisure Trend.* Stylish options offer versatility which allows active consumers who are leading a healthier lifestyle to multitask while wearing fitness clothing (Pasquarelli, 2014).

For instance, being able to go from the gym, to work, to the grocery store all without changing can be appealing to the consumer (Palmieri, 2013; Park, 2006; Salfino 1, 2013). The growing selection allows both active and non-active consumer segments to select and purchase varying fitness clothing products that best suit their respective lifestyles (Cohen, 2014; Cotton Inc., 2012). Active and non-active consumers' lifestyles differ based on their level of physical activity. This trend of athleisure affords both active and non-active consumers the opportunity to wear fitness clothing beyond the gym. About 93% of consumers purchase and wear fitness clothing for activities other than exercising, like traveling, working, and running errands, as this type of clothing has increasingly become the "go to" uniform (Salfino 2, 2012; Cohen 2, 2014).

The versatility aspect of fitness clothing provides consumers with the ability to wear it for more than just working out (Pasquarelli, 2014). It also gives non-active consumers the chance to appear as though they are leading a healthier lifestyle, but are just capitalizing on the athleisure trend by wearing stylish, comfortable, fashion-forward fitness clothing (Palmieri, 2013; Pasquarelli, 2014; Salfino 3, 2012). The athleisure trend combines fashion with function delivering to consumers what they want from fitness clothing (Palmieri, 2013; Park, 2006). While the great selections of fashionable and functional fitness clothing contribute to the popularity of fitness clothing, this trend of athleisure is also driving suppliers, like mass retailers, to increase their offerings and floor space for fitness clothing (Pasquarelli, 2014; Salfino 1, 2013). Companies like Gap Inc., are creating more store locations for their brand Athelta to meet the demand of consumers (Sherman, 2014).

This growth in part is due to the acceptance of athleisure and how it has become more mainstream (Townshed & Rupp, 2014)

## 2.2 Features of Fitness Clothing

Research has shown that fit, design and performance, style, quality, versatility, brand and price are general features consumers look for when shopping and making purchasing decisions (Bennur & Jin, 2013; Jegethesan, Sneddon, & Soutar, 2012; Gong, Li, Wu, & Zhang, 2002). For fitness clothing specifically, consumers seek out features such as versatility, comfort, fit, brand, and price (Cotton Inc., 2012; Gong, Li, Wu, & Zhang, 2002; Palmieri, 2013; Salfino 2, 2012). While consumers may have different preferences because of their respective activity level, lifestyle, or demographics, the versatility of fitness clothing affords consumers, both active and non-active, to blur the lines between appropriate attire for work and for the gym (Pasquarelli, 2014). The attraction of allowing fitness clothing to become an individual's everyday uniform is because fitness clothing seemingly transitions from one activity to the next (Cohen 2, 2014; Pasquarelli, 2014; Salfino 4, 2014).

Male consumers, in particular, tend to gravitate towards the versatile features of fitness clothing as it is becoming more sophisticated (Pasquarelli, 2014) combining performance features with style. With more and more of the fitness clothing combining performance with stylish looks, consumers can feel confident wearing these garments at work or for various other activities (Cotton Inc., 2012; Pasquarelli, 2014).

The innovative and ever-changing style of fitness clothing is another attractive

feature. A majority of consumers evaluate a purchase decision of fitness clothing on both the fit and comfort (Salfino 3, 2012). Research has shown that consumers prefer comfort over other features and often make purchase decisions based on both the comfort and performance of a garment (Jegethesan, Sneddon, & Soutar, 2012). Fit is another important aspect, as 24% of consumers prefer well-fitting fitness clothing pieces (Cotton Inc., 2012). Partnerships between companies such as Nike, Adidas, Puma and Under Armour with major fashion designers show the precedence put on combining expertise in both the performance aspects of a garment and the fashion style of fitness clothing pieces (Salfino 2, 2012).

Brand has also been described an “important feature when [an individual] considers making a [fitness clothing purchase]” (Jegethesan, Sneddon, & Soutar, 2012). The top three favorite fitness clothing brands among consumers are Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour (Cotton Inc., 2012). Clothing can be considered as an extension of one’s personality, expressing who they are through what they wear (Evans, 1989). Therefore, consumers tend to relate with a brand that reflects their personal style (Bahng, Kincade, & Yang, 2013; Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009). As fitness clothing becomes more stylish certain brands will appeal to consumers not only on the basis of fulfilling their exercising needs (i.e. yoga wear vs. cycling wear), but also enabling them to project their personal style. Additionally, the brand name is important as consumers purchase certain brands because they are popular among their peers or endorsers they admire (Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009). Some consumers feel more comfortable knowing that by wearing trendy, branded clothing it signifies status (Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009). Consumers, specifically Generation Y

consumers, seek out brand names they trust and recognize because they know the level of quality they will receive for the price (Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009).

Lastly, price is another feature of fitness clothing to consider. Consumers are used to and willing to pay full price for fitness clothing as it is on sale less than traditional clothing and provides consumers with the level of quality they are seeking (Cotton Inc., 2012). Consumers can deduce potential prices and levels of quality from a brand. For instance, a particular brand name may infer higher price products or better quality products (Jegethesan, Sneddon, & Soutar, 2012; Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009). Two prime examples are Lululemon leggings and Nike running shoes. Not only does the brand equate with a higher price, but a certain level of expertise in their respective product offering (Pasquarelli, 2014; Sherman, 2014).

While comfort and fit, brand, and price are main fitness clothing features individuals seek, consumers also use performance features such as wick-ability and breathability as evaluative measures when purchasing fitness clothing (Cotton Inc., 2012; Park, 2006; Pasquarelli, 2014; Salfino 1, 2013). Fitness clothing features are transitioning to be more innovative and meet the lifestyle needs of consumers, specifically consumers of specific ages, such as Generation Y consumers (Cohen, 2014; Pasquarelli, 2014). While consumers of all ages are increasingly purchasing fitness clothing, those of Generation Y (early twenties to late thirties) are of particular interest to the fitness clothing manufacturers and retail outlets (Fitness clothing- US, 2011).

### 2.3 Generation Y Consumers

Born between 1977 and 1994 (Page & Williams, 2010) Generation Y accounts for 24.5% of the United States (U.S.) (O'Donnell, 2014). Generation Y consumers range in age from early twenties to mid/late thirties (BCG, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014 (Page & Williams, 2010) and have strong purchasing power. These consumers are projected to spend \$1.4 trillion annually by 2020 and will be responsible for 30% of retail sales (O'Donnell, 2014). By 2030, the 78 million individuals of Generation Y will outnumber the Baby Boomer Generation's (ages 50-69) which accounts for 56 million individuals (BCG, 2014). Hence, it is clear to regard this generation as the future of consumerism and the retail market (BCG, 2014).

Generation Y consumers have very unique values and spending patterns compared to other generational cohorts' values. They appreciate truth and experience (Page & Williams, 2010). They expect an internet experience, such as online shopping, to be interactive (Page & Williams, 2010; Powers & Valentine, 2013). Word of mouth (WOM) and fashion leadership (Hong & Kim, 2011) is also vital as they are often guided, persuaded, and influenced by their peers (BCG, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014; Page & Williams, 2010). Taken as a whole, Generation Y consumers are interactive, both in the shopping experience and with their peers.

Generation Y has grown up with a technology immersed environment and culture, learning as the technologies are introduced and adapting them into their everyday lives (BCG, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014). Generation Y consumers use technology to price compare and find the best deals possible when shopping (O'Donnell, 2014). Generation Y consumers

are more familiar with e-commerce (online shopping) and are able to process information online five times faster than other consumers (Powers & Valentine, 2013). Research has shown that Generation Y males are more likely to spend more and shop more often online than females (Powers & Valentine, 2013). Yet, when shopping online, Generation Y females are more likely to purchase clothing and are specifically looking at price and product information for the garment (Powers & Valentine, 2013). With this being said, Generation Y is transforming how companies market to the general consumer, but specifically to Generation Y consumers (BCG, 2014).

Generation Y consumers are also prone to having an in-store experience more than any other adult population, with only 28 % preferring to shop online as they delight in the social aspect of shopping (O'Donnell, 2014). Female consumers particularly enjoy the experience around in-store shopping (Powers & Valentine, 2013). Along with social factors, external factors such as family and friends tend to guide Generation Y consumers' behavior. Peers or other individuals of prominence can often influence another consumer's shopping and consumption behavior through their own shopping habits (Hong & Kim, 2011).

The reputation of a company can also be an influential factor in Generation Y consumers shopping and consumption behaviors. Generation Y consumers prefer to purchase products from companies that they perceive as "good," also known as corporate altruism (BCG, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014). These "good" companies are partaking in social or environmental causes - they support charities or foundations and are giving back to their respective communities. Examples of these charities or foundations are Nike's Livestrong, Under Armour's I Will

What I Want, Gap's (RED) campaign or TOMS one for one (O'Donnell, 2014). Generation Y consumers tend to personally identify with a brand and are more likely to purchase from a brand when they are responsible, transparent, and an active-player in today's social issues (BCG, 2014).

As Generation Y is the future of the retail industry and make up the majority of the fitness clothing industry's target market, they are an important cohort to capture in order to sustain the growth of the fitness clothing industry (BCG, 2014; Griffin, 2013). Overall, it is imperative for companies to embrace this generation and their values and to effectively use the influence of technology in conjunction with external factors and corporate altruism to attract and retain Generation Y consumers.

#### 2.4 Consumer Needs and Values

Values are the basic needs and goals of individuals (Kim, 2005). Therefore, values tend to guide consumers' product selection and evaluation based on an individual's beliefs and the importance of that product relative to a consumer's self (Kim, 2005). Zethaml (1988) defines value as a "consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on the perceptions of what is received and what is given." Hence, values are desired (Ha & Jang, 2012) and play a critical role in the behavior of individuals in every facet of their daily lives (Gutman, 1982).

Yuan et al. (2011) gathered research focusing on the hierarchical relationship among consumer values, needs, and consumer behavior. Consumer values as mentioned earlier shape lifestyles and product selection. As established through Schwartz's List of Values (LOV) potential values of Generation Y consumers are self-respect, security, warm relationships with

others, sense of accomplishment, sense of belonging, being well respected, and fun and enjoyment in life (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1986; Kim, 2005). Consumer needs can be broken down by functional, symbolic, or experiential needs (Yuan, Song, & Kim, 2011). Functional needs fulfill the consumer by providing them with a product that solves a problem, thus fulfilling a consumer's utilitarian value with tangible product attributes (Yuan, Song, & Kim, 2011). Symbolic needs fulfill intangible needs or provide intangible benefits which relates to self-concept (Yuan, Song, & Kim, 2011). Self-concept allows for a mixture of both the physical and mental "self" (Evans, 1989). Self-concept is applicable to the clothing industry, specifically fitness clothing, in that garments can be worn for physical reasons (i.e. working out or staying warm) and can enhance emotions (i.e. communicating one's identity through clothing choices) (Evans, 1989).

“Although a consumer's motive structure varies over time due to changes in situation, roles and lifestyles, there remains a central theme or organization to the structure. Self-concept theory comprises a basic motivation to achieve the “ideal” self- whether in a “private” or “social” context” (Evans, 1989).

Symbolic needs can relate to consumers' values like the need for belonging, sense of accomplishment and self-respect (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1986; Yuan, Song, & Kim, 2011). Experiential needs can relate to hedonic values as consumers engage in enjoyable, emotionally enhancing, and exciting consumption experiences (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Hong & Kim, 2011). Furthermore, symbolic and experiential needs are driven by “social affiliation

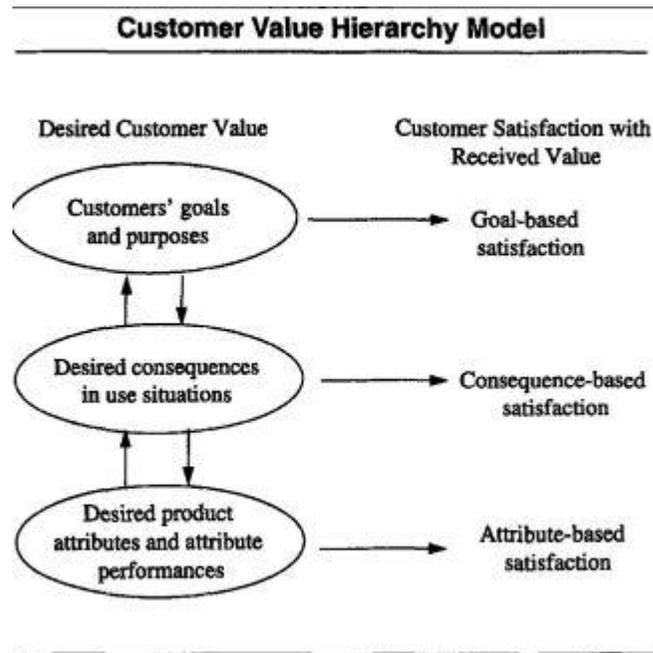
values” (Yuan, Song, & Kim, 2011) compared to functional needs that are driven by “self-directed or internal values which focus on personal preferences and goals” (Yuan, Song, & Kim, 2011). Altogether consumer values are desired and can motivate certain product selections and decision making processes as they can affect consumers’ needs (Gutman, 1982).

## 2.5 Customer Value Hierarchy

Customer values tend to influence purchasing behaviors (Ha & Jang, 2012) as customer value perceptions encompass a trade-off between what is received by a customer and what they concede in return for the possession and use of a product (Ha & Jang, 2012; Woodruff, 1997). Woodruff (1997) defines customer value as “a customer’s perceived preference for and evaluation of product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer’s goals and purposes in use situations.” The theory poses four important questions that incorporates customer’s values, both desired and received, as well as preferences and consequences (Ha & Jang, 2012; Woodruff, 1997). The questions to consider are as follows: “(1) What do customers value? (2) Of all things customers’ value, what should companies focus on? (3) How well do customers think companies deliver that value?, and lastly, (4) How will what customers value change in the future?” (Woodruff, 1997). The customer value hierarchy aims to answer those four questions and as result the hierarchical becomes an important managerial tool that provides companies with knowledge to better provide customer value (Woodruff, 1997).

The hierarchy is composed of three levels - product or service attribute, product or

service consequences, and customer goals or purposes. (Stahl, Barnes, Gardial, Parr, & Woodruff, 1999; Woodruff, 1997). Figure 1 depicts the customer value hierarchy model.



**Figure 1:** Customer Value Hierarchy Model (Woodruff, 1997)

The customer value hierarchy allows companies to refine their strategy to increase loyalty and growth (Stahl, Barnes, Gardial, Parr, & Woodruff, 1999).

It is critical to understand that “products or service create value not by delivering the innate characteristics of the product or service, but by delivering [the sought after] consequences in their [respective] use situations” (Stahl, Barnes, Gardial, Parr, & Woodruff, 1999). Through envisioning customer value as a hierarchy companies can receive more

knowledge about how customers “think about the value of products and use in situations” (Woodruff, 1997). The hierarchy is applicable to the fitness clothing industry as consumers are more heavily partaking in the athleisure trend (Cotton Inc., 2012; Park, 2006; Pasquarelli, 2014) and companies could benefit from understanding how to provide customer value in the usage situation of athleisure, as well as for fitness clothing’s use for exercising.

The customer value hierarchy is the framework that facilitates the Means-End Chain Model (Woodruff, 1997). And so, the goal of the MEC model is to identify hidden values within product attributes and the consequences or benefits that consumers seek for the products or services to provide (Ha and Jang, 2012; Stahl, Barnes, Gardial, Parr, & Woodruff, 1999). The customer value hierarchy is a further way to prefacing the Means-End Chain (MEC) model. The means-end chain model is similar to the customer value hierarchy as they both contain three levels. The MEC model’s goal is to reveal the desired attributes of a product or service, the product or service’s consequences, and the resulting values hoped to be achieved from buying or using a product or service (Gutman, 1982; Lee, Chang, & Liu, 2010).

## 2.6 Means-End Chain Model

“The Means-End Chain (MEC) model is a model that seeks to explain how a product or service selection facilitates the achievement of a desired end state” (Gutman, 1982). Means are products or services and endeavors a consumer partakes in (i.e. working out or reading a book) (Gutman, 1982). Ends are the resulting value states of those endeavors (i.e. sense of

accomplishment or happiness) (Gutman, 1982). This model helps reveal the perceptions of brands chosen by consumers and the drivers that motivate consumers' consumption choices (Olson & Walker, 1991). The MEC model allows for connections to be drawn from attributes to corresponding values and resulting consequences (Gutman, 1982; Ha & Jang, 2012). In the context of establishing and understanding consumers' product preferences and choices, these connections are established from information gathered about consumers' purchasing behaviors and end uses of products (Gutman, 1982; Ha & Jang, 2012; Lee, Chang, & Liu, 2010). The means are the physical aspects of the product itself while the ends are the values a consumer wishes to satisfy (Gutman, 1982). Application of the MEC model can dissect a consumer's associations with a product (Ha & Jang, 2012). It allows for the discovery of how a product satisfies a benefit, reaches a goal, or fulfills a value and creates importance to the consumer (Olson & Walker, 1991).

The MEC model is built off of three levels of consumer knowledge - attributes, consequences, and values (Olson & Walker, 1991). The MEC model progressively becomes more abstract as it goes, with attributes being responsible for the least abstract level

(Ha & Jang, 2012). Attributes are simply the physical aspects or characteristics of products or services (Ha & Jang, 2012). Hawley, Norum and Ko (2009) discuss the second level of consumer knowledge, consequences. Consequences can be both tangible and physical experiences (i.e. hunger or thirst) (Gutman, 1982) or emotional and more symbolic experiences (i.e. self-esteem or rising group status) (Gutman, 1982). A consequence aids in

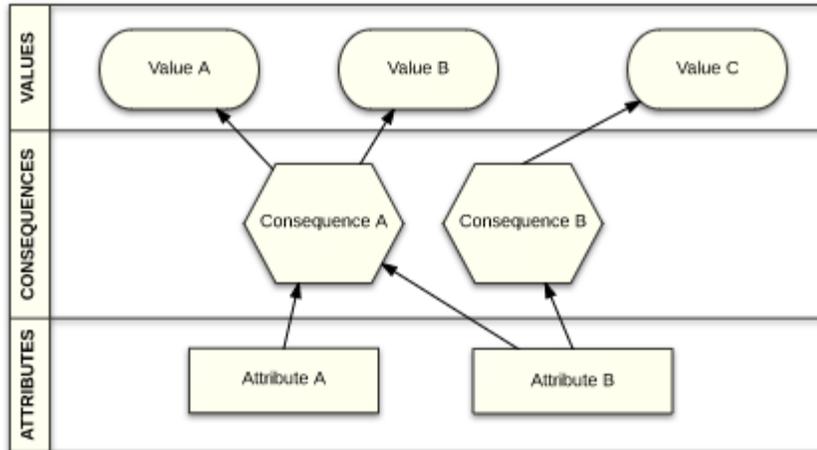
transporting a consumer to an end state (Hawley, Norum, & Ko, 2009). Therefore, consequences are a by-product of consumption and therefore integral to the formulation of the MEC model (Hawley, Norum, & Ko, 2009). The third level of consumer knowledge is values. Values can be the beliefs a consumer holds about their selves which can include goals or motivational beliefs (Ha & Jang, 2012). When the attributes of a product or service deliver the desired end state to a customer it is called consumer value (Ha & Jang, 2012). Products and services elicit an emotional response (Ha & Jang, 2012) and each have different meanings to individual consumers, therefore consumer value is critical in facilitating a behavior or choice when purchasing items (Ha & Jang, 2012). The MEC gains insight into the influences which persuade consumers' purchasing and consumption behavior (Gutman, 1982; Lee, Chang, & Liu, 2010).

Kirchhoff et al. (2011) illustrate how the MEC model can benefit social marketing and communications between businesses and the end consumers in the context of vegetable consumption. The research suggests communication strategies applicable to businesses through the discovery of attributes (Kirchhoff, Smyth, Sanderson, Sultanbawa, & Gething, 2011). Through a method referred to as "laddering" the researchers successfully identified attributes such as high nutrition and consequences that resulted in fulfilling values of an enjoyable life and achievement of consumers' personal goals (Kirchhoff, Smyth, Sanderson, Sultanbawa, & Gething, 2011). In another study by Ha and Jang (2012), the MEC model is effectively used in determining consumers' values for restaurant segments (fast food, causal,

and fine dining restaurants). Through the application of the MEC model and laddering method, the authors provide implications for effective marketing strategies and how to formulate competitive advertisements and promotions (Ha & Jang, 2012). Both these studies effectively use the laddering method in gathering research to construct the MEC model.

### 2.6.1 Laddering Method

Laddering method is typically used eliciting MEC data. It is a form of questioning and a tool frequently used by scholars to measure the customer means-end chain (Gutman, 1982). The laddering method operates in two steps. The first step is to identify the attributes a consumer solicits (Kirchhoff, Smyth, Sanderson, Sultanbawa, & Gething, 2011). The second step is the actual interview itself (Kirchhoff, Smyth, Sanderson, Sultanbawa, & Gething, 2011). The interview's purpose is to ask questions that uncover the connections between attributes, consequences, and values (Gutman, 1982; Kirchhoff, Smyth, Sanderson, Sultanbawa, & Gething, 2011). The questions asked are "why?" questions. For instance, "Why is that attribute (or consequence) important to you?" These questions in sequence of each other create a chain that reveals connections between the attributes, consequences, and values (Gutman, 1982; Olson & Walker, 1991). The data analysis of responses develops into a visual matrix known as the Hierarchical Value Matrix (HVM) that depicts the connections between values, attributes, and consequences (Olson & Walker, 1991). Pictured below in Figure 2, is an example of the Hierarchical Value Matrix (HVM) and how the results of this study, in particular, will be visually displayed as adapted from Kirchhoff et al (2011).



**Figure 2:** Hierarchical Value Matrix (Kirchhoff, Smyth, Sanderson, Sultanbawa, & Gething, 2011)

The end goal of the laddering method is to draw out the hidden attributes and values that consumers knowingly and unknowingly seek when purchasing a product or service (Ha & Jang, 2012). In the case of this research the laddering method of the MEC model will attempt to discover the attributes and the driving values behind fitness clothing consumption for a specific consumer segment.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate Generation Y consumers' behavior toward fitness clothing from the value perspective. Specifically, this study is designed to investigate Generation Y consumers' consumption of fitness clothing in terms of preferred attributes and driving values. As limited literature is available regarding Generation Y consumers' behavior toward fitness clothing, this study took an exploratory qualitative research approach.

#### 3.1 Research Design

A means-end chain approach (Gutman, 1982) with laddering interview technique was adopted to guide the design of this study. Through the laddering method one-on-one interviews were conducted with Generation Y consumers. The general structure of the interviews sought the following information - product attributes that consumers seek, consequences/benefits sought, and values driving the consumption of fitness clothing. The interviews were divided into two segments. The first was a survey to collect subject demographic information, information about the subjects' purchasing behavior of fitness clothing, how often subjects wear fitness clothing and for what activities, and lastly the brands and attributes they seek when deciding to buy and consume fitness clothing. The second segment of the interview was the interview itself. Based on the answers provided from the surveys, subjects were asked about the attributes listed individually. Using the laddering method and asking more questions about the attributes, the answers became more

abstract until arriving at the underlying value possessed by that subject about a certain attribute of fitness clothing.

### 3.2 Recruitment of Participants

The laddering interview method can be time consuming and due to budgetary restrictions, a goal of 50 subjects was set for this study. However, after 30 interviews little new information was generated. Therefore, the interview process stopped after conducting 35 interviews. This sample size (35) was in line with most sample sizes (range from 26-71) used in previous studies using the laddering technique (Gutman, 1982; Ha & Jang, 2012; Kirchhoff, Smyth, Sanderson, Sultanbawa, & Gething, 2011). The subjects were recruited from a large, mid-Atlantic university with a diverse representation of educational backgrounds and demographics. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the university. A snowballing recruiting method was used. The researcher visited sorority and fraternity houses recruiting subjects to participate in this study. In conjunction with the snowballing method, flyers were posted around campus in hopes of drawing in a diverse sample of subjects to interview. To motivate subjects to participate, an incentive in the form of a gift card to a popular coffee shop was provided to each participant.

### 3.3 Interview Questions

The goal of the laddering method is to gain an understanding of the final values consumers hold and how it related to the attributes. Typically, “why” questions can evoke a more abstract answer each time, leading further away from the attribute and closer to the

value (Veludo-de-Oliveira, Ikeda, & Campomar, 2006). The interview questions were aimed at identifying underlying values consumers hold about the attributes that influence their purchasing decisions. For instance, if the subject indicated durability as important, they were asked “Why is durability important to you?” If the subject replied with “Because durability most likely means the garment will last longer and therefore save me money” then the interviewer asked “Why is saving money important to you?” This pattern continued until a value was reached and then it was repeated for the next attribute on the list.

### 3.3.1 Pilot Test

A pilot test was conducted with two subjects to ensure the questions were understandable and clearly asked. Based on the pilot results, modifications were made to the questions in order to create a more cohesive and smooth interview. Due to the qualitative nature of the interview, the researcher had flexibility in changing the format and order of questions during the interview.

### 3.4 Data Collection

The data collection was split into two parts. In the first part, the subject filled out a short survey providing general demographic information and indicating the attributes they think are important in fitness clothing. The second part was the interview itself. From the list of important attributes the subject provided in the short survey, the subject was asked about each attribute individually. The interviews took place on campus during a two week time period in December, 2014. The interviews took place within the two libraries on the

university's campus to accommodate the subjects' schedules and to provide a quiet environment. Each subject was greeted upon arrival and casual conversation was made to make them feel more comfortable before beginning the detailed interview. Once the subject seemed more at ease, they were given the survey questions to answer before beginning the actual interview process. When the interview was completed each subject was compensated for their time through the incentive discussed earlier. Lastly, the subject was thanked for their help and time and then dismissed. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes until no new information was produced. Each subject was interviewed individually while being knowingly tape recorded. The tape recordings were then transcribed to ensure accurate collection of answers. A total number of 120 pages of transcripts were generated and used for data analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

#### 3.5.1 Category Development

The analysis and subsequent categorization of the data followed the common method employed by MEC research (Gutman, 1982). During the interviews multiple terms were used by subjects to describe attributes. It was determined that similar attributes would be grouped together developing a category and were denoted by using one term to represent all the similar terms (i.e. attributes) used. From the interviews of 35 subjects, 15 attributes, 8 consequences, and 7 values were identified, a total of 30 items. Through the process of categorization a total of nine attributes, seven consequences, and seven values were determined.

### 3.5.2 Coding

As typical for qualitative research, a coding system was developed to represent the attributes, consequences and values each subject identified. For example, the attribute *price* was denoted as “PR” and the attribute of *durability* which encompasses quality was referred to as “D.” Consequences such as *economic value* and *self-expression* were coded as “EV” and “SE” respectively. This system continued for all the other attributes, consequences, and values identified from the interviews. The data was coded by the principal researcher and an academic professor serving as an advisor. Both are familiar with the MEC model. The analysis examined all answers and discussions from the subjects. Each attribute, consequence and value means-end chain was coded individually and numbered based on its page number from the 120 pages of information transcribed from the tape recordings. This coding system aided the principal researcher and advisor to correctly interpret each individual means-end chain to properly reflect the subject’s underlying driving values. After coding, the identified items (attributes, consequences, and values) were tallied multiple times to ensure accuracy and reliable results. Once tallied, the Hierarchical Value Matrix (HVM) was drawn and revised several times to confirm the results discovered during coding. After confirming the results, the final Hierarchical Value Matrix (HVM) was created.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Profile of Participating Subjects

A total of 35 student subjects (28 females and 7 males), ages 18-32 with the average age of 21.6, participated in this study. The class standings of subjects varied, 43.0% were seniors. Graduate students and sophomores each represented 17.1% of the subjects who participated. Juniors and freshman each made up the remaining 11.4% of the subjects. They represented a variety of majors and colleges across the university. Around half (48.6%) of the subjects purchased general apparel products 1-3 times per month, with the remaining subjects shopping less frequently as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Frequency of Apparel Products Purchase

<b>Frequency of Purchase</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1-3 times per week	2.86%
1-3 times per month	48.57%
1-3 times per 3 months	31.43%
1-3 times per 6 months	11.43%
1-3 times per year	5.71%

All of the subjects have purchased fitness clothing in the past with 97.1% of them wearing fitness clothing for activities other than exercising. The top three fitness clothing brands purchased by the subjects included Nike (29.6%), Adidas (18.3%), and Under Armour (13.0%). The top ten brands mentioned in the survey segment of the interview are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Top Ten Fitness Clothing Brands

<b>Brands</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Nike	29.6%
Adidas	18.3%
Under Armour	13.0%
Brooks	5.22%
Victoria's Secret	4.35%
Target Private Brand (C9)	4.35%
Asics	4.35%
New Balance	3.48%
Lululemon	3.48%

#### 4.2 Salient Attributes Identified

In order to develop the Hierarchical Value Matrix to reflect the links between values and consumers' preferred product attributes for fitness clothing, the preferred attributes, perceived consequences of attributes, and consumer values were first identified. As discussed in Chapter three, categories were developed to synthesize the number of similar attributes into a common group denoted by one attribute. Therefore, terms such as performance, durability, and aesthetics were selected to represent multiple attributes of similarity listed. While literature classified wick-ability and breathability as the performance attributes of a garment, data collected suggested that the attributes of wick-ability and breathability were discussed separately from the performance attribute. Whereas, the support, flexibility, and functionality of fitness clothing was discussed in conjunction with the performance attribute. For that reason, the attributes support, flexibility, and functionality were categorized as the performance of a garment, hence differing from research. Durability was chosen to represent durability and quality as both durability and quality can refer to the longevity of a garment

and were discussed hand-in-hand during the interviews. Aesthetics was also chosen as a term used to represent the attributes of color and style. Table 3 represents the identified attributes preferred by the subjects collectively. Aesthetics seemed to be the most salient attribute identified by the subjects, followed by price, performance, fit and durability. Brand names and fiber contents were also mentioned, but the links of the attributes such as brand names and fiber content to their respective consequences and values weren't as strong as the other salient attributes provided. Therefore, they were not included in developing the Hierarchical Value Matrix.

**Table 3: Salient Attributes Identified**

<b>ATTRIBUTES</b>	<b>COUNTS</b>
Aesthetics (A)	26
Price (PR)	23
Durability (D)	18
Performance (P)	17
Fit (F)	17
Brand (B)	9
Fiber Contents (FC)	8
Breathability (BR)	6
Wick-ability (W)	4

#### 4.3 Consequences Identified

Once the salient product attributes were identified the collective consequences of the subjects were identified. Consequences tend to be slightly more abstract and are integral to reaching a consumer's desired end-state or value. As shown in Table 4, a total of six consequences were identified that aided subjects in reaching their desired end-state or value.

*Economic value* (EV) reflects the financial benefits consumers received and responses included “saving money,” “a good value,” “not wasting money” and “saving for the future.”

*Image* (I) refers to someone’s social image, how a subject perceives others thinking of them, often based on their appearance. For example, subjects stated that “I wouldn’t want people to exclude me based on my appearance” or “So I can stand out in a crowd.” Whereas,

*Self-expression* (SE) is how a subject wants to express their personality through their fitness clothing or exercise activities. For instance, one subject noted that “colors allow me to show off my personality.”

*Efficiency* (E) signifies how an attribute assists a subject in feeling or being more productive often declaring “I feel like I am more active” or “I can focus better”.

The consequence of *Comfort* (C) was used to describe how fitness clothing influenced how they felt. Subjects would state that fitness clothing needs to be “comfortable” and would avoid being “uncomfortable” whether at the gym or during various other activities.

Lastly, *Avoiding Embarrassment* (AE) is similar to *image*, but is a consequence referring to a subject avoiding embarrassment by wearing fitness clothing that serves its purpose (i.e. performance, wick-ability, and breathability attributes) or fits flattering (i.e. fit and aesthetic attributes).

**Table 4:** Perceived Consequences of Attributes

<b>Consequences</b>	<b>Counts</b>
Economic Value (EV)	25
Image (I)	18
Efficiency (E)	14
Comfort (C)	8

**Table 4 Continued**

Self-Expression (SE)	5
Avoiding Embarrassment (AE)	3

#### 4.4 Underlying Values Identified

Table 5 depicts the seven values revealed in this study, including self-esteem, social recognition, security, freedom, accomplishment, physical well-being and happiness. The seven values listed can be thought of as elements that steer behavior of consumers (Rokeach, 1973). The following sections provide a description of each identified value in detail.

**Table 5: Resulting Values of Preferred Attributes and Perceived Consequences**

Values	Counts
Self-Esteem	19
Social Recognition	15
Security	14
Freedom	10
Accomplishment	8
Physical Well-being	7
Happiness	1

*Self-esteem* refers to one's level of confidence or respect for themselves (Rokeach, 1973). Some subjects would state that they "don't want to look ugly or like a freak." While another subject mentioned that they "don't want to wear something that people won't accept them for." Other subjects would say that "if I have a cute exercise outfit on, I want to show it off" or that "working out allowed them to be more confident" about themselves.

*Self-esteem* relates to the self-concept of symbolic needs. *Self-esteem* aims to allow an individual to realize their “ideal” self in either a private or social context. *Social recognition* also relates to self-concept theory, but revolves around attaining one’s ideal self in a social context versus *self-esteem* in a private context.

*Social recognition* linked to the consequences of *image* and *self-expression* which both encompasses showing off one’s personality through appearance or being accepted by peers through one’s appearance. As discussed above *social recognition* is linked with symbolic needs and an individual’s need for belonging or acknowledgement.

The value of *social recognition* revolves around the admiration or respect given by peers (Kamakura & Novak, 1992; Rokeach, 1973). For example one subject stated “I don’t necessarily wear it to be seen, but when I do and someone knows what I am wearing and appreciates it, it’s nice.” Other subjects described fitness clothing as a way “to define who they are,” or that they “want to be known by others,” and “make good impressions.”

The values of *security* and *freedom* are similar in that both have an aspect of financial security and the ability to have choices by being financially stable. *Security* contributes to a subject feeling capable of taking care of themselves or others who are of importance to them (Kamakura & Novak, 1992; Rokeach, 1973). When interviewing the subjects they referred to having “enough money for other priorities” or “being able to provide for others.” *Freedom* can also relate to the ability to freely express a subject’s personality or the freedom to choose to purchase any piece of fitness clothing a consumer wishes. For instance, a subject disclosed

that by purchasing durable, quality pieces of fitness clothing that lasted them subsequently “had more money and freedom to spend it on other wants and needs.” Some subjects stated that the wide range of aesthetics “gave them the freedom to project different personas through their fitness clothing.”

*Accomplishment* refers to a subject feeling a sense of accomplishment (Rokeach, 1973) or certain level of efficiency and productivity throughout their day or life. It could also facilitate a subject in feeling as though they left a lasting contribution. Interviewed subjects would state that they “want to be efficient” and “workout to my fullest.” Some subjects indicated that they strived to “work hard” and be “successful” starting with “maintaining health and fitness.”

The last identified value is *physical well-being*. *Physical well-being* signifies a subject’s healthy habits or longevity of life that they strive for through sought out attributes and resulting consequences. Subjects stated that they wanted to “stay in shape,” “live a long life,” “have the best life possible,” and “stay healthy.”

#### 4.5 Hierarchical Value Matrix

The Hierarchical Value Matrix (HVM) was formulated from the identified salient product attributes, resulting consequences, and uncovered values. The lowest level of the matrix is the attributes. The middle of the matrix revolves around the slightly more abstract consequences while the highest level of the matrix is reserved for the uncovered hidden values held by the subjects. The connecting lines between each level were drawn to illustrate the means-end chain connection from an attribute all the way to the value. Each line is

labeled with a count, illustrating the number of times that a salient attribute resulted in a respective consequence or a particular consequence led to a desired end-state or value.

The resulting Hierarchical Value Matrix is composed of seven attributes, six consequences, and six values. A cutoff value of two was established to avoid drawing all lines between the three levels. The counts of the attributes, consequences, and values compared to their corresponding lines do not always equal each other. During the interviews attributes would not always lead to a consequence or a consequence would not always continue to meet a desired end. One of the identified values, happiness, was not included in the matrix due to the limited number of mention as seen in Figure 3.



- *Price (PR)* and *durability (D)* solely connected to the consequence *economic value (EV)* which solely links with the values, *security* and *freedom*. Both *price (P)* and *durability (D)* lead to the consequence of *economic value (EV)* as subjects strive to save money and get their money's worth from durable, quality fitness clothing pieces purchased.
- The attribute, *performance (P)*, connects to the consequences of *economic value (EV)*, *comfort (C)*, and *efficiency (E)*. The *performance (P)* features of a garment can allow a consumer to feel more comfortable by providing flexibility and support. It can also aid a subject in potentially being more efficient during a workout. The *economic value (EV)* derived from *performance (P)* features relates to if a consumer feels that they are receiving their money's worth by the garment serving its purpose.
- The *breathability (BR)* attribute exclusively connects to the consequence of *comfort (C)* which joins with the values of *physical well-being* and *self-esteem*.
- *Wick-ability (W)* singularly links to the consequence of *avoiding embarrassment (AE)* as a subject often tries to avoid feeling self-conscious about their sweat and appearance while working out, therefore allowing them to focus only on the workout or task at hand.
- *Fit (F)* connects to the consequences of *efficiency (E)* and *image (I)* as a piece of fitness clothing, if properly fitting, can also aid in the efficiency and completion of a productive workout. While flattering, properly fitting fitness clothing can influence a subject's perceived *image*.

- The final attribute listed on the Hierarchical Value Matrix is *aesthetics* (A) connecting to both *self-expression* (SE) and *image* (I).
- The middle level of the Hierarchical Value Matrix is reserved for resulting consequences that lead to underlying values held by subjects. As *economic value* (EV) and *comfort* (C) have been discussed, the other four consequences were analyzed.
- The consequence of *efficiency* (E) leads to the values of *physical well-being*, *accomplishment*, and *self-esteem*.
- Both *self-expression* (SE) and *image* (I) solely connect to the values of *self-esteem* and *social recognition*.
- The last consequence of *avoiding embarrassment* exclusively joins the value of *self-esteem*. These are the major resulting consequences that enable the subjects to reach their desired end-states relative to this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DICUSSION

#### 5.1 Analysis of Preferred Product Attributes

Attributes are an evaluative measure used by consumers when making purchasing decisions. Research showed that consumers seek out various attributes of fitness clothing when browsing selections (Cotton Inc., 2012; Gong, Li, Wu, & Zhang, 2002; Palmieri, 2013; Salfino 2, 2012) to help in determining ultimately what fitness clothing pieces to purchase. This study found that 97.1% of participants wear fitness clothing for other activities than exercising, which is supported by the literature declaring 93% of consumers wear fitness clothing as athleisure (Salfino 2, 2012; Cohen 2, 2014). Results of this study identified seven prevalent attributes sought out by the 35 subjects interviewed. These attributes as reported in chapter four were *aesthetics*, *price*, *performance*, *fit*, *durability*, *breathability*, and *wick-ability*.

Literature stated attributes such as the comfort of a garment, fit, brand, price, style and the performance of a garment were main attributes looked for by consumers (Cotton Inc., 2012; Park, 2006; Pasquarelli, 2014; Salfino 1, 2013). Through the analysis of the data collected, it was determined that subjects referred to comfort in the sense of a consequence instead of an attribute due to how subjects discussed comfort. Comfort aided subjects in reaching underlying values. In line with the literature, *aesthetics* (style and color), *price*, *performance*, and *fit* were identified to be evaluative attributes used by the subjects interviewed. The three major attributes identified in the hierarchical value matrix were

*aesthetics, price, and durability* due to their high counts- 26, 23, and 18 respectively.

*Price* and *durability*, being predominant attributes sought after by the subjects, reflect what Generation Y consumers are looking for when shopping for fitness clothing. While Generation Y may be the future of consumerism and the retail industry, the majority of them are still in college, just graduated, have settled into their first job or are starting a family, making them financially conscious. These consumers are price sensitive and with the ability to process information faster and seek comparative prices (Powers & Valentine, 2013). While consumers are willing and prepared to pay a higher price for fitness clothing versus traditional clothing (Cotton Inc., 2012), *price* plays an influential role in consumers gathering information about the product and determining the potential longevity of a product. Consumers tend to infer the quality of a product based on the *price*. This insight offers fitness clothing companies, high-end fashion designers, and fast fashion retailers the opportunity to strategically price their fitness clothing offerings to reflect the durability (and quality) of the garment and capture their target market.

Along with *price* the attribute of *aesthetics* also played a critical role for Generation Y consumers. Due to a prevalence of the underlying value, *self-esteem* the results indicated that the subjects strive to stay in line with trends or look presentable, but with a restricted budget some subjects sought out more expensive pieces of durability and quality that offered longevity. Other subjects waited to find pieces on sale or bought pieces of lesser value so that they could purchase more. With 48.6% of the subjects purchasing apparel products one to

three times per month, it is imperative for companies within the industry and marketers to understand the integral attributes looked for in fitness clothing by consumers. By offering garments that appease consumers wants companies can create an environment of loyal, returning customers.

Generation Y plays a big role within the fitness clothing industry, therefore having the knowledge that these consumers seek aesthetically pleasing and durable fitness clothing at competitive prices is beneficial to the major players within the industry and others trying to penetrate the fitness clothing market. These three influential attributes lead to the two most predominant consequences, *economic value* and *image*.

## 5.2 Analysis of Consequences

Consequences represent the bridge from attribute to value. Consequences can represent both tangible and intangible experiences (Gutman, 1982). Consequences, by being innately more abstract are integral to a consumer's needs being satisfied and assists in transporting a consumer to their desired end-state or value. The results of this study determined six consequences - *economic value*, *image*, *efficiency*, *comfort*, *self-expression*, and *avoiding embarrassment*. While *economic value*, *image*, and *efficiency* were the three most discussed consequences that transported subjects to their underlying values, two consequences were of particular importance identified in this study - *economic value* and *image*.

As reported in Chapter 4 *economic value* is linked to the consequences of *price* and

*durability*. *Economic value* tended to relate to the value of a garment, saving money or getting the best price. The price and durability of fitness clothing were important as they were signs of quality and value as discussed above and in the literature review. Subjects in this study reached their *economic value* through considering these attributes as ways to potentially save money by either spending more on a durable, long-lasting piece of apparel or spending less by purchasing something on sale or of lesser value. *Economic value* in relation to Generation Y consumers can also be interpreted from the perspective of “purchasing goods of value”. Generation Y consumers appreciate the truth and experience companies offer, but also the “good” some of these companies may be doing. Generation Y consumers may be more likely to purchase products from companies that give back, partake in causes, and support charities and foundations that are in line with their beliefs. Fitness clothing companies like Nike with the Livestrong campaign and Under Armour with its “I Will What I Want” campaign are offering products of value to consumers. Other fitness clothing companies could integrate campaigns appealing to Generation Y consumer’s seeking the benefits of *economic value* from the products or services they acquire.

*Image* was the second most discussed consequence during the interviews, with a count of 18 responses. The attributes of *fit* and *aesthetics* lead to this consequence. As *image* was based on how one perceived themselves in a social setting and their appearance, the attributes of *fit* and *aesthetics* sensibly contribute to reaching this consequence. Through the availability of more fitness clothing and the trend of athleisure consumers are afforded more

options to choose from when it comes to fit, style and color of fitness clothing pieces. The fit of a garment is especially important to consumers as 24% prefer well-fitting clothes (Cotton Inc., 2012). Therefore, enabling consumers to showcase their individual style while making good impressions or being accepted by peers.

*Image* is of importance as Generation Y allows family, friends, and individuals of prominence (i.e. celebrity endorsers) to guide their behavior, influencing their shopping habits. The results of this study show that subjects place precedence on *aesthetics* and their *image*. Thus, fitness clothing companies can benefit from understanding how the influence of others affect shopping behavior and the level of importance Generation Y consumers place on their outwardly appearance. When combining *image* with the consequence of *economic value*, fast fashion retailers entering into the fitness clothing market or improving current fitness clothing product offerings will be at an advantage. Fast fashion retailers will be able to supply fashionable, reasonably priced fitness clothing appealing to Generation Y. Therefore, fast fashion retailers will be able to provide two out of three of the major attributes sought while delivering on two crucial consequences Generation Y consumers strive to satisfy. The consequences of *economic value* and *image* lead to the major values identified in this study.

### 5.3 Analysis of Values

Values can act as a navigation tool for decisions being made about products and services. Consumers use not only evaluative attributes, but also underlying values held to

make purchase and usage decisions about products or services acquired. Values guide consumers' product selection based on beliefs held by a consumer and the product or service's ability to aid in reaching a consumer's desired end-state. The values recognized from the data collected in this study were *security, freedom, physical well-being, accomplishment, self-esteem, and social recognition*. The three most discussed values were *security, self-esteem, and social recognition* due to their higher counts compared to the other three values.

The consequence of *economic value* solely led to the value of *security*, based on study results. As discussed in Chapter four, *security* often signifies financial capabilities meaning being stable or having the ability to take care of oneself or others. Consumer's values can shape lifestyles and product selections. *Security* can relate to the functional and symbolic needs of a consumer. Products that exhibit the attributes that result in the value of *security* are often solving a problem or are being worn for physical reasons and can enhance one's emotions. The value of *security* can be thought of as a self-directed or internal value which focuses on the individual's preferences and goals. Those preferences and goals may be to provide for and help others, but they are internalized versus driven by social affiliation.

The values of *self-esteem* and *social recognition* linked to the consequence of *image*. *Self-esteem* centers more on ones' self and the confidence or respect an individual has for themselves. Whereas *social recognition* revolves around others and the admiration or respect gained from peers. *Self-esteem* is not only the result of *image*, but many consequences as

seen in the HVM. *Comfort, self-expression, efficiency, and avoiding embarrassment* were all shown to lead to *self-esteem* as well. These consequences help a consumer feel better about themselves, allowing them to have more self-esteem.

These three major values were held by the subjects because they strived to attain their “ideal” self. The subjects looked for attributes that transport them to the consequences which allowed them to reach their desired end-states or fulfill their purposes and goals. Fitness clothing companies that are able to grasp and apply this information will appeal to Generation Y consumers. Generation Y consumers seek out pieces of clothing that offer them benefits more than the simplicity of price. The product development division of companies can interpret this finding to improve their current product offerings. By offering products at a higher level of durability (and quality), but maintaining a competitive price will draw more Generation Y consumers to the company. These consumers ultimately want to feel secure about their choices as they endeavor to find higher levels of self-esteem and social recognition from these pieces. Campaigns that empower consumers’ confidence and encourage achieving an “ideal-” self will best resonate with Generation Y.

Along with raising confidence levels (self-esteem), appealing to consumers who are price conscious and want to still feel secure after making purchasing decisions is key. Offering more sales on durable pieces will go far with Generation Y consumers. Fitness clothing companies can apply these concepts to their marketing campaigns and business practices to manage their customer relationship by actively communicate with and

subsequently capturing more Generation Y consumers.

This study aimed to explore the influence of consumer values on Generation Y consumer's shopping behavior toward fitness clothing. The study revealed that 97.1% of the subjects wore fitness clothing for other activities than exercise and aimed to identify salient product features that Generation Y consumers look for in fitness clothing. The results of the data and the MEC model confirm this and provide advantageous information for the fitness clothing industry. It will be beneficial for fitness clothing companies like Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour (as they are regarded as the top three fitness clothing brands as found in the results of this study and previous research) to integrate this information into their respective marketing practices. Companies will have an advantage by understanding how to provide customer value in fitness clothing's usage situation of athleisure as well as its usage in exercise. Upon delivering sought after consequences from the preferred attributes of fitness clothing that result in consumers reaching their desired end-state, goals, or values, companies will be able to increase loyalty and growth in sales.

#### 5.4 Limitations of the Study and Future Studies

Limitations to this study exist. First, while the sample size was in line with the average sample size of similar studies and no new information was produced after interviewing 35 subjects, it could be beneficial to examine whether more or differing attributes, consequences, and values are determined from a different sampling unit, such as non-student Gen Y population. Secondly, the sample consisted predominantly females (28

female and 7 male). This was due to the primarily voluntary nature of subject selection. More females agreed to participate. It would be interesting for future studies to interview more males to see if differences exist between genders in terms of attributes and the resulting consequences and values of those opposing attributes.

While the study addressed the uses of fitness clothing and salient product features that Generation Y consumers look for in fitness clothing, it lacks addressing the possible shopping motivations toward fitness clothing. It could be of importance for companies to understand why consumers go to purchase fitness clothing as well as what this study found of usages and salient product features. A future study could focus on those motivations providing beneficial managerial implications that would fully allow marketers to understand the motivations, along with usages, and sought out attributes, consequences, and values that drive consumers' purchases.

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