

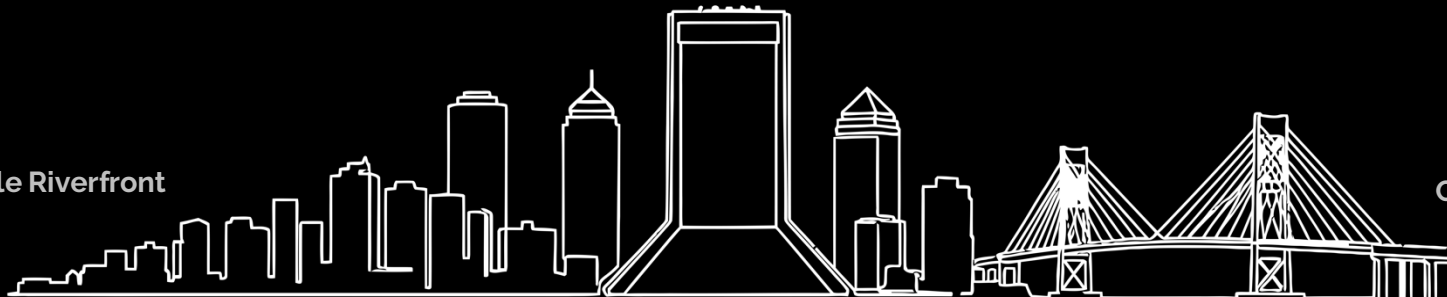
LIFESTYLE BRANDING IN A CAMPUS WORLD: BUILDING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS THAT DRIVE LOYALTY

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Currents of Opportunity, ICBA 2026

February 5, 2026
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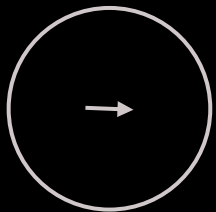
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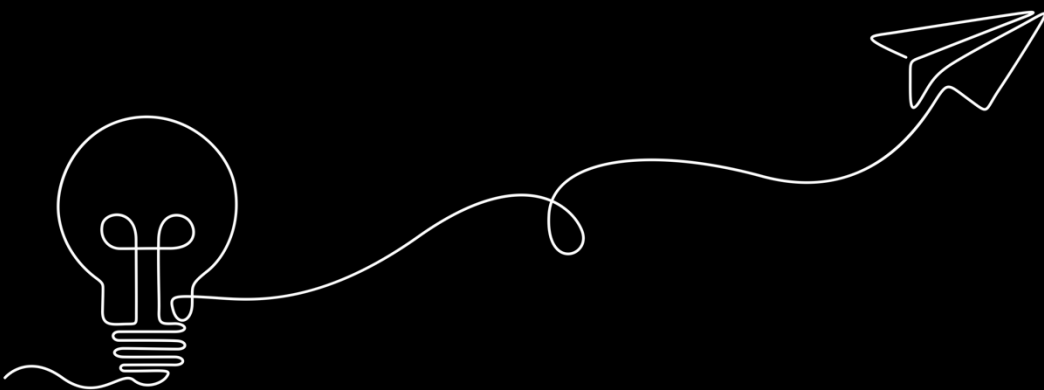
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Lifestyle Branding in a Campus World

Building Emotional Connections that Drive Loyalty



Students don't just purchase products—they buy into lifestyles, values, and experiences that reflect their own identities. For independent college stores, this presents a unique opportunity to transcend transactions and transform their stores into cultural hubs on campus.

This session covers the principles of lifestyle branding and shows how to align your marketing with students' identities, values, and daily routines.

Session Details

Using real-world examples and practical strategies, attendees will learn how to turn their stores into lifestyle-driven brands that connect with today's students and alums.

KEY TOPICS

- The Psychology of Lifestyle Branding
- Practical Strategies for Store Marketers
- Campus Culture as a Brand Asset
- Creative Ideation Mini-Workshop

**“PEOPLE USE BRANDS TO TELL STORIES
ABOUT WHO THEY ARE, WHERE THEY
BELONG, AND WHAT THEY VALUE.”**

— Grant McCracken

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LIFESTYLE BRANDING

TARGET AUDIENCE

Gen Z

College Students



UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S STUDENTS (GEN Z - ZOOMERS)

BIRTH YEARS: 1997 – 2012

AGES: 14-29 YRS OLD

- Value Authenticity and Transparency
- Digital Natives
- Prioritize Wellness and Balance
- Seek Community and Purpose

75%

of Deloitte Global Gen Z Survey respondents
expect brands to contribute positively to society.

Deloitte, Global Gen Z and Millennial Survey (2023)

HOW STUDENTS DISCOVER BRANDS

- Peer Influence
- Social Storytelling
- Lived Experiences



92%

of consumers trust recommendations from people they know
over any form of advertising.

Nielsen, Global Trust in Advertising Report (2021)

**EMOTIONALLY CONNECTED CUSTOMERS
ARE MORE THAN TWICE AS VALUABLE AS
HIGHLY SATISFIED CUSTOMERS,
BECAUSE THEY BUY MORE OFTEN
AND ADVOCATE MORE STRONGLY.**

Harvard Business Review, The New Science of Customer Emotions (2015)

70%

of Gen Z consumers say they
try to buy from companies they believe
are ethical and authentic.

McKinsey & Company, True Gen: Generation Z and Its Implications for Companies (2019)

~~TRANSACTIONS~~ → RELATIONSHIPS



Product-driven Branding = “What we Sell”

Lifestyle Branding = “Who this is for? What does it say about them? “

LIFESTYLE BRANDING IS ABOUT ALIGNMENT

- Rooted in identity and belonging.
- Reflects daily routines, rituals, and values.
- Creates emotional—not just functional—value.



LIFESTYLE BRANDS AFFIRMATIONS

- Identity and Self-expression
“This is who I am.”
- Daily Rituals
“This fits into my everyday life.”
- Values-Driven & Ethics
“This reflects what I care about.”
- Belonging & Participation
“This is where I show up with others.”

STUDIES SHOW THAT EMOTIONALLY
CHARGED EXPERIENCES ARE
REMEMBERED LONGER AND RECALLED
MORE VIVIDLY THAN NEUTRAL ONES.

Damasio, A. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994)

IDENTITY AND SELF-EXPRESSION

“THIS IS WHO I AM.”



URBAN OUTFITTERS

aerie





RUN FOR THE OCEANS

adidas

PARLEY

JOIN US [ADIDAS.COM/PARLEY](https://adidas.com/parley)

URBAN OUTFITTERS





aerie



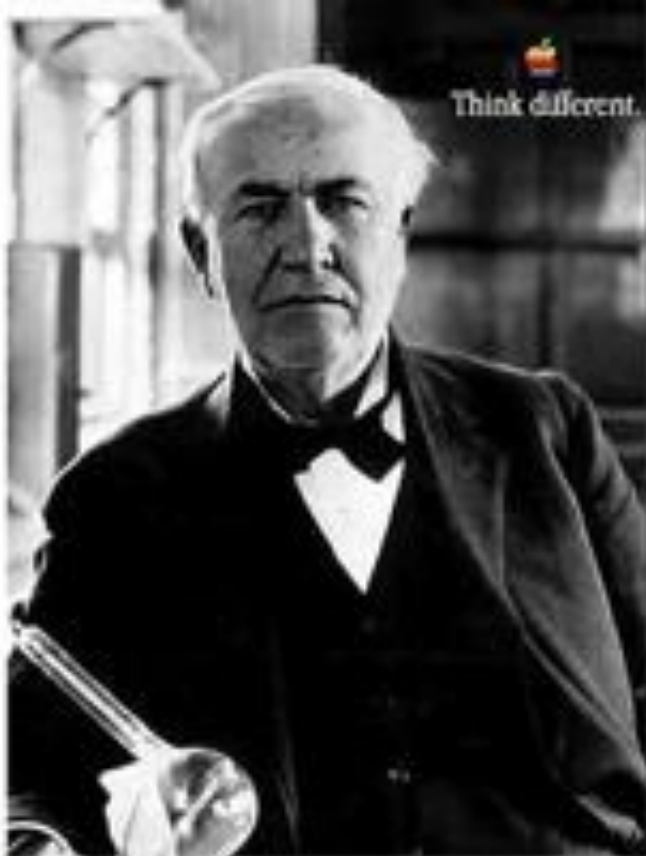
Think different.



Think different.



Think different.



Think different.



Think different.



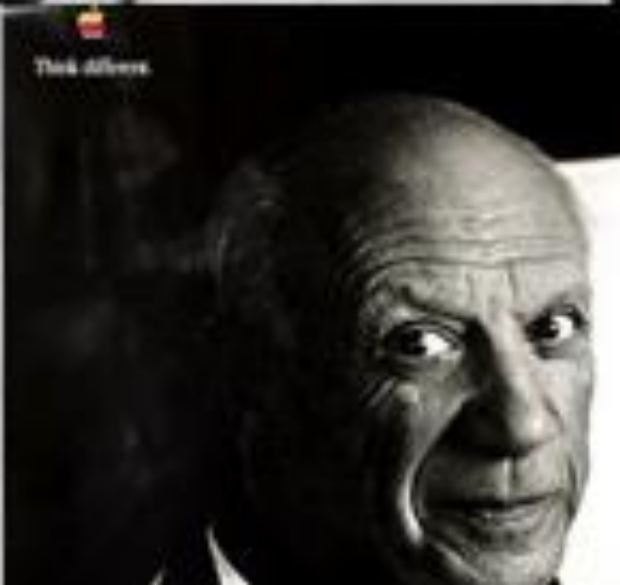
Think different.



Think different.



Think different.





DAILY RITUAL BRANDS

“THIS FITS INTO
MY EVERYDAY LIFE.”







owala.



STARBUCKS COFFEE





dear
duolingo

VALUES-DRIVEN & ETHICAL BRANDS

“THIS REFLECTS WHAT
I CARE ABOUT.”

TOMS

VEJA

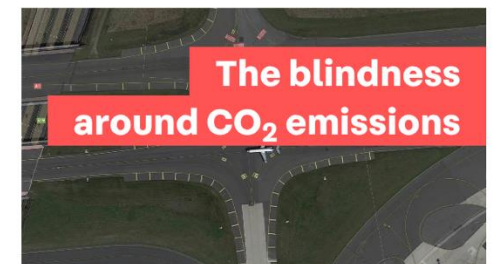
allbirds

EVERLANE



TOMS

Since 2005, VEJA has been creating sneakers in a different way, mixing social projects, economic justice, and ecological materials.



<https://youtu.be/Jv3ZShuPatw?si=aLkL38hoWL4B7ykA>



allbirds



everworld

We're on a mission to clean up a dirty industry.
These are the people, stories, and ideas that will
help us get there.

The Latest



February Editor's Picks

Product



Spring Incoming

Style



And the Award Goes to...

Style



Behind the Spring Edit

Style



January Editor's Picks

Product



Behind The Edit: Better
Beginnings

Style

EVERLANE

[SUSTAINABILITY](#) [IMPACT REPORT](#) [FABRIC CARE](#) [RE:EVERLANE](#) [ABOUT](#) [STORES](#)



Fashioning A Better Future

We're on a mission to clean up the industry. It's a movement we're calling
Cleaner Fashion.

EVERLANE

BELONGING & PARTICIPATION BRANDS

“THIS IS WHERE I
SHOW UP WITH OTHERS.”

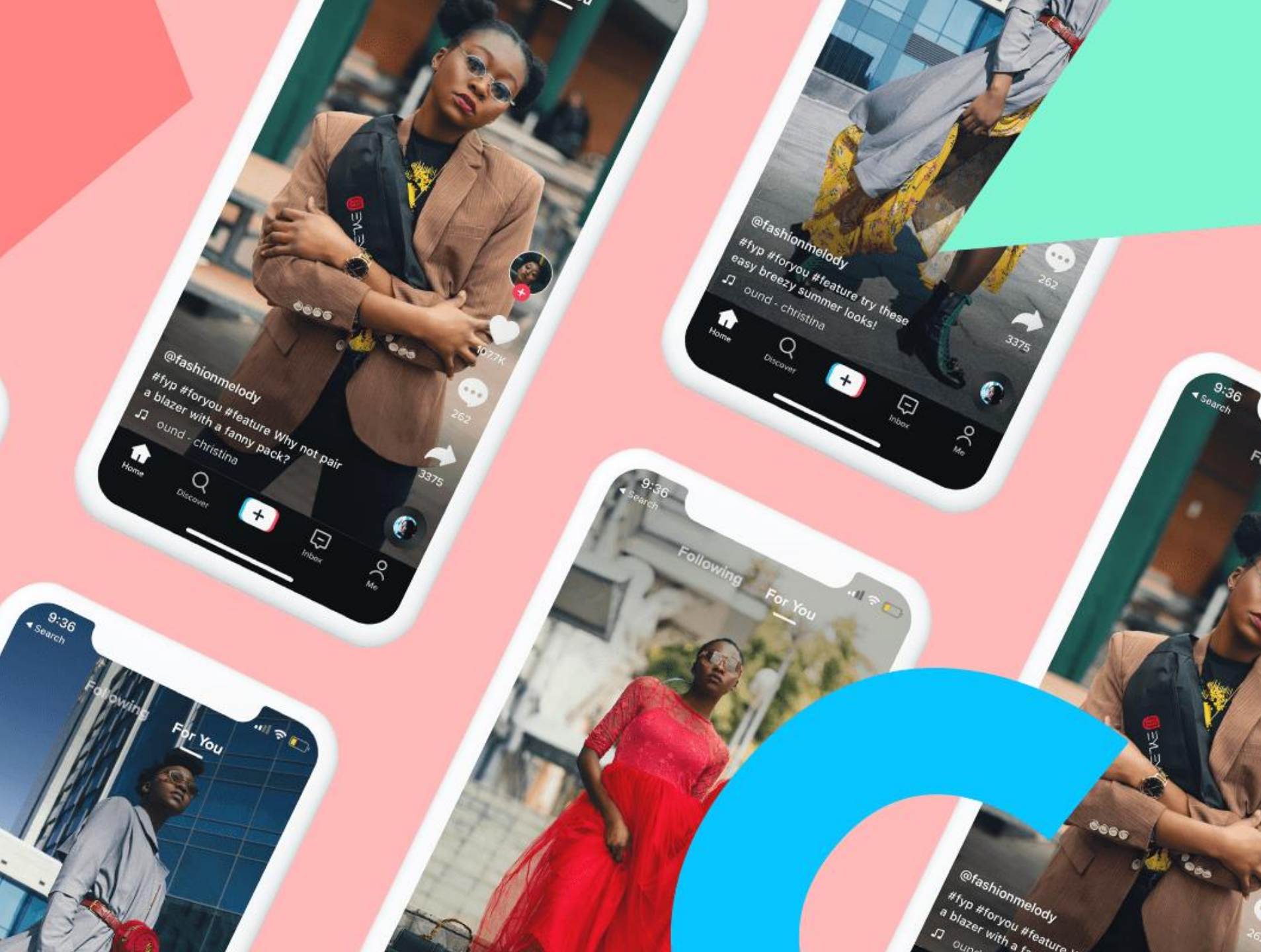


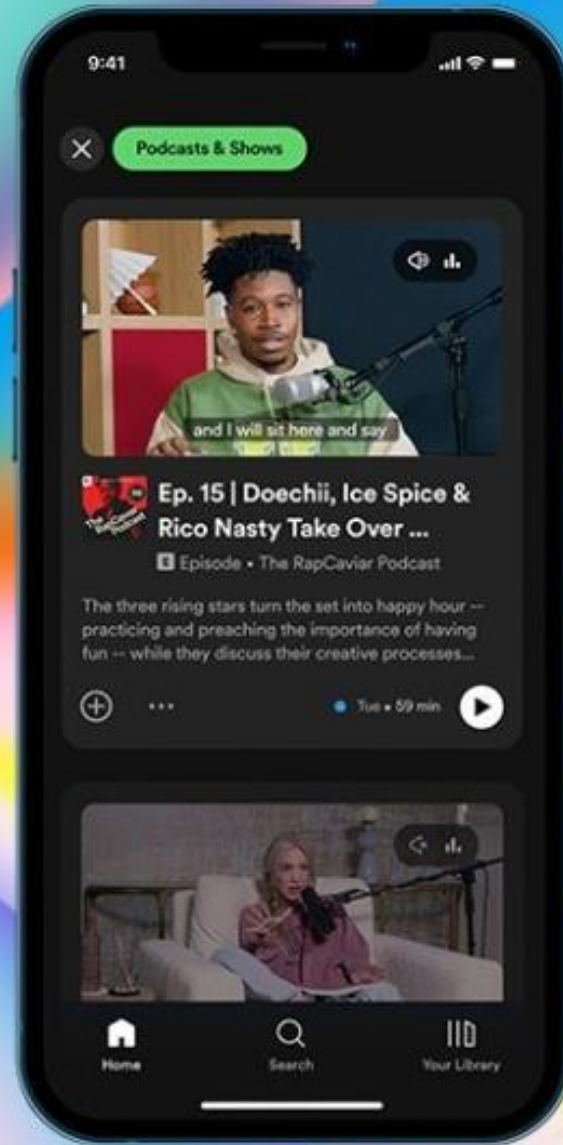
Spotify®



lululemon

crocs™









crocs™



**WHY DOES THIS MATTER
FOR CAMPUS STORES?**

PRODUCTS = LIFESTYLE

APPAREL = BELONGING

SUPPLIES = RITUALS

SPACES = SOCIAL PROOF

GEN Z
DOESN'T
SEPARATE
PRODUCTS
FROM
IDENTITY.

Brands function as
social language.

Loyalty is driven by
values + participation.

Stores succeed when they feel
like **cultural hubs**, not retail
warehouses.

PEOPLE SPEND MORE TIME—AND MONEY—
IN SPACES WHERE THEY **FEEL COMFORTABLE**
AND **SOCIALLY AFFIRMED**.

CAMPUS STORES AREN'T NEUTRAL SPACES;
THEY **ACTIVELY REINFORCE BELONGING**.

Underhill, P. Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping (2009)

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR BOOK STORE MARKETERS

STRATEGIES

- Life-Style Branded Store Layouts
- Visual Merchandising
- Social Media
- Events & Experiences

**A GEN Z CAMPUS BOOKSTORE ISN'T
ORGANIZED BY PRODUCT TYPE—
IT'S ORGANIZED BY IDENTITY, RITUAL,
VALUES, AND BELONGING.**

WHAT DOES A LIFESTYLE- BRANDED STORE LOOK LIKE?

ZONES

1. Identity and Self-expression
“This is who I am.”
2. Daily Rituals
“This fits into my everyday life.”
3. Values-Driven & Ethical
“This reflects what I care about.”
4. Belonging & Participation
“This is where I show up with others.”

**ZONE 1:
IDENTITY
AND SELF-
EXPRESSION**

Front-of-Store / Power Wall

Vibe:

- Statement. Belonging. First impression.

Brand Signals:

- Nike-inspired, Urban Outfitters-inspired, Patagonia-inspired

Retail Insight:

These zones perform best when styled as outfits or identity statements, not folded stacks.



ZONE 2:
**DAILY
RITUALS**

Central Spine / High-Traffic Path

Vibe:

- Routine, comfort, habit

Brand Signals:

- Stanley-inspired, Owala-inspired, Starbucks-inspired

Retail Insight:

Think **ritual bundles**: “Study Night Kit,”
“Morning Reset,” “Hydration Station.”

STUDY NIGHT

Focus, Relax, Succeed

MORNING RESET

Refresh, Recharge, Conquer



ZONE 3:
VALUES &
ETHICS

Mid-Store / Discovery Zone

Vibe:

- Thoughtful, values-driven, intentional

Brand Signals:

- Patagonia, Allbirds, Everlane, thrift culture

Retail Insight:

Signage matters here—students want to see the values story, not hunt for it.

BOTTLED WATER
BUT NOT OUR PEACE

One of the most common ways we consume plastic is through bottled water. But the environmental impact of bottled water is huge. It takes a lot of energy and resources to produce and transport bottled water. And it creates a lot of plastic waste.

Fertilizer with Purpose

There are many different types of fertilizers, but not all are created equal. Some are made from natural sources, while others are synthetic. Synthetic fertilizers can be harmful to the environment, but natural fertilizers are a better choice.

TAKE YOUR LOCAL COMPOST DIFFERENCE

There are many benefits to using local compost. It helps to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfills. It also helps to improve the quality of the soil, which is essential for growing healthy plants.

COMPOST YOUR EARTH SAVING

Composting is a great way to save the earth. It helps to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfills. It also helps to improve the quality of the soil, which is essential for growing healthy plants.

FLEISS WALL
OUR PRIDE

**ZONE 4:
BELONGING &
PARTICIPATION**

Back-of-Store / Community Anchor

Vibe:

- Interaction, customization, community

Brand Signals:

- Spotify-inspired, TikTok-inspired, Lululemon-inspired

Retail Insight:

Participation drives sales—
customization, social sharing, and
community cues outperform discounts.

CREATE YOUR STYLE



DESIGN YOUR OWN



ZONING INFLUENCES EMOTIONS

<i>Zones</i>	<i>Brain Trigger</i>	<i>Emotional Outcome</i>
Identity & Self-Expression	Dopamine	Excitement, Aspiration
Daily Rituals	Familiarity	Comfort, habit
Values & Ethics	Meaning	Trust, alignment
Belonging & Participation	Social Proof	Attachment, loyalty

HOW THE NORTH FACE TRANSFORMED ITS LONDON FLAGSHIP INTO A DIGITAL IMMERSIVE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE



<https://www.retailcustomerexperience.com/articles/how-the-north-face-transformed-its-london-flagship-into-a-digital-immersive-shopping-experience>



VISUAL MERCHANDISING

- Lifestyle Vignettes
- Mood-based Displays
- Story-first Signage

COLLEGE LIFE: YOUR STORY STARTS HERE



Visual merchandising research shows that
shoppers process visual information

60,000

times faster than text, meaning your displays communicate identity
instantly—often before students read a single sign.

3M Corporation, Visual Systems Division Research



SOCIAL MEDIA

- Day-in-the-life content
- Student-led storytelling
- Moments over merchandise



@CampusLifeDiaries



Morning, Insta! First stop: Bookstore coffee! 🐼

OMG! Look these new new planners! #MyBooktreFinds

60%

of Gen Z users **discover new brands through social platforms**, especially when content feels **authentic** and **peer-driven** rather than promotional.

Meta / Instagram Internal Insights (2022)



EVENTS & EXPERIENCES

- Micro-events over Mega-sales
- Collaborations with Student Orgs
- Experiences that Reinforce Identity



WELCOME HOME, NEW STUDENTS

UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE

Loot-Meate
Exsantolis

Compa Sortford Guide

Lost-Muste
Exsantolis
Bountary

19S E WEGEE



74%

of consumers say
engaging with branded events makes them more likely to buy,
especially when the event feels personal.

EventTrack, Event Marketing Report (2023)

CAMPUS CULTURE AS A BRAND ASSET

“RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT SHOWS THAT **STUDENTS WHO FEEL CONNECTED TO CAMPUS CULTURE ARE MORE LIKELY TO REMAIN LOYAL AS ALUMNI.** CAMPUS STORES CAN PLAY A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN REINFORCING THAT SENSE OF CONNECTION.”

Kuh, G. D. High-Impact Educational Practices (AAC&U, 2008)

**CAMPUS
CULTURE IS
YOUR BRAND
ASSET**

- Traditions
- Shared Milestones
- Everyday Campus Moments



TURNING CULTURE INTO STORY

- Orientation
- Move-in Weekends
- Game Days
- Performances
- Finals Week
- Graduation

CAMPUS CULTURE: ORIENTATION



CAMPUS CULTURE: ORIENTATION

Emotions:

- Anticipation · Nervous Excitement · Curiosity · Emerging Belonging

Brand Role:

- Reassure + Invite + Signal Belonging

Store Moments

- First campus store visit
- Welcome kits / “official gear” moment
- Wayfinding + friendly staff interaction

Product Categories

- School-branded apparel (tees, hats, hoodies)
- Campus maps, planners, lanyards
- Starter bundles (“New Here” packs)
- Stickers, pins, affordable identity items

CAMPUS CULTURE: MOVE-IN WEEKENDS



CAMPUS CULTURE: MOVE-IN WEEKENDS

Emotions:

- Overwhelm · Anxiety · Independence · Comfort-seeking

Brand Role:

- Reduce Stress + Offer Care

Store Moments

- Emergency runs with parents
- Last-minute essentials purchases
- Emotional transition from home → campus

Product Categories

- Bedding, dorm décor, storage
- Desk lamps, organizers, laundry kits
- Comfort items (throws, mugs, candles*)
- “Survival kits” (snacks, hygiene, tools)

CAMPUS CULTURE: GAME DAYS



CAMPUS CULTURE: GAME DAYS

Emotions:

- Pride · Excitement · Collective Energy · Adrenaline

Brand Role:

- Amplify Identity + Ritualize Participation

Store Moments

- Pre-game rush
- Post-win celebration purchases
- Group shopping with friends

Product Categories

- Game-day apparel & accessories
- Face paint, flags, rally towels
- Limited-edition drops tied to opponents
- Clear bags, stadium-approved items

CAMPUS CULTURE: PERFORMANCES (CONCERTS, PLAYS, EXHIBITIONS, SHOWCASES)



CAMPUS CULTURE: PERFORMANCES (CONCERTS, PLAYS, EXHIBITIONS, SHOWCASES)

Emotions:

- Vulnerability · Pride · Validation · Connection

Brand Role:

- Honor Creativity + Mark Achievement

Store Moments

- Pre-show preparation
- Post-performance celebration
- Gift-giving moments

Product Categories

- Flowers, cards, small gifts
- Artist/designer merch
- Photo frames, journals
- Apparel tied to departments or events

CAMPUS CULTURE: FINALS WEEK



CAMPUS CULTURE: FINALS WEEK

Emotions:

- Stress · Fatigue · Determination · Relief-seeking

Brand Role:

- Support + Sustain

Store Moments

- Late-night visits
- Stress-purchase behavior
- “Just get me through this” shopping

Product Categories

- Coffee, energy drinks, snacks
- Blue-light glasses, wellness items
- Notebooks, highlighters, last-minute supplies
- Self-care kits (tea, sleep aids, stress balls)

CAMPUS CULTURE: GRADUATION



CAMPUS CULTURE: GRADUATION

Emotions:

- Pride · Accomplishment · Nostalgia · Optimism

Brand Role:

- Preserve Memory + Extend the Relationship Beyond Campus

Store Moments

- Family shopping experiences
- Commemorative purchases
- Last chance to “take campus with you”

Product Categories

- Premium alumni apparel
- Diploma frames & keepsakes
- Class-year merchandise
- Gifts for family & self

YOUR STORE IS A CULTURAL HUB

- A place to gather
- A place to discover
- A place to belong

IF YOUR STORE DISAPPEARED TOMORROW, WHAT WOULD STUDENTS MISS?

This is a powerful question to ask your team.

If the answer is only “convenience,” that’s an opportunity. If the answer includes memories, traditions, or community—that’s lifestyle branding at work.

—

DAILY RITUALS

CORE INSIGHTS

Daily rituals are emotional micro-moments. The brands that win are the ones that show up inside those moments.

College students don't buy things—they buy:

- Energy
- Belonging
- Identity
- Relief
- Momentum



DAILY RITUALS

- Morning Rituals → *Activation & Identity*
- Academic Rituals → *Control & Progress*
- Food Rituals → *Comfort & Social Currency*
- Social Rituals → *Belonging & Visibility*
- Digital Rituals → *Micro-Escapes*
- Evening Rituals → *Reflection & Reset*

MORNING RITUALS → ACTIVATION & IDENTITY

Rituals

- Coffee before cognition
- Outfit = mood + confidence
- Scrolling before thinking

Lifestyle Meaning

- “Help me feel like myself
before the day asks anything
of me.”

MORNING RITUALS → DESIGN INSIGHTS

Retail / Campus Stores

- Curated “Morning Kits”
(mug + hoodie + notebook)
- Merch that signals identity
- Limited drops that align with semesters or seasons

Spaces

- Campus stores as morning hubs, not retail stops
- Natural light, warm woods, calm music
- Quick-flow layouts (grab → go → glow)

Apps

- Morning-mode UI
(low contrast, calm color palettes)
- “Today at a glance” dashboards
- Push notifications timed after 9 am
(respect the ritual)

ACADEMIC RITUALS → *CONTROL & PROGRESS*

Rituals

- Studying in aesthetic spaces
- Same seat, same routine
- Productivity rituals > actual productivity

Lifestyle Meaning

- “Make me feel capable—even when I’m overwhelmed.”

ACADEMIC RITUALS → DESIGN INSIGHTS

Retail / Campus Stores

- Design-forward study tools (pens, planners, tech sleeves)
- “Study aesthetic” merchandising
- Bundles for midterms/finals survival

Spaces

- Study zones with *visual calm*
- Modular furniture for solo + group work
- Quiet corners that feel intentional, not restrictive

Apps

- Progress visualization (checkmarks, streaks, milestones)
- Gentle reminders vs. alerts
- “You’re on track” language instead of urgency

FOOD RITUALS →
COMFORT & SOCIAL
CURRENCY

Rituals

- Coffee as social glue
- Late meals
- Food as emotional regulation

Lifestyle Meaning

- “This is my reward, my break, my bonding moment.”

FOOD RITUALS → *DESIGN INSIGHTS*

Retail / Campus Stores

- Snack walls curated by mood (focus / comfort / celebration)
- Co-branded mugs, tumblers, reusable containers
- Limited-time collabs tied to campus events

Spaces

- Café-retail hybrids inside campus stores
- Seating that encourages *linger behavior*
- Flexible layouts for solo + group moments

Apps

- Loyalty systems based on *frequency*, not spend
- Social rewards (bring-a-friend perks)
- Late-night modes

SOCIAL RITUALS → ***BELONGING & VISIBILITY***

Rituals

- Walking to class together
- Clubs and casual hangouts
- Shared memes > deep talks

Lifestyle Meaning

- “I want to feel seen without trying too hard.”

SOCIAL RITUALS → DESIGN INSIGHTS

Retail / Campus Stores

- Club-based merch collections
- Customization stations (patches, pins, embroidery)
- Highlight student creators and designers

Spaces

- Open, flexible commons inside stores
- Photo-friendly moments (murals, typography walls)
- Event-ready layouts (pop-ups, launches, club nights)

Apps

- Community boards and micro-events
- Student-generated content featured in-app
- Low-pressure social prompts

DIGITAL RITUALS → ***MICRO-ESCAPES***

Rituals

- Constant scrolling
- Music as emotional regulation
- Checking Canvas/email compulsively

Lifestyle Meaning

- “Give me a break without guilt.”

DIGITAL RITUALS → DESIGN INSIGHTS

Retail / Campus Stores

- Tech accessories that feel personal, not generic
- Analog products as *relief* (journals, puzzles, art tools)
- Messaging that normalizes burnout and rest

Spaces

- Tech-free or tech-soft zones
- Headphone-friendly seating
- Ambient soundscapes

Apps

- Dark mode by default
- Gentle transitions and motion
- Clear boundaries between “urgent” and “informational”

EVENING RITUALS → *REFLECTION & RESET*

Rituals

- Reviewing unfinished tasks
- Nighttime streaming
- Quiet reflection before sleep

Lifestyle Meaning

- “Help me reset—not judge.”

EVENING RITUALS → DESIGN INSIGHTS

Retail / Campus Stores

- Wind-down kits (journals, tea, blankets)
- Self-care merch positioned as *maintenance*, not indulgence
- Language centered on growth and grace

Spaces

- Softer lighting in evening hours
- Calm signage and wayfinding
- “End-of-day” atmosphere shifts

Apps

- Reflection prompts instead of task lists
- “Done is enough” messaging
- Tomorrow-preview features

YOUR CAMPUS STORE ISN'T *JUST A STORE.*

It's a:

- Morning Motivator
- Study Sanctuary
- Social Connector
- Emotional Reset Point

When brands align with rituals, they
earn loyalty without discounts.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

CREATIVE IDEATION MINI-WORKSHOP

TIME: 10 – 15 MINUTES
FORMAT: SMALL GROUPS → DISCUSS → SHARE
MATERIALS: PEN & PAPER

LET'S BRAINSTORM

Lifestyle branding isn't about doing more—it's about thinking differently.

This isn't about chasing trends—it's about listening, observing, and designing experiences that feel meaningful.

Identity before Inventory

Culture before Campaigns

Emotion before Promotion

CREATIVE IDEATION MINI-WORKSHOP

In small groups, choose a campus moment—like move-in day or finals week—and think through how your store could show up to support students emotionally and culturally. Focus on emotion first, product second. There's no wrong answer here—this is about realigning how you think about branding on your campus.

- Choose a campus moment.
- Identify associated emotions & values.
- Design one lifestyle-based idea you could implement.

Lifestyle Brand Affirmations

1. Identity and Self-expression
“This is who I am.”
2. Daily Rituals
“This fits into my everyday life.”
3. Values-Driven & Ethics
“This reflects what I care about.”
4. Belonging & Participation
“*This is where I show up with others.*”

Guidelines

- 10 -15 Minutes
- Be specific.
- Think experience first.
- Share with Us!

**KEY
TAKEAWAYS**

Campus culture is
your superpower

Small moments
build big loyalty

Start with one
lifestyle brand shift

OPTIONAL WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

MAP YOUR STORE THROUGH A GEN Z BRAIN

TIME: 12 – 15 MINUTES

FORMAT: INDIVIDUAL → DISCUSS → SHARE

MATERIALS: PEN & PAPER

ADAPTING THE MODEL BY STORE SIZE

SMALL STORES (Under 5,000 sq ft)

Small stores win by being emotionally dense, not physically big.

Strategy:

- *Layer, don't separate*

How to Adapt

- One fixture = multiple zones
- Rotate stories instead of expanding the footprint
- Use vertical space + signage

FLAGSHIP STORES (10,000–25,000+ sq ft)

Flagships succeed when every zone earns its square footage emotionally.

Strategy:

- *Sequence the journey*

How to Adapt

- Distinct zones with transitions
- Dedicated community/customization areas
- Seasonal reprogramming of zones

“WHAT DOES YOUR LAYOUT TELL A STUDENT ABOUT *WHO THIS STORE IS FOR?*”

STEP 1: MAP YOUR STORE

- Where does your store currently lead with?
 - ☐ Products
 - ☐ Apparel
 - ☐ Textbooks
 - ☐ Clearance
- Which zone dominates the front-of-store?
- Which zone is hardest to find?

STEP 2: GAP ANALYSIS

- Mark each zone:
 - Strongly Represented
 - Some Presence
 - Missing or Buried

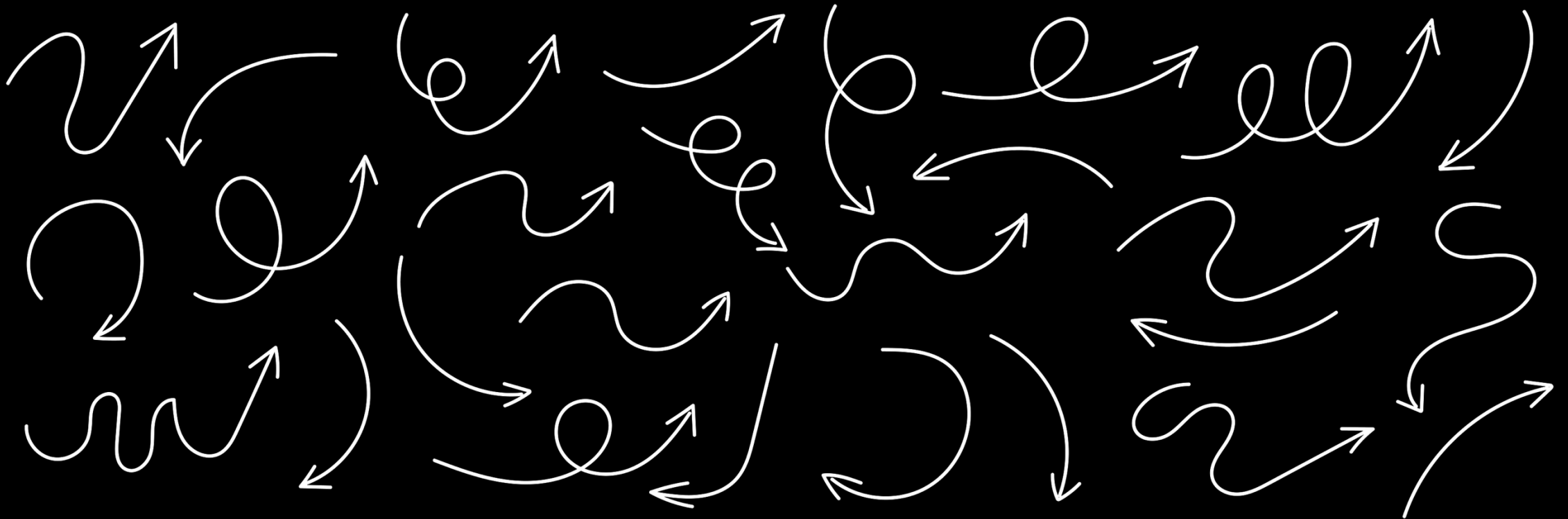
STEP 3: ONE HIGH-IMPACT SHIFT

- Write down one change you could make (*without remodeling*):
- Examples:
 - Move identity apparel to the front
 - Turn planners + drinkware into ritual kits
 - Add one values sign instead of a new product
 - Create a 3' x 3' customization moment

METRICS THAT MATTER:
MEASURING LIFESTYLE ZONING SUCCESS

<i>Zones</i>	<i>Primary Metric</i>	<i>Emotional Outcome</i>
Identity and Self-expression	Dwell Time	Excitement
Daily Rituals	Repeat Visits	Comfort
Values-Driven & Ethics	Attachment	Trust
Belonging & Participation	Participation	Loyalty

QUESTIONS?



LET'S **CONNECT!**



Diana Lodi

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<https://tinyurl.com/2azeancc>

