Focus Group Codes and Themes

I. Not Chocolate
   a. It’s like coffee
      i. Consumers compared craft chocolate to coffee, conceptually. This had to do with flavor, packaging, sustainability labels, texture, etc.
   b. It’s like wine
      i. Consumers thought that the chocolate tasted like and was packaged like wine. They interpreted the origin as the vineyard and the variety of cacao like the grape variety.

II. Packaging—In general, packaging is an indicator of quality. This is part of the brand as well. If the consumer hasn’t eaten a chocolate before, then they seem to rely on packaging to convey whether that product is a worthwhile purchase.
   a. Products with cocoa percentage written on the packaging are high quality
      i. Consumers stated that products with a number on the package that indicates its cocoa percentage are high quality.
   b. Dark chocolate is high quality
      i. Chocolate with cocoa percentage written on the label is typically dark. Consumers strongly associated dark chocolate with quality.
   c. Nice foil indicates high quality
      i. Consumers found the thickness and re-foldability of the foil to be very important. Foil thickness is an immediate indicator of quality and can allow the consumer to eat the chocolate throughout the day.
   d. The color gold indicates quality
      i. Consumers locked into the color gold in packaging. It meant “quality”, “expensive”, etc.
   e. This packaging is like giftwrapping
      i. Consumers found that the packaging of Dandelion chocolate (craft chocolate) looked like giftwrapping.
   f. Not chocolate
      i. This packaging does not look like chocolate, it looks like another product.

III. Price—Consumers looked to price as an indicator of quality. If the chocolate is expensive, it must be high quality. If the chocolate is cheap, it must be low quality.

IV. Availability—In general, the location where you purchase the chocolate indicates its quality. If the chocolate is easily/readily available, then it is low quality. If the chocolate is obscure, difficult to find, or only found in a few shops or online, it is high quality.
   a. New chocolate is exciting!
      i. Consumers demonstrated that a different looking chocolate than they’d had before was exciting and a reason to purchase.
V. **Handcrafted aesthetic**—Consumers picked up on when things were made by hand or mass-produced. This was a distinction they made based upon packaging, type of chocolate (dark or milk), flavors, and it impacted how they perceived the chocolate.

VI. **European aesthetic**—Consumers differentiated between a European aesthetic versus an American aesthetic. A European aesthetic was considered to be higher quality than American.

VII. **Segmentation**—Packaging, price, colors, tastes/flavors determine whether that is a “kids” chocolate, “adult” chocolate, “grandma” chocolate.

VIII. **Trust**—Consumers sought proxies for trust in all of the products. This was so surprising! Why not inherently trust a product? Meaning through story or a cause provides trust. Greg provided a *person* to trust. People feel comfortable trusting a cause. Sustainability labels could be trustworthy or imbue distrust.

   a. **Consumers look to sustainability labels as a proxy for trust OR they do not**
      i. Consumers had varying levels of knowledge and importance regarding sustainability labels. The MOST IMPORTANT thing was what the sustainability label *meant* to the consumer. What this label *meant* and whether it was *important* was on a continuum. If it *meant* safe or fair, and the consumer valued safe or fair, then it was important. If it didn’t *mean* safe or fair, and the consumer valued safe or fair, then it was unimportant, etc.

         1. **What is organic?**
            a. Organic and fair trade are the same thing, right?
         2. I purchase chocolate with sustainability certifications
            a. Fair trade certification is important to me
         3. **Fair trade and organic labels are not important on chocolate**—“I’d say I’m probably neutral to ‘em”
         4. **Price and taste come before sustainability certifications**

   b. **Finding meaning in a product is important to consumers**—Whether sustainability labels were important to them or not, consumers searched for meaning in the products. They wanted a semblance of purpose.

      i. **A story sells a product**

         1. Consumers were excited by packages that told stories outright—endangered species---or inspired them to create stories—Dandelion/Greg. They said that they wanted to hear a story and that did it for them more than certifications, etc.
         2. **Consumers like to purchase chocolate that benefits a cause**
            a. Two ideas here: 1. shared values with other people and the company 2. Consumers feel guilty indulging in chocolate and buying chocolate, but buying chocolate for a cause, such as endangered species, relieves that guilt
3. A person’s name carries more meaning than a certification, or basically anything, as an indicator of quality and flavor
   a. The name Greg or Hershey was incredibly important to focus group participants. In lieu of an actual personal interaction with a human, this mark of someone’s name represents personal interaction.

IX. **JOY/UTILITY**—Aside from trust, the other attribute consumers look for in their chocolates is joy. Joy does not come across as a want, instead, it is expressed as a utility by the consumers. This comes across in the use of chocolate for sharing as a gift at holidays and celebrations, a way to re-experience nostalgia and childhood, and also the way that chocolate is used as a drug.
   a. **Chocolate is linked to holidays, celebrations and gifts**—Consumers associate specific chocolate with holidays—Halloween candy. They also associate chocolate with celebration and gift giving.
      i. **Consumers differentiate between chocolates they buy as gifts and chocolates they buy for themselves**
         1. Consumers said they would give nicer chocolates to others, in general.
      ii. **Consumers purchase some chocolates for themselves as a treat: “I’m gonna treat myself”**
         1. Consumers purchase chocolates as gifts, they purchase chocolates for their children and their partners, and then some chocolates they purchase specifically to eat by themselves. These are usually different chocolates.
   b. **Nostalgia through packaging, flavor, taste and mouthfeel**
      i. Elements of packaging communicate nostalgia. The Whitman sampler box, the foil that everyone remembers from the original Hershey bar of their youth, the name Dandelion, which reminds you of being a kid.
      ii. Consumers thought of childhood when they looked at and tasted certain chocolate bars.
   c. **The use of chocolate for desirable post-ingestive effects**
      i. to relax and/or relieve stress, for energy, to satisfy a need, as a treat. It serves a function—a utility!
         1. Chocolate gives me energy
         2. Chocolate consumption relieves menstruation pain/stress
         3. Chocolate is for relaxation

X. **Consumers eat some chocolates a little bit at a time**—Consumers differentiated between chocolates that you pound down and chocolates that you savor and eat a little at a time. The package of the chocolate was important as well—consumers liked if the wrapper was substantial enough that they could eat a square, wrap it up and then put it away and eat more later.