

CHARACTERISTICS BRANDING & BRAND MANAGEMENT IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

UROŠEVIĆ Snežana¹, ZAVRŠNIK Bruno²

¹ University of Belgrade, Technical Faculty in Bor, Management Department, Vojske Jugoslavije 12, Bor, Serbia, E-mail: surosevic@tf.bor.ac.rs

² University of Maribor, Faculty of Economics and Business, Slovenia, E-mail: bruno.završnik@uni-mb.si

Corresponding author: Snezana Urosevic, E-mail: surosevic@tf.bor.ac.rs

Abstract: Brand allows for market offer to be identified and differentiated from the competitive offers. The very essence of brand is based not only on potential sales figures, but on the philosophy that makes it possible for a customer to identify with the brand. Faced with the plenty of market offers customers undoubtedly prefer well-known companies and brands, thus minimizing risk and time consuming activities of gaining further knowledge concerning alternative offers. The consumers often wonder whether the branded goods are more worth from the other, similar goods without any famous trademarks. There are many questions and theories but only one is undeniable: one should never doubt the companies that invest great amount of assets, ideas, talents, love and risk, intend to risk previously stated items with bad design, services or products' quality. Brand building in textile industry differs from branding of market offers targeting general public. Branding in textile industry requires more focused approach. Fashion companies are facing with bigger challenges when fighting to attract and keep new consumers who are offered new products and markets. In order to create strong brand, it is necessary to possess expert planning and long-term capital investment. Successful brand is actually an excellent product or service, with creatively designed and conducted marketing. Branding has become marketing's priority, because successful brands achieve higher prices and gain over loyalty, and attract both consumers and financiers. Marketing agents of the successful 21st century brands must be extremely efficient in strategic brand management, which assumes implementation of marketing activities and programmes in order to build brands, as well as brand management to increase its value. Brands and its value must be regarded and recognised as strategic capital.

Key words: brand, brand management, branding, fashion industry, marketing strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

The fashion phenomenon has always captured people's attention, but this issue has never been as tangible as in the time we are living. Fashion industry pervades all aspects of the human society and illustrates the time we are living in the best way. Domestic fashion industry producers want to win even stronger position on domestic and international fashion market by introducing some new images. Domestic companies have decided to build the image of a market-oriented fashion company. The business strategy implies continuous investment in the development of trade marks – brands. From the consumers' point of view, there no such thing as just a product. A product does not come alone, but it takes, with the help of marketing strategies and techniques, the image or status. The consumer expects to identify or locate a product according to type, name or label. Fashion companies are facing with the growing challenges how to attract and retain new consumers when new products and markets are concerned. This paper is designed in a way it point out the importance of a brand management and it appliance in the fashion industry.

Fashion companies are facing with bigger challenges when fighting to attract and keep new consumers who are offered new products and markets. In order to create strong brand, it is necessary to possess expert planning and long-term capital investment. Successful brand is actually an excellent product or service, with creatively designed and conducted marketing. Branding has become marketing's priority, because successful brands achieve higher prices and gain over loyalty, and attract

both consumers and financiers. Marketing agents of the successful 21st century brands must be extremely efficient in strategic brand management, which assumes implementation of marketing activities and programmes in order to build brands, as well as brand management to increase its value. Brands and its value must be regarded and recognised as strategic capital. It is important to adjust brand and business strategy, and this can be performed successfully if brand is carefully monitored and improved by company's top leadership and if employees are in good connection with the organisation and its brands. In order to make a consumer loyal to a fashion industry product – brand, the consumer must purchase the product sufficiently and there must be cognitional obligation to do that. A brand must have sufficient meaning for the consumer, which means, he buys not only complacency or propitiatory but also what brand represents, that is, important benefits for the consumer (in contrast to mass-consumption products). Being loyal to a brand represents consumers' inner commitment to repeat purchase of certain brands. Even though people from marketing sector attempt to make consumers loyal to a brand, they must be interested for usage rate of some products on different markets and in different consumers.

2. THE TERM BRAND AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN CREATING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The word brand became synonym for something good at the end of 20th century. The simplest definition of a brand is an expression that products and services of high quality are called, and according to wider definition, concept of a brand becomes synonym of the highest universal value due to globalisation and fast society development. The word brand was used daily, and some brands have become more powerful than some world's countries, because a good brand brought big income. To create a good brand and manage it during its lifetime is not a process conducted over night but it takes years, decades and sometimes, even centuries.

One of many brand's definitions is it is beloved trademark. When will you fall in love a person, or something, or anything? Answer to the question is only when his/hers personal characteristics suit you entirely.

If the brand's essence is more about the consumers than the product or service itself, it is clear that the brand formation should be based on the brand's function perceived by the consumers rather than on what does the brand represent for the company [1], [2].

There are many suggested brand models, but one thing that they have in common is that the brand is based on three components – functional component, comparative component and emotional component [3]. When analysing the components, it is necessary to answer the questions:

1. What does the brand do for the consumers? (functional component)
2. What makes the brand different from the competition's brand? (comparative component)
3. What feelings does the brand evoke in the consumers? (emotional component).

Brand can be defined as a promise given to the consumers, composed out of group of relevant products' features, that their needs would be satisfied when buying the products [4]. Very illustrative explanation says that most top managers does not see symbols, brands and names simply as *icing*, but as *yeast that contributes to the cake's growth* [5]. Table 1 resumes some of the key brands' advantages.

Table 1: Brand advantages [6]

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps consumers to identify supporting brand • Speeds up the purchase process • Provides status and psycho-social identification • Helps in quality and product price evaluation • Shrinks the purchase risk • Alleviates anew purchase • Enables wider acceptance of new products within the same brand • Causes consumers' loyalty |
|---|

It can be said that the brand's development is in range from recognition to complete loyalty. It can be presented graphically as in Figure 1.

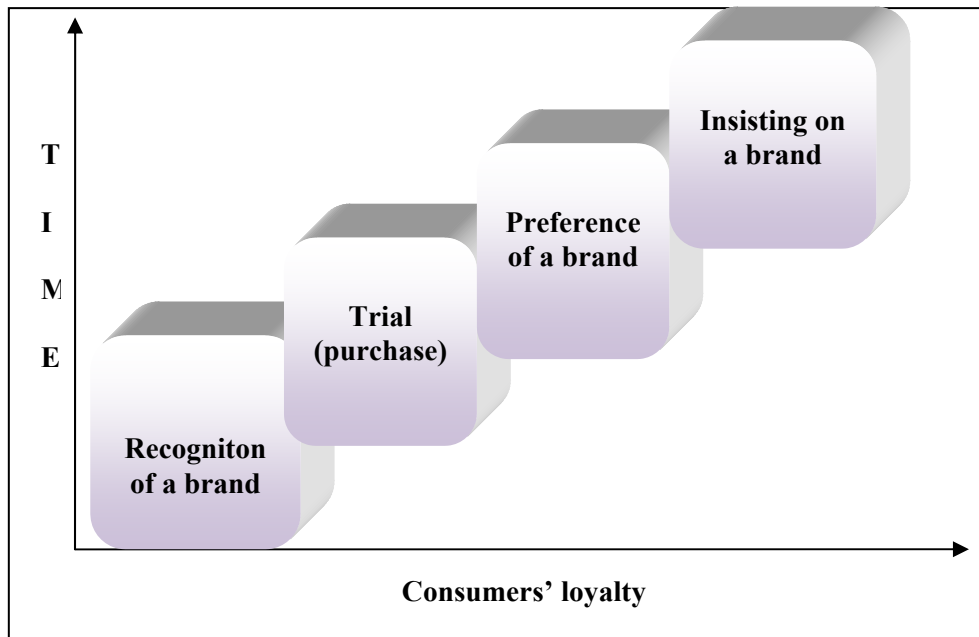


Fig. 1: Brand's development – from recognition to insisting [6]

Value of a brand is usually called brand's equality. The other way to view brand's equality is to consider marketing and financial values connected with brand's position on market. Brand's equality is usually connected with awareness of brand's name, loyalty and quality. Even though it is difficult to measure brand's equality, it can be said it represents brand's value for an organisation [6].

The brand has important influence in creating competitive advantage of a company on market and in environment which are becoming more demanding and more turbulent. It can be said with certainty that the brand is more than just a product and more than just a service and it is of priceless value to both consumers and the company which owns it. From the consumers' point of view, the brand eases choosing the market and making decisions on purchase, guarantees performances of a certain level, gives information, security and recognition of a service. Brand is important for a company because it contributes to the competitive advantage on the market, management of the intellectual capital, quality and the value of the company. That is why the creating and development of a brand represents one of the greatest challenges for every company. According to Kotler, brand provides numerous competitive advantages:

- The company has advantage in decreasing the marketing expenses due to awareness and loyalty of a brand's consumer,
- The company has greater opportunity to choose when negotiating with the distributors and dealers,
- The company can increase the price unlike the competition,
- The company can easily expand the brand because the brand's name offers high authenticity,
- The brand defends the company against the price competition [7].

On the fashion market survived only organizations with the capability of continuons and rapid adjustment to modern conditions. Today, the customer expects exceptional quality apparel products, modern design, while being willing to pay a price that is more than elements of competition in the market constantly fashion industry.

The brand and its strategy have become one of the important sources of the fashion industry competition, and immediate benefits from it are:

- Standing out from the competition,
- Increasing the product's value with the consumers,
- Better and faster launching of new fashion products.

The brand's success, as one of the basic features of a fashion product, depends upon the feelings and opinions of the competition's consumers. Due to great changes in fashion trends, the development of a trade mark exists in all parts of the textile-clothing chain.

The existence of a trade mark has several advantages:

- Greater profit,
- Ability to plan the offer,
- Creating the image of a production-business system,
- Better correlation between the production and sale,
- Greater level of information and identification.

3.CHARACTERISTICS BRANDING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

Even though there are some texts about product branding in domestic literature, there were not many of them which said anything about effective and efficient brand management. Construction and maintenance of a brand is one of the key tasks for marketing manager [8]. Due to great deal of choices of products and brands in almost every area, the consumers are now facing with huge number of potential suppliers, too huge to be familiar with all of them and thoroughly checked. When the market choice becomes bigger, the consumers prefer well-known companies and brands because they do not have to waste time on exploring, and they put themselves to lower risk.

The main difference between fashion industry market and other mass-consumption products markets is in the products and services' nature and complexity, in demand's nature and variety, in considerably smaller number of consumers, in greater products quantity per consumer and, the last but not the least, in closer and long-lasting relations between the producer and consumer. Holistic approach to branding is necessary in order to see that everything, from development, design to realisation of marketing programmes, processes and activities, is connected and intervened between one another [7]. Branding represents more than putting the brand's name and logo on product or service. Brand is intangible concept. In order to simplify and easier understanding, brand is often equalised with material elements of marketing communications used as its support – advertising, logos, slogans, jingles and so on – but brand is far more than that: 'brand is a promise – total perception' [7].

Brand has special place in consumer's conscience due to previous experiences, associations and future expectation. Brand is abbreviation for the attributes, advantages, beliefs and values which differentiate, shrink complexity and simplify the decision making process in marketing and management. Brand with clear purpose is like a compass with two sides, one directs the consumer towards the right products, and the other side directs product designers, people in charge of marketing and promotion when the new versions of their products are developed and improved on the market. Brand creation enables the company to create benefit, differing one brand from the other. Successful brands are those, which create a set of brand values superior in relation to competition brands. Brand creation involves good understanding and functional (easy use) and emotional (trust) values that a consumer uses when choosing between the brands. Company's ability to combine them in a unique way is necessary to create extended product preferred by the consumers – the real marketing value strategy.

If a company accepts the brand concept as a promise given to its consumers, it is obvious it can exist only if it constantly fulfils the given promise. Of course, the promise given by a brand must be clearly defined, relevant and meaningful, and it should not be mixed with excessive marketing promises. Consumers are engulfed with imposing offers on many markets. Brands represent abbreviation for the attributes, advantages, beliefs and values. They contain almost everything the company and its product or service represent. Branding triangle shows visually marketing connections between the company as an organisation, its co-workers and its consumers.

Brand manager's monitoring of the efforts invested in branding as a usual short-term business within a company is not enough to make those efforts successful. A duty of everyone employed in a company, starting from the top management to workers is to build, support and protect strong brands within a company. Brands and its value must be understood and recognised as the strategic capital (especially in fashion industry), which they actually are, and basis of concurrence advantage and long-term profitability. The key point is to adjust brand and business strategies, and this can be performed successfully if brand is carefully monitored and improved by a company's top leadership.

Strong brands provide the companies faster recovery after the economy crisis. Companies can have huge benefit from strong "alive" brand and its implicit promise of the quality since it can impose premium price to the consumers, and to provide the highest price of shares to the investors. The companies with the good positioned brands benefit because they are clearly focused, therefore more effective, efficient and more competitive in the business.

The brand's development aims to create long-term non-material property, not just short-term increase of sale. Industrial branding does not give solutions to all problems which the companies face with. Decision whether to brand a product, product line or company is based upon the evidence that the brands are more than just a product – it is an abbreviation which comprises feelings of a person towards a company or a product. Brand is emotional, it has “personality” strength and it wins hearts and minds of its consumers and because of that, the great brands survive the attacks of the competition's and market trend.

World's fashion scene is full of small and big brands, and of those, which keep their positions by nourishing quality and tradition, and which plan to spread, extend their business and charm new consumers. Introduction of various approaches in fashion, exposing the new ideas and fashion vision are always interesting and inspiring. Many fashion brands will never occur here, but therefore it is interesting to get to know them.

Both consumers and producers are able to monitor the world's situation by global sources, and seek for the suppliers or consumers that suit the best their specific needs and demands. Relationship development process is expensive and quite complex and therefore only the best partners are searched for, because the quality demands high quality partners. Regular identification of any inefficiency in relation to sales and purchase must be in focus in order to eliminate them. The most efficient channels of sales representatives and consumers will survive. Any inefficiency of both soft and hard costs is identified and removed from the relation. Companies ready to make strategic but not cosmetic changes, in a way that they cooperate with the consumers/suppliers, have the possibility to succeed, and efficient application of marketing strategies becomes significant.

Brand's lifetime planning in marketing is based upon the needs, because many companies are to blame for brand's aging. The connection with the experts who know ‘the worst practices’ and know how to avoid it is necessary. Brands should not be changed frivolously, but companies should keep the ones desired by the consumers – and not by the subjective owners or extremely aggressively brand managers. Quitting from the inefficient brands is easier if the managers in charge of the consumers segment controlled company's marketing resources. This type of wide reinvestments is possible only if it fundamentally changes the executive team sector. Changes barely perceived at the beginning but essential in time, will be seen if those regulations are applied serially. People in a company will understand the brands are their ultimate goal, and the company's ultimate goal is creation and nourishment of profitable and long-lasting relations with the consumers.

The consumer easily identifies the company of the market brand producer, which makes it easier to locate responsibility for possible oversights and deficiency. Brand simplifies and makes easier decision making process of a consumer when purchasing. Brand is a symbol of a partnership agreement between the dealer and consumer. The consumer shows its loyalty and trust, and brand has to guarantee the quality, recognizable performances, consistency, continuity and awareness. Brand decreases the time and effort of seeking the desired product and risk of wrong purchase. Brand is of huge information importance for the consumers, because it gives information on the desired product profile and its basic usage and function features. Brand has huge communicative significance for the consumers because it brings with it significant status and associative features. Status and image of a brand intersect with the status and image of the consumers but also of the employees.

To make a consumer loyal to a fashion product – brand, it is not enough just to buy the brand but it is also necessary to create cognition commitment to do so. Brand must be significant enough for the consumer, that when buying a brand, the consumer buys comfort and all that the brand represents is of great importance for the consumer (unlike the consumer goods). Loyalty towards the brand represents inner commitment of a consumer to repeat the purchase of certain brands. Even though people from marketing department tend to make the consumers loyal to a brand, they should be interested in usage rates of some products on different markets and with different consumers. Brand management is the process of planning, organizing, performing and controlling marketing activities focused on profiling the brand type and turning its identity into desired image and market reputation as well as creating positive goodwill and real property value of a brand. Nowadays branding is more methodical and it requires strategic planning, efforts and money to be successful in creating awareness and associations within the consumers. Exceptional reputation is mainly the consequence of branding process.

To make a consumer loyal to a fashion product – brand, it is not enough just to buy the brand but it is also necessary to create cognition commitment to do so. Brand must be significant enough for the consumer, that when buying a brand, the consumer buys comfort and all that the brand represents is of great importance for the consumer (unlike the consumer goods). Loyalty towards the brand represents inner commitment of a consumer to repeat the purchase of certain brands. Even though people from marketing department tend to make the consumers loyal to a brand, they should be interested in usage rates of some products on different markets and with different consumers. Brand management is the process of planning, organizing, performing and controlling marketing activities focused on profiling the brand type and turning its identity into desired image and market reputation as well as creating positive goodwill and real property value of a brand. Nowadays branding is more methodical and it requires strategic planning, efforts and money to be successful in creating awareness and associations within the consumers. Exceptional reputation is mainly the consequence of branding process.

There is danger in fashion industry for a brand to become old-fashioned or run by the competition. Branding, as a continuous process, which applies more types of developed brands, enables to increase the productivity and sale of the branded fashion products. Successfully conducted activities of strategic image brand management can significantly influence on creating desired corporate image and reputation, conquering new products and retaining the existing markets, establishing good relationships with the business partners, consumers'/buyers' loyalty and easier decision making process with the consumer.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Brand can lead to significant increase of the profit and it can help the companies to become really special. Brand should be used as a management tool, because branding can influence the way a company shall be led, the way it shall do business, its market position and the direction of its growth and development. Strong brand will have useful effect on relations with the interest groups in the business. Branding should connect both the entire marketing area and the company's business process. Brand management is an integral and dynamic concept of the marketing guidance and coordination of the market expression process, behaviour and recognizable appearance, with the aim to actively control market position and to create more favourable competitive and financial effects of the specific brand.

Successful fashion clothing brand in the consumer must inspire positive feelings, must build trust, quality, reliability and prestige. Therefore, companies need to design and build a strong brand with a clear identity. In the fashion industry, the brand especially important, because the competition is high and companies need to attract new customers and retain them. For a successful fashion brand requires good understanding of consumers and their purchasing processes.

REFERENCES

- [1] D.A. Aaker, „*Building strong brands*“, Simon&Schuster Adult Publishing Group, New York, 1995.
- [2] D.A. Aaker, „*Managing brand equity*“, Simon&Schuster Adult Publishing Group, New York, 1991.
- [3] P.Fisk, „*Marketing Genius*“, Capstone, Mankato, MN, 2006.
- [4] M.Stamatović, K.Kurij, „*Uvod u strateški menadžment*“, Savez inženjera i tehničara, Centar za razvoj, Beograd, 2003.
- [5] M. Kocić, „*Uloga simbola i imena u jačanju identiteta*“, Direktor, Beograd, No 3, pp. 29-32, 1998.
- [6] M. Stamatović, S.Vukotić, „*Upravljanje marketingom: Strateški pristup*“, Cekom Books, Novi Sad, 2009.
- [7] Ph.Kotler and K. Keller, „*Marketing menadžment*“, Data status, Beograd, 2006.
- [8] Ph. Kotler and V. Ferč, „*B2B Brend menadžment*“, Asee, Novi Sad, 2007.