

Creating Brand Value in Third Countries: A Case of Underwear Industry

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ABSTRACT

The purchasing of a branded product is carried out with the intention of the product and the brand reflects the buyer's image and lifestyle. The perceptions of a brand and values control purchasing patterns of products and services. The purpose of this study is to research how to create brand value for an invisible brand within the clothing industry. In order to fulfill the task the author has interviewed a brand group and a qualitative approach was chosen as a method that will help to understand customer behavior and also how to create a brand value from an invisible product.

Keywords: Branding, Brand Value, Third Countries, Underwear Industry

INTRODUCTION

“A product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless.” (Aaker, 1991, p.1). There has been written thousands of studies within the field of branding. Therefore a legitimate question would be: why branding is of such an interest? A simple answer is that the brand differentiates the product or service from competing products, which in the post-modern economy has an increasing importance (Duncan and Moriarty, 1997). This means that the buyer will prefer the branded product and therefore not replace it with another. The brand creates value to the customers and can also become a competitive advantage for the firm (Kotler et al., 2001). There are some dimensions, which are important to customers that concerns branded products. According to Grace & O’Cass (2002) these are feelings and self-image correspondence. Apparel is especially a way of communicating one’s self-image to the surroundings. Clothes and shoes that individuals use are part of the first impression people get of an individual. Thus, buying a branded shirt or a pair of jeans does not only give value to a person’s well being but it is also a reflection of the personality.

The apparel industry is one business where branding is a common way for companies to differentiate from competition and gain competitive advantage. Although one branded t-shirt may not differ from another when it comes to quality, the brands are different, and this will lead to a perceived diversity between the products. However, underwear differs from external and visible apparel in general, due to the fact that they are actually hidden underneath other clothes. Underwear cannot, unless in certain situations, communicate the wearer’s self-image to the surroundings. Therefore it can be assumed that branding in the underwear industry will differ from branding of other apparel.

Brands and branding are getting more and more important. Branding is today an important marketing tool for manufacturers (Motameni and Shahrokhi, 1998). The values of a brand and the

perceptions of it control purchasing patterns of products and services (Kotler et al., 2001). The competition between corporate organizations is high and it continues to grow. In order to keep up with the market's ongoing pace, awareness is an important factor. Being in control of a strong brand is a competitive advantage and opens windows of opportunities in order to maintain it as well as strengthen the competitive position. Furthermore, building relationships with the customer is an essential aspect. It can determine whether a company will be successful or not. Having a good customer relationship and being keen to the needs and demands of the customer is of great importance for the firm. Developing a reliable relationship with customers is a corner stone in order to establish a long-term relationship. This can be the prerequisite to a loyal customer and thus, higher sales to the company (Reynolds, 2002).

When a customer purchases a branded product, the purchase is carried out with the intention that the product and the brand shall reflect the buyer's image and lifestyle (Baskin, 2003). This becomes a way to communicate ones personality. It can especially be observed within in the clothing industry where individuals' clothes reflect parts of his/her image. Due to the fierce competition within this industry, the barriers of entry are high. When building a brand it is central to create visibility, build associations and create differentiation in order to develop a deep customer relationship (Aaker & Joachimshaler, 2000). If one cannot build a brand based on visibility when worn, then it is not possible to create a brand and add value to it. Is it actually feasible to create a strong brand when not leveraging upon visibility? The purpose of this study is to research how to create brand value for an invisible brand within the fashion industry.

RELATED LITERATURE

The concept of branding and how to actually create a brand, if there is no brand; there can be no brand value. But this is not sufficient; once a brand has been created it must be managed carefully. If managed wisely the brand can become very valuable to the firm (brand equity) and create value for customers. Brand equity will be analyzed with focus on the connection to brand value. On the other hand, customer behavior will determine consumer perceptions and influence how the brand misperceived by customers and thus, affect brand value to customers as well.

To understand branding and thereby be able to understand invisible branding, one must: First understand what constitutes a brand. "A brand is a name, term, sign o symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers" (Keller, 2003, p.3). "Branding is to help achieve and maintain a loyal customer base in a cost effective way in order to achieve the highest possible returns on investment" (Costantino, 1998 p.60). The word brand originally comes from the Old Norse word brand, which means, "to burn". The livestock owners historically used to burn their animals to differentiate them from other owners'. Branding livestock to branding goods is a small step. In the Greek and Roman eras branding became more popular, shop-owners used signs to present what goods or services that were offered. The brand was used as a mark of identification and the good craftsmen were hoping the customers would be looking for their particular mark on the goods. Early branding was both a sign of authorship and a way to differentiate the products (Costantino, 1998).

It is important to recognize that a brand must deliver an added value. The difference between branded products and commodities is due to the extra value delivered with the brand. With commodities, customers have a hard time to differentiate the products; one pot is very much like another pot. With commodities the purchase is usually based on price and availability. Branded products on the other hand

have additional attributes, which may be considered as intangible, but still important to the customers. If customers value a brand, they should also be willing to pay extra for that particular brand (Costadino, 1998).

According to Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong (2001), the brand can be divided into four different levels. 1) Attributes: A watch can be nice looking, have many technological features and be expensive. 2) Advantages: An expensive watch may give the owner a certain status, or one with many features may help the owner be on time. One should look upon the advantages with the attributes in mind. 3) Values: The buyers of a specific brand will most likely share values with the brand, i.e. the customers of BMW probably value performance, comfort and prestige. 4) Personality: The brand can also project a certain personality. Sometimes it might take on the personality of an actual well-know person, an animal or an object.

Levitt (1980) argues that there is nothing that could be referred to as a generic product. He stresses that all products and services are differentiable. He argues that the real value of any product or service is the use by the customer. Furthermore, he states that the customer attaches value to a product with ability to solve the customer's problems and meet its needs. According to his concept the products or services consist of different stages of performance towards the customer and its needs. Levitt describe these layers as generic, expected, augmented and potential performance.

The generic product is the fundamental product sought by customers and represents the minimal essential customer expectations. The augmented product is the addition of extra benefits exceeding normal customer expectations. The potential product refers to new or improved methods, technologies and services used to attract and keep customers. Thus, a product can be improved to a potential product by passing through different stages in form of services (Levitt, 1980). It is on two latter layers, augmented and potential product, where branding can be identified.

Fashion and clothing are forms of non-verbal communication since they do not use spoken words. The theory presented below will be used in order to examine how and if an invisible brand can communicate. Roach and Eicher (1979) mentioned that the unifying function of fashion and clothing serves to communicate membership of a cultural group both to those who are members of it and to those who are not. When customers are purchasing new clothes, they tend to alter their mood and become happier and more satisfied when wearing them (Barnard, 1996). In order for people to satisfy their needs, it may sometimes go to the extreme when people become addicted to the feelings they get when wearing something new. Within fashion clothing as well as other items such as cosmetics and perfumes, the added value is often emotional, and the brands therefore become symbolic devices. It is not necessarily the functional capabilities of the purchased item that are the primary motive for buying a certain apparel or product. People tend to purchase a branded item because it communicates something about him or her through the design, packaging, price or even the effort they have made in the selection process of the desired product (Costantino, 1998).

Roacher and Eicher (1979) proposed that the emotional survival of humans somehow depends upon their ability to find a balance between meeting the requirements of the society and protect a sense of self-identity. Some colors and joyous lines can be used in attempt to change a person's mood. Fashion and clothes are ways for people to differentiate themselves and declare a form of uniqueness (Barnard, 1996).

Kapferer (1992) identified five useful principles when creating a brand. The first principle is defining the brand's identity. The relevant questions of launching a new product are: Who is being targeted, what are the product positioning, its distinctive advantage and competitive area, and finally what promises and benefits can the consumer expect (Kapferer 1992). Another important question when

creating a brand is: Who is the brand? Hence, one must first know who is speaking, why the brand exists, what are its values, goals etc. (Kapferer, 1992). When analyzing powerful brands it is shown that they have physique know-how, and an essential product to which they are not entirely restricted. Furthermore they have a culture (a system of values) and a certain type of relationship, consumer's reflection, and self-image (Kapferer, 1992).

The second principle is determining its imaginary sources. Major brands do not solely derive their identity from functional sources. The choice of a brand's imaginary source is just as important as choosing what products of the range to advertise (Kapferer, 1992).

The third principle is choosing products with a meaning. The more ambitious the brand is the greater is the degree of care required when choosing the product or service to launch a brand campaign. The focus should be on the product which best represents the brand's intention, the best supports the brand's potential to bring about change. All products included by a brand are able to do this. A campaign must be backed by a product which reflects the brand's own image (Kapferer, 1992). Brand campaign or product campaign is the fourth principle. When a brand is created, two alternative strategies may be chosen. Firstly by communicate the brand meaning, its imaginary significance, and its intention direct to the consumer. Secondly by promote a representative product to build the brand image.

The last principle argued by Kapferer is brand language and territories of communication. Firstly, brand identities are rich in meaning and therefore it cannot be reduced to a single word or a concept. The vocabulary of today does not take a uniquely verbal form. In fact the visual part is just as important. Taking a glance at the television or the ads in a magazine, the picture stands out more than the words. Brand language facilitates the expansion of the brand, due to lack of a personal language, communications are more complicated. By not knowing what language to speak, the same words or picture keep reappearing, leading to the whole brand message becoming restrained. Due to a desperate desire to create a common image the different campaigns will end up as near clones (Kapferer, 1992).

Finally, Kapferer (1992) presented brand language serving as a means of decentralizing decisions. Subsidiaries worldwide may adapt the theme of a message to their local markets and product requirements but at the same time maintain the singularity and nature of the brand, and thereby there is a common language.

Advertising has an important role in the brand development. Advertising could be used to position a brand, and to help enhance awareness and familiarity of a brand. Using advertising is costly and requires a high budget, therefore this strategy is called high budget route. There is an alternative though, the low budget route, which is a cheaper version where image transfer can play an important role. The route chosen for the brand development is based on the budget size. Not only the marketing budget decides what route to choose, an organization could chose the low budget route based on two other principles. Firstly, choose the cheaper way if the target group is rather small and the advertising would not give a satisfying return on invested capital. Secondly, the firm wants to choose a way where the differentiation is low, in other words choosing a low-cost strategy (Riezebos, 2003). When choosing a high budget route, one should have an indication of the advertising budget needed. To indicate this, a determination of how big the target group is must be done and further analyze if advertising is valuable enough to reach the target group (Riezebos, 2003).

Since brands reflect a certain image, brand extensions are a natural move for several organizations. The customers' brand loyalty, preferences and recognition of a certain brand, makes it possible to transfer a certain image to a new product. This could be a good strategy to increase revenue. If it is implemented successfully the customers will buy the same brand in the new product category (Forney, Park and

Brandon, 2005). Forney et al. (2005) argued that to allow the customer to spend minimal time at point of purchase, the idea of habitual shopping of mainstream brands is interesting. By brand extension, organizations can gain from this and a strong brand name could automatically have the customers buying products from a different category. A strong brand name would reduce the risk of introducing a new product by building on customers' familiarity and knowledge of an already existing brand. Another benefit would be that companies could enter a new market segments without the expenses of launching a new brand. This can reduce the costs of acquirement of distribution and/or boost the effectiveness of promotional costs (Forney et al., 2005).

A brand extension that broadens a successful brand name by launching new or modified products or lines offers customers wider access to that brand in multiple product contexts (Kotler et al., 2001). Branding a product is important when building an image and it also affects the experiences value, which leads to an added value for the customers and further to a brand loyalty that enhances the effects of brand extensions (Cleary, 1981; Forney et al., 2005). Riezebos (2003) argued that brand extension could influence brand name acknowledgment and image when entering new markets. But if the brand extension is unsuccessful the core brand could be damaged. Customers are becoming more aware of trends and more selective when it comes to products, therefore it is important that the retailers are well aware and educated in order to meet the needs of different kind of customers. An offering of a set of products that can be linked to a specific lifestyle is an interesting approach to reach and keep customers (Forney, Park and Brandon, 2005).

Within the fashion industry, it is crucial to distinguish between the product and the brand and see the relationship between them. Without a good product the brand would not survive. The brand is used as a strategic way to differentiate the firm from its competitors and can be used to sustain a competitive advantage. This tool for distinction is especially important for products within the fashion industry, since within this particular industry elements such as symbolic and evocative are more important than technical and functional ones. Fashion is linked to a short-term horizon, the season, which have led to companies putting a lot of effort into product-oriented strategies (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

The products are more homogenous today, and the developments in the market are controlled by a few large brands. But at the same time the modern customer seems to express a more individualistic identity and is more independent from the factors controlling the industry (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

The lifestyle of the customer controls what brands that are possible to be leaders within each market segment. The distribution organizations select a few strategically industrial suppliers on an international level. The distribution organizations and the consumers require a long term relationship which could not be built around the product, since it changes over time along with the fashion trends. Brand identity allows creating a bridge between the long term and short term, and also a connection between product and brand. The relationship with the customers certainly depends on the connection between product and brand; therefore it is also critical to separate the expressions of product and brand. The product is what the firm delivers, but the consumer buys the brand. While products last during a shorter amount of time, since the lifecycle is short. The brand could last for ages and represent a long-term asset for the firm (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

Once the brand is created, the value of it must be sustained for the brand to survive in the long-term perspective. This section concerns the aspect that the management should have in mind when managing a brand. The model presented by Saviolo (2002) shows in three steps why brand management is important and what way the management team should go. Concerning the way to go, the last part of this section is

not connected to Saviolo's model, but it contributes to the brand management in another way, explaining what retailer to chose.

According to Saviolo (2002), branding is a way of organizing and extracting value from limited resources in the fashion industry is:

- The supply system (obtain access to the best skills and suppliers worldwide).
- Creativity (designers, architects, advertising agencies, creative people in general and creative teams that are difficult to find and manage).
- Location (it becomes more and more difficult to be present in the top location at global level).

Branding requires a great awareness of medium to long-term strategies, a clear market positioning consistent product innovation and product range policies. Thus, branding will act as a means to better organize and select the network of suppliers, designers and the rest of the creative people working for the brand vision (Saviolo, 2002).

Brand management begins with the concept of brand identity, where brand identity is defined as a word or a logo related to a product that in the beginning does not truly have any meaning. However, as the years go by, it becomes significant due to the products and the communications of the past (Kapferer, 1993).

Firms must manage the brand through the brand identity as perceived by the market. Brand image evolves as the overall perception of a brand identity in the marketplace, driven by brand personality and position. The personality and position of a brand is the result of the interplay between different elements, all affecting the values and the symbolic meaning of the brand. The brand identity can be defined as a system of attributes. In particular importance is three types of brand attributes: corporate brand history and core competencies, product and stylistic identity, and visual identity (Saviolo, 2002).

History is a very important asset of a brand and it has a fundamental role in defining the brand authenticity and what it stands for. History reveals the original competencies, which constituted the brand and its credibility. A brand acquires legitimacy and growth potential from its core competencies. History and competencies are the starting point, and the key to building a credible brand identity (Saviolo, 2002).

Stylistic identity is the definition of the long-term stylistic codes belonging to a brand (forms, colors, materials, and product categories). The stylistic identity is the main point of the product and brand systems in fashion and style based industries. In these industries, arising as an original product and a distinctive concept, and by leveraging upon this, they build a strong brand identity and a wide range of products that are always bound to the product and its aesthetic. The brand identity should be part of the corporate story and consist of daily practice, techniques, designing and constant innovation (Saviolo, 2002).

The definition of the visual identity is long-term codes to characterize brand communication. Message, tone, atmosphere, the media strategy, point of sale, and merchandising are, if employed correctly, able to make the corporate image distinguishing. It is necessary to have a strong consistency between stylistic and visual identity in order to build a strong brand (Saviolo, 2002). However, this does not mean that the stylistic and visual identity has to become rigid, but instead keep focus on its target group and always be relevant. The difference between brands that maintain their leadership year after year and brands that just last for a couple of seasons is their skillfulness in making the brand identity evolves together with the market evolution. To permanently being dynamic is the most important concept in brand management. The key issue for luxury and fashion brands is how to be relevant to new generations. It is not always the case that going back to the roots, the historical essence of the brand is the right cure to revive a brand. Thus, returning to the past ideals of a brand is not always the right solution.

Instead a successful brand should connect with an image that is relevant to the identity of the customers at that point in time. To maintain leadership, brands need to transfer themselves across generations. In fashion clothing and accessories this transfer is particularly difficult due to the fact that clothing is within such a symbol intensive product category (Saviolo, 2002).

Gehlhar (2005) stressed the importance of retailers and what retailing path to be chosen. The authors therefore found it interesting to examine how the path chosen affects an invisible brand and if it will influence the brand value. To reach the customers through department stores is advantageous due to the prestige, exposure, and sales volume they can provide, since the relationship with them strongly can reflect the sales (Gehlhar, 2005). Having a close relation with the retailer could also be a good competitive advantage. Department stores are really focused on sales volume and if the product is not selling well, the risk of dumping the item is high. Therefore it is important to be consistent with the relationships and work hard. The choice for new designers should be more focused towards small boutiques and work with them until the brand or product is well established. Small boutiques are more flexible regarding delivery and they are also helping to share the risk (Gehlhar, 2005). In smaller stores the owner is usually the buyer, he/she often knows the customers and could purchase goods especially for them. A good relationship with a smaller store is a good way to reach the market at a first phase. It has challenges though: the process of finding the right stores and the need of serving them all separately could be a problem. Since smaller stores are less known compared to department stores, the turnover is not as high and they could be seen as uneconomic risk (Gehlhar, 2005).

Gehlhar (2005) also presented another way to reach the customers and that is through the internet. Selling from a company's own homepage, combined with using other already existing sites, is a good way to reach a wider market. Following up the sales is an advantage, since the firm could track exactly where the products were delivered, as well as knowing where potential returns were made and why. Doing this, gives the designer or the firm that are producing the goods, a chance to meet the customer directly, leading to a possible higher margin. On the other hand, the negative aspects of using the internet as a distribution channels are that the customer cannot use all their senses when buying. The fact that some customers want to have the product in his/her hands before the purchase could be an important aspect that is left out when using the internet as a distribution channel. If the product, when it comes to fashion products, does not fit there is a problem as well, a problem that could have been resolved before the purchase in an ordinary store (Gehlhar, 2005).

Riezebos (2003) stated that brand value refer to the fact that a branded product has more value for the customers than the bare product. He also argued that the brand has to have some kind of importance to the consumer in order to add any value to the product. Brand loyalty is the most important measure of a brand's value. If customers are indifferent to the brand and make their purchase based on features, price, and convenience with little concern to the brand name, there is probably low brand equity. However, if customers continuously purchase the brand over competitors' with superior features, price, and convenience, brand value actually exists. This means that brand loyalty can be thought of as a measurement of the customer's attachment to a brand (Aaker, 1996). Levels of brand loyalty: 1) Committed buyer, 2) Likes the brand – considers it as a friend, 3) Satisfied buyer with switching costs, 4) Satisfied/habitual buyer, no reason to change, 5) Switchers/price sensitive, indifferent no brand loyalty.

The ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a particular product category is called brand awareness. Thus, a link between class and brand must be involved (Aaker, 1996). In contrast to brand loyalty, brand awareness is the simplest form of brand equity. A familiar brand makes the customer feel more confident (reduces risk) of the product thus its chances of being considered

and selected are increased. Evidence supports the fact that customers prefer brands, which they are familiar with. Furthermore, by choosing a known brand the buyer justifies the decision, in other words it explains the actions of the buyer. The justification also acts as a social role, indicating that the person has bought something of value (Aaker, 1996).

A brand association is anything customers link with the brand. The link to a brand will be stronger the more experiences and exposures it is based upon. Further it will be stronger when it is supported by a network of other links (Aaker, 1996). Subjective and emotional associations are an important parts of brand value. These include personal associations and a good example of this is celebrity endorsement. Associations may also be of an emotional character, relating to lifestyle or personality etc. Strong associations can also be with the type of customer or user of the product or geographic region. Together these associations make a brand personality that suggests situations when a brand is and is not appropriate (Aaker, 1996).

Branding is somehow always linked to the customer, since the customer is the buyer of the branded product and the actions is known as the buying behavior. How the customers behave in the buying decision, and how they affect the brand's success in the market is an important issue. As mentioned, there is a need to convince the customer in order to get successful. Convincing is important, and the relationship with the customers could be a way to accomplish that. Customers tend to choose certain product and services that are associated with their own lifestyle. The lifestyle influences the choices made by the customers in their own consumption or purchase of lifestyle products.

Purchases reflect the trends and fashion expressions (Brandon et al., 2003). According to Grossman & Shapiro (1998), the brand could sometimes be very important to the customers; this is shown by the willingness to buy counterfeited products by Gucci from street vendors. The products are not authentic and do not have the same quality, despite this the customers buy these products since they are branded with a well-known brand, hence that the brand is forged. This shows that a brand name is a potential complement in consumption behavior and that increase customers' willingness to pay a premium price. Kotler et al., (2002) argues the buying behavior around new products is a process of having the product fit in the customers' mind, to prepare them mentally before purchasing the product. This mental phase later decides whether the customers are ready to use the product or not. Kotler et al., (2002) further stressed that there are several roles in what the customers are indifferent to during a purchase a product. The first of these roles are the innovators; these customers are ready to try a new product in a real early state, to fulfill the adventurous feeling around being the first one with a new product. Early adopters chose to try the product to a less risk of being first, these person are often the influencer to others in the circle of acquaintances. The most traditional customers are the laggards. These customers are suspicious and do not try a new product before it is fully accepted by the community (Kotler et al., 2002)

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The qualitative approach is characterized by a higher degree of intimacy between the interviewer and the respondent (Holme & Solvang, 1997). When conducting qualitative research, the sample population is usually pretty small not more than 30 responders (Cantzler, 1992). This research method is usually built upon interviews and case studies, which in turn fostered an interactive environment where the interviewer gets the chance to respond through following up questions. Obviously the results of the different interviews will differ and to put all the data together demands a lot of resources such as time and money. Due to these facts the sample data is usually not more than 30 (Cantzler, 1992). The purpose of

the thesis is to research how to create perceived brand value for an invisible brand within the clothing industry. When investigating upon how a company creates brand value one has to take the company's brand strategy in consideration. A research of a company's brand strategy based upon the quantitative approach would be quite thin and it is not the author's purpose to examine if there are some variables in brand strategy that are similar between different companies. Instead the focus goes in depth and to truly understand the process of thinking when a company creates brand value for an invisible brand.

The researcher has chosen to focus the research within the qualitative approach since the authors believed that the purpose is most suited for this type of study. It will be difficult to turn respondents' thoughts into numbers. Instead the researcher finds it more meaningful to understand the intentional strategic actions taken by the firm in order to create perceived brand value for customers. The qualitative approach fosters a creative and innovative interaction between the interviewer and the respondent (Holme & Solvang, 1997)

The Mall Group was used in fulfilling the purpose. The qualitative approach will help understand customer behavior and also how to create a brand value from an invisible product. To help the research to get a real life case, the Stargate Brand Group was interviewed, this seen as the first of three aspects. The organization was successful within the underwear industry and was interesting in this thesis. The information received during the interviews was analyzed with help of the next aspect, which was interviews with their retailers, in this was trying to find the some critics to the accomplishments and also trying to find the real truth about the organizations success story. Having these two aspects in mind, the third and last one are the customers that interviewed within focus groups. This is one of the best qualitative approaches to gather information from private persons.

After the interviews were done, the taped information was transcribed. This means that the spoken words are transformed into written word (Bryman, 2001). This gives the authors a better overview of what was said and it is also making sure that no important information was lost. The next step in this process is to code and systemize the information (Bryman, 2001). After this was done the analysis of the collected data was easier to interpret and conclusions could easier been drawn.

FINDINGS

Interview with Mall Brand Group Profitable in underwear is important to get a high volume. Therefore by choosing a niche, one may not get a sufficient piece of the market share. The brand name contains many product groups and Mall is beginning to implement brand extension. The brand was accepted very fast by the customers, therefore scarves, hats and other branded apparels were added at an early stage. The thought was to make the brand visible and thereby making people like the brand.

The product in itself was very much unique, no companies before had emphasized colors and patterns. Therefore the product was distinctively different from competitors. However, recently competition has launched products with similar attributes. Mall products are more aggressive with new colors and patterns. Furthermore the price is fairly attractive in comparison with competition. The major part of the underwear market today is the "everyday underwear" (Underwear that are not too nice to be worn everyday). The big challenge for Mall is to find out how to conquer market share and establish the brand as one of the major competitors among "everyday underwear" in the future.

There is an extreme longing in customers to be cool, the media buzz and the commercialism feeds people with the message that in order to become somebody one has to buy certain products. Thus, shallow reasons lie behind the purchasing decision. The companies working the market try to convince

the customers that they need these products. All brands with a trendy attitude capitalize on the vanity and the shallow ideals of society of today, as well as peoples seek for identity and belonging. Men are less changeable than women when it comes to products, but since Mall offers something fairly unique it becomes interesting for the consumer to try the products and hopefully like the product and continue buying it. The company has excellent designers, is very confident in its creation, meaning the company dares to be controversial in its design and is not afraid to do the little extra. In addition the company has huge network of contacts and distributors, which is a major advantage.

Purchasing decision / buying behavior. The purchasing behavior of invisible items such as underwear varies to a certain extent compared to clothes in general. The buying behavior connected to invisible items is strongly connected to a persons own feelings and thoughts. When buying underwear, most of the interviewers believed that people are more price sensitive, due to the fact that underwear is a relatively unpleasant item to spend too much money on. The respondents also believed that buying underwear is an impulse purchase decision that refers to the salesmen's skill of selling an additional product to the customer.

Often the underwear is placed next to the cashier thereby making it easier for the customers to add in their purchase when waiting in line before paying for another item. Another detail presented by respondents is about buying underwear. It appears as if women prefer to buy underwear on a more regular basis compared to men. Several of the respondents claim that there is a relation between the prices the consumer pays for other clothes when choosing what underwear to buy. If a person normally does not spend a lot of money on clothes in general, he/she will probably not buy expensive underwear. According to some answered received, men's underwear has a tendency to be more important today than it was a couple of years ago, this could be due to the high competition within the market and that means are more aware of what they wear, another answer to this issue could be that there are more brands for the customers to pick from. Furthermore, fashion has today led to that the whole concept is important and customers tend to be more conscious about what is worn underneath. The respondents agree upon that especially boys and men tend to care more about the brand when buying fashion products, including underwear. This behavior may have been transferred from the female buying behavior, since females always have been aware of this.

The respondents believe that those who buy branded underwear are not in a particular segment. It can be every person between 15 and 45 who care about what clothes that they are wearing. The customers who are around 18 or older have a tendency to spend more money, and thus more expensive underwear compared to those who are younger. Reasons for this can be that people above 18 have more money to spend, and the fact that underwear becomes more expensive due to brands and quality. Some of the respondents assumed that a person who suffers from low self-esteem can increase his/her confidence by purchasing branded underwear. It might also be peer pressure that influence especially youth's way of buying underwear as well as clothes in general. Furthermore the shop assistants believed that people who buy underwear want to be a little bit cooler and trendier than other people. The empirical research also revealed that underwear is a popular gift. Compared to a pair of jeans, which one has to try in order to know it suits, underwear is easier to buy. From this perspective it was claimed that the brand has a competitive advantage since if one wants to buy underwear in gift one would choose a pair of colorful and fun underwear over a pair of traditional black or white underwear.

Product/Brand. Almost all retailers interviewed by the authors believed that branded clothes are more important today than ever before. The authors found different opinions of whether the brand or the produce is the most importance concerning underwear. Some argued that the product was most important

and others argued the opposite. However all respondents agreed that quality was of high concern and in that sense if the quality is low the brand value will be low as well. Hence if the product is good the brand will benefit. Although, when one is purchasing new underwear for the first time, the brand becomes important. If the underwear is of high quality customers will repurchase the brand, and if quality is low they will not. If the product has got a good reputation it seems to be more people purchasing a product due to the well-known brand instead of the bare product. Furthermore, some of the interviewed retailers believed that the brand can help someone who does not know what kind of clothing item to buy. In this case a well-known brand secures that an item is not completely out of style or fashion. A negative aspect of following a brand can be when a low quality product will be sold just because it has a high status brand. One of the shop assistants said that a brand has succeeded when it can do almost whatever it pleases with a product still sell very well.

How to succeed in the market. According to the interviewees the overall relationship within the clothing industry can be more important than within other businesses, since it mostly concerns smaller orders than for instance within the food business. In some way there arises a more personal conversation to a smaller company and its sellers, than it does with larger firms. Another favorable aspect can be that a clothing retailer has additional contact with national companies compared to foreign. The respondents have mentioned that high quality and a good fit are two major characteristics that determine if underwear will be successful or not, it is of importance to stay innovative and keep on refreshing the models and pattern of the underwear.

How important is the brand for an invisible product? The participants found that the brand for these products stands for quality and identification, and just as for other branded products people buy an identity. Personal preferences, experiences and advertising decide whether a product has high quality or not. Moreover, quality is about positioning. And customers assume that a higher price vouches for higher quality. However, people sometimes tend to buy the brand more than the actual product. The brand also shows that the user is knowledgeable about fashion, why the brand is especially important.

Invisible branding, underwear. Branded underwear can be important for the self-esteem; it feels better to wear a pair of nice branded underwear. The most important aspect when buying underwear is quality. Underwear is the clothes closest to the skin and therefore it is natural that underwear must feel comfortable, hence the fit must be good. Especially for men, underwear is still seen as just a good. Therefore quality becomes a decisive factor. In some sub-cultures, i.e. the skate-culture, people actually show their underwear, since the trend is to have big size jeans and the underwear will be revealed due to a loose fit of the pants.

How important is the brand? When buying underwear the first time the brand is very important as quality insurance. However when buying the second time the brand is of less importance and instead quality is the determinant factor, if one were satisfied with the quality of the underwear after the first purchase you will probably buy them again. The group agreed upon the importance for the producers of underwear to get customers' attention and evolve into a purchase and hopefully of the repeated purchase behavior. In this sense the brand was seen as a good example due to the colorful and patterned underwear which inevitably draws the customers' attention to the product. Customers usually buy the same underwear over and over again due to price and quality, but also due to the fact that men cannot try the underwear before the purchase. This is why usually the brand is most important for the purchase decision at the first time purchase. If one does not refer to any particular model or color of underwear people are more willing to buy a well known brand. The actual buying behavior for underwear is then characterized by repetition. If someone has a pair of black boxers which one is satisfied with someone would probably

not change for another brand. One may even buy the exact same pair of underwear (color, model, etc.), and this is not very common when buying other clothes. The group members found that three of the strongest brands within the clothing industry are: *Benetton*; this brand stands for not only the care about profits and selling clothes but takes a strong social responsibility and takes its role of world citizen seriously. *Diesel*; the Diesel brand has a strong personality and consistency mixed with the Italian heritage and an ambition of being in the front line of design and quality. *Levi's*; the Levi's brand is seen without noticed, meaning that when entering a room full of people up to fifty percent wear Levi's jeans with the Levi's tab. This unconscious marketing is what makes Levi's such an astonishing brand.

CONCLUSION

The empirical research concluded that in order to create brand value for an invisible brand, the most important elements are quality and perceived quality. Thereby to become a successful underwear brand, quality must be highly emphasized and having a high quality product is the easiest way to create brand value to customers. The quality of the products and the perceived quality are vital aspects to the brand value, firstly in order to attract customers and secondly in order for customers to become loyal. If loyal buyers can be created, the brand value will be stronger. By saying this though, the authors do not argue that quality exclusively is the road to success. There are other issues concerning the topic as well. The men's underwear industry though has experienced an important change due to Mall and how the company found a new way to create value to customers using new and innovative design.

The overall understanding of invisible products and brands is that they are bought primarily to fulfill the customer's need of feeling comfortable and leverage upon people's want of well being. An invisible brand cannot leverage upon its user to the same extent as other products, since it is not shown to the public. Therefore marketing becomes a high concern. The tool of marketing could be used to form associations connected to the brand and its message could create an image around the brand. Since the product is invisible, image transfer is of most concern. Having a lifestyle concept connected to the brand that can be transferred is essential since psychological factors have a strong influence on the invisible products. Therefore it becomes important to "convince" the customer that the purchased product is in line with the experienced life style of the buyer. Image transfer is also affected by the choice of retailers. If an invisible product is being present at high end fashion stores the brand will automatically be viewed as a high end brand. The marketing approach must create associations that cause the invisible brand to become visible and connects this to the customer's feelings. Hence the marketing approach must coincide with the customers' perceptions. Finally retailers should be of very high concern for an invisible brand. The need of a well planned path to reach the customer must be considered. The retailers have a big part in helping the brand to be valuable and therefore it is one of the key terms in this model. The management of the invisible brand must firstly find the retailers which the brand best can leverage upon. Secondly the relationship with retailers must be nurtured very carefully in order to make retailers promote the product.

Even though, we as the authors came up with a model for how to create brand value for an invisible brand in our conclusion, we wished to enhance that this model is not in any way revolutionary. A proper model for invisible branding can not be designed only focusing upon the fashion industry, but we as authors believed that this concept is real and it needs further research for other industries than the fashion industry. Concerning our study, we argued that it could be done in other ways, but we found our solution to be the one with the best fit for this subject.

The results could be used by organizations that want to increase the value to their brands. Organizations could also use this thesis as a guidance or source of inspiration when launching a new brand that is concerned as an invisible brand. The result of this endeavor could be used to raise awareness around the subject of invisible.

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