



Branding of Clothing Fashion products: Fashion Brand Image Development by Marketing Communication Approach

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Abstract

The preference of consumers for readymade branded apparels is fast changing which is caused by the creation of personality and status with the quality and comfort they deliver. Customers have become highly brand conscious presently. Hence, brand image is a significant factor in choosing the product or brand to buy. Driven by the competitive environment in fashion business, marketers have realized that creating a favorable brand image is a key to win larger market share in its market niche. An understanding of brand image can provide better foundation for developing a more effective marketing program. The understanding of consumers' desires, behavior and of the purchase process of fashion products is extremely important to the design of fashion products collections as well as to the placement of these products in the market. A fashion product must satisfy the demands of the target customers, so the main idea (message) behind the brand (sender) must reach the consumer (receiver). The key issues are: a) how to develop the brand images through the main idea; b) how does the message, created in the very beginning of the marketing plan get through to the final consumer. This paper presents some approaches on how brands of fashion products can reinforce their fashion image and how the image of fashion products can, by itself, become a utility tool in the development and communication of the brand image.

Keywords: Branding, clothing fashion, customer profile, fashion images, fashion products.

Introduction

Fashion is a form of direct and individual communication. Clothing with high branded images has a great impact in garment market to satisfy the desire of customers. Due to the increased awareness and consciousness, people are ready to spend any price for comfort and quality related to strong branded apparel. Benefit seeking is one of the driving forces for consumers to begin their buying process with. The customers are also utilizing the opportunity too. They may seek a product that can offer at least functional, symbolic or even expressive benefits to them in order to satisfy their needs or wants¹. Therefore, you may say a successful marketing program is not so difficult to create. It simply satisfies the target consumers' needs and wants. Meanwhile, to know the consumers' needs or wants is actually the most difficult task for the marketers to handle. In order to succeed in today's competitive environment, the fashion marketers must be able to formulate effective marketing strategies for their target markets. The success of a fashion brand depends upon how precise it is in understanding its target customers and their needs, so as to create wants. It was because clothing in itself carries symbols and that's why clothing has been called a "silent language". When people talk about the clothes they buy and why they buy them, they show a variety of logics. An understanding of why customers select one brand over another and what factors generate such kind of want is crucially important to fashion marketers. When insiders talk about this issue, the concept of brand image would be mentioned and

useful to explain the phenomenon. McEnally and Chernatony (1999) also stated that brand concept was developed by the management while the consumer received the message from the management and form brand image in the memory¹. In this sense, the management sees the brand in one way, which is a perceived concept, and the customers also see the brand in their own way, which is also a perceived image. When there is substantial difference on these two perceptions, it indicates that the brand image marketing problem is present. In the fashion industry, an inappropriate brand image strategy could make a brand fail in that increasingly competitive business environment. A designer label, a private label or even a little brand name, they are different on the level of the product exclusivity, perceived quality and reliability; but they are all talking about image marketing, and would like to use brand as a tool to seize larger market share in their market niche². Thus, "brand image" has been the focus of a large amount of important academic and field study in fashion industry. However, the terminology of brand image is quite confusing. To clarify the nature of the brand image, this article also aims to discuss the different meanings of brand image (perceived by the consumer) from different sources. It is crucial for the fashion marketer to know the meaning behind the term, as it is the foundation of the brand image marketing³. This paper reviews the meaning of brand image and its related concept, brand personality, and discusses marketing approaches and implication for fashion marketers to develop better brand image.

What is a brand?

Distinguishing name or symbol, such as a logo, that identifies the products or services offered by a seller and differentiates those products and services from those offered by competitors⁴. 'Brand' is derived from the old Norse word brand, "meaning burn, and it was by this method that early man marked his livestock" The traditional American AMA definition (American Marketing Association, 1960) of brand is, "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them, which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors." And it can be defined, as an identifiable version of product can be perceived by a consumer as being distinctive from other versions of the product.

From Brand to Brand Image: The traditional concept of brand is always related to logo, sign or label for physical differentiation⁴. Therefore the traditional definition was criticized by others as "too mechanical, too concerned with the physical product, too input oriented, with little reference to manufacturers' strategic thinking or visions for the brand and failing to recognize that the brand acquires connotations in consumers' minds through their experiences. There was a comparatively new concept of the brand introduced by de Chernatony, brand was defined as nine main themes, i.e. "as a legal instrument, as a logo, as a company, as an identity system, as an image in consumers' minds, as a personality, as a relationship, as adding value and as an evolving". From this point of view, a brand is more than a visual label for differentiation and it involved imagery matter. For example, Levi's, a well-known jeans wear brand which is more than just an eye-catching red label; it has developed core urban-hip user imagery in youngsters' mind⁵. The concept of brand image was not a product of the 90's. It was first introduced by a journal "The Product and the Brand" in 1955 i.e. "A brand name is more than the label employed to differentiate among manufacturers of a product. It is a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes⁶. It tells the consumers many things, not only by the way it sounds, but more importantly, via the body of associations it has built up and acquired as a public object over a period of time". And that brand image concept "was widely seized upon because it aptly summed up the idea that consumers buy brands not only for their physical attributed and functions, but also because of the meanings connected with the brands". The brand image, which included, the sets of consumers' feelings, ideas and attitudes of brand, were crucial to purchase choice. Hence, the brand awareness can be created in the customers mind considering the following-

Brand Image: Herta Herzog suggested that brands, like product types, are perceived by the consumer in the form of "brand images". And Brand images "is the sum of total of impressions the consumer receives from many sources: from actual experience and hearsay about the brand itself as well as its

packaging, its name, the company making it, the types of people the individual has been using the brand, what was said in its advertising, as well as from the tone, format, type of advertising vehicle in which the product story was told".

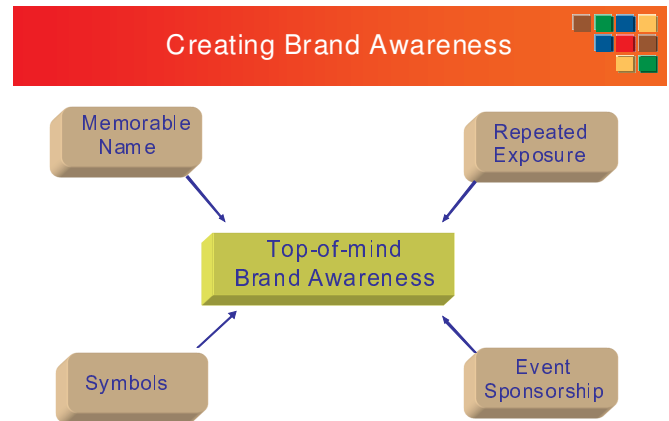


Figure-1
Creation of Brand Awareness

Actually, many scholars have proposed numerous definitions of brand image and there is little consensus regarding its appropriate definitions (Keller, 1993)⁴. Keller (1993) defined brand image as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer's memory". In Keller's definition, brand association is divided into four types⁶, which are i. types of brand association (can be classified into three major categories: attributes, benefits, and attitudes); ii. favorability of brand associations; iii. strength of brand associations; and 4) uniqueness of brand associations. Howard defined brand image as the consumer's total understanding of the brand. It consists of three components i. 'Brand recognition'—the physical characteristics by which the customer recognizes the brand. ii. "Attitude"—the strength of the brand of each of the relevant benefits on a "favorable-unfavorable" scale as judged by the consumer; iii. "Confidence" the strength of the consumer's feeling about his ability to determine accurately the quality of the brand⁷. Many researchers investigated the relationship between brand image and the consumers' self-image, and so many congruity studies of different products around. However, values of brand images are very important issues in strong clothing fashion brand creation.

Fashion Products: A Concept

At the end of the 20th century fashion is no longer a mode³ and *hadlost their ability to dictate trends*. This total change of the market of fashion products is a consequence of the evolution of society and its new trends which emerged after the 50's. Currently, the fashion concept demands an approach to the brands culture because the consumer looks for the brands that belong to a known universe that guarantees the benefit of identification with a specific group and/or lifestyle¹⁸.

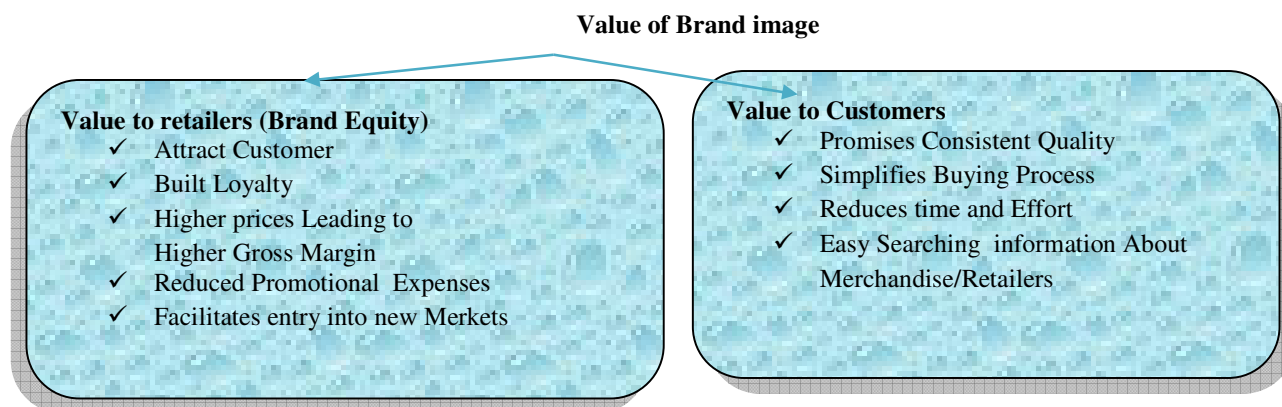


Figure-2
Different Values of Fashion Products

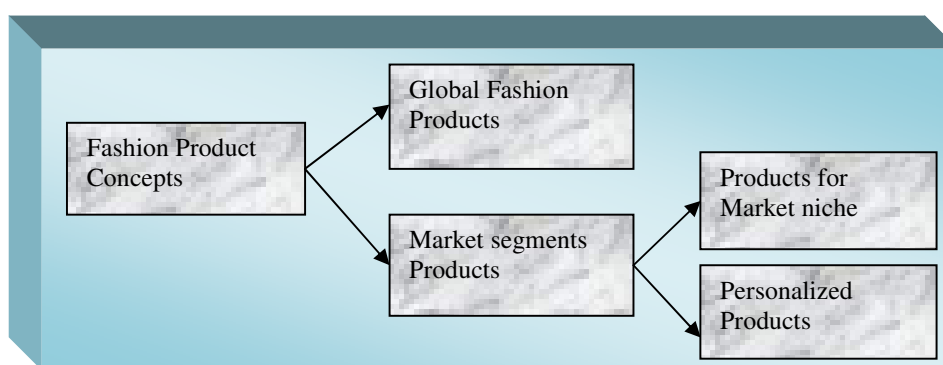


Figure-3
Different Concepts of Fashion Products

To the three components of the fashion – style, acceptance and timing, announced by authors like Frings⁸, Packard et al and Wolfe¹⁴, a fourth element has been added. Those three components orient this new element, the brand, but they are also determined by it. From this new trend, with social and economic implications, emerge two different concepts of fashion products: the fashion global product and the market segment fashion product.

A global product implies the uniformity of styles and apparel codes, without distinction of nationality, race or colour. All over the world, global brands present the same image of fashion, supported by franchising chains and marketing communication activities. This was the achievement of global brands that approached individuals of all nations and submitted them to the same fashion trends. However, the idea that the global brands are identical in all aspects in all the countries will be a myth very soon: local store managers of global brands. The products they sell in each store are not the same in all markets. Only the global brand concept and brand image remain the same. Moreover, the image of these products is usually overlapped with the fashion image of the designer, who projects it upon the

products by his (her) presence in fashion shows and during the personal attendance of his (her) customers. The ready-to-wear fashion products for market niches are produced in series (on a small scale), and do not depend on creators' image nor extremely personalized attendance to clients. The concept and image of the brands are focused in the clients as a group and aim to satisfy their values, tastes, demands and desires.

The Message with the Brand

In the two mentioned concepts of fashion products, the consumers look for specific aspects that correspond to the fashion image that they intend to adopt. According to Rogers et Gamans⁷, *selling fashion is selling an image, and when profit is a goal, the perceived image of the merchandise must coincide with the perceived self-image sought by the target markets served*. To maximize the impact on the market, it is necessary that the products of each brand can be immediately identified with these aspects and/or a differentiated image⁸. Therefore, the brands are now driven to focus on specific areas of fashion, which allow them to be tuned with the individual motivations of customers and with the most recent fashion trends. Therefore,

the brands of fashion products demand specific care in its image design. This message is transmitted by an idea that should be considered and developed, through the seasonal collections design and the marketing communication plan, to create a total image² called *approached globale* by Sommier⁹.

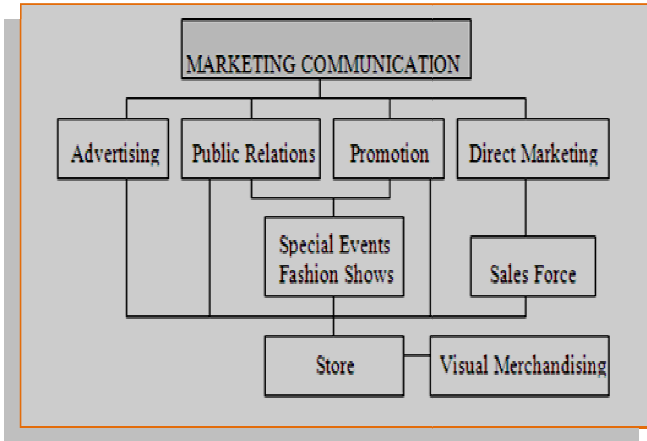


Figure-4
Marketing Communication Applied to Fashion Products

Another marketing communication method applied to develop clothing brand image is given below.

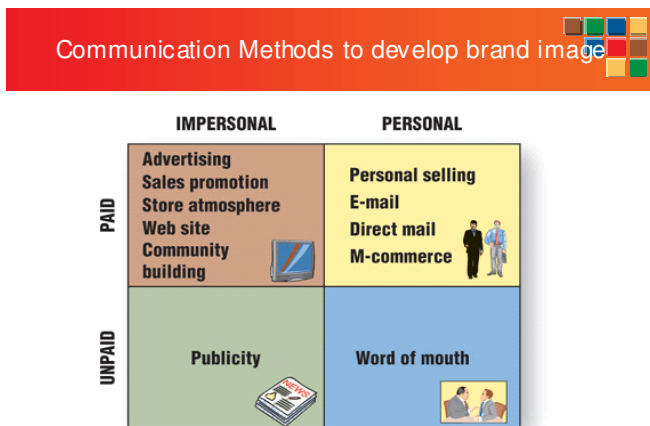


Figure-5
Marketing Communication methods to develop brand image

However, The market of fashion products is a highly competitive market whose main characteristic is the similar positioning of a large number of brands and, in this respect, the brands' image developed by marketing communications can influence the adoption process of the products. This process, the marketing stimuli assigned with the intention to influence the purchase decisions, must transmit similar messages in all communication supports¹⁰. The harmony this complex process must consider such aspects as the brand awareness and the

brand image, both determined by the characteristics of consumers' perception. The image is a mental representation of the brand or product attributes and benefits. It is a multidimensional phenomenon that depends on the perception of those attributes and benefits. In fashion products, both mental representation and its perception are built in a continuous way, and developed through the image of fashion transmitted by each seasonal collection and by all the activities of marketing communication¹¹. The overall effect of fashion products branding depends on the integration of all the components of the marketing communication plan, including visual merchandising, with the product design. All these elements have an impact over the adoption process and a final goal: to influence the purchase options of fashion products through the satisfaction of a fashion image demand.

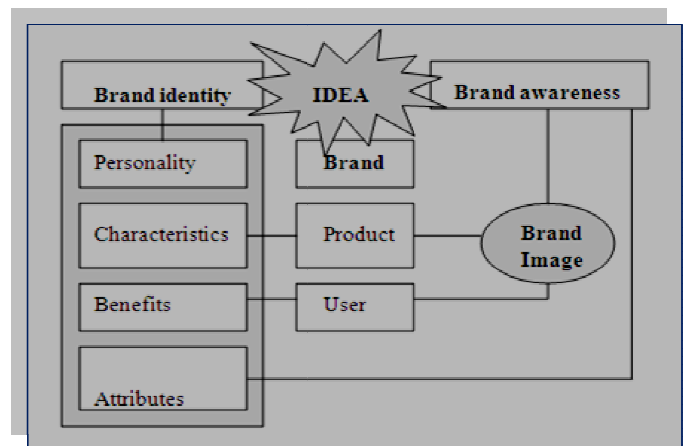


Figure-6
The Brand Image in the Marketing Communication Process

The adoption process of fashion products reflects the great influence of the image of fashion that it transmits as well as its inherent identification potential (social, cultural and economic), besides its basic function – to protect the body¹⁰. Following the idea presented by Rogers et Gamans, for whom fashion products are products associated to the image, Sommier¹² states that the brand offers the consumer, through the fashion collections, the possibility to choose a distinguishing personal image between the two principles:

To be –the adoption of a fashion image and the acquisition of concordant products allows the individual to make a statement and to communicate it through the values of the brand he chose; To seem – the fashion image adopted depends on the psychological needs of the consumer and its satisfaction through the attributes and benefits of the brand.

However, the consumer searches for fashions that more nearly fit his or her own needs and wants, rather than those of the idealized people who in the past have appeared in advertisements and commercials.

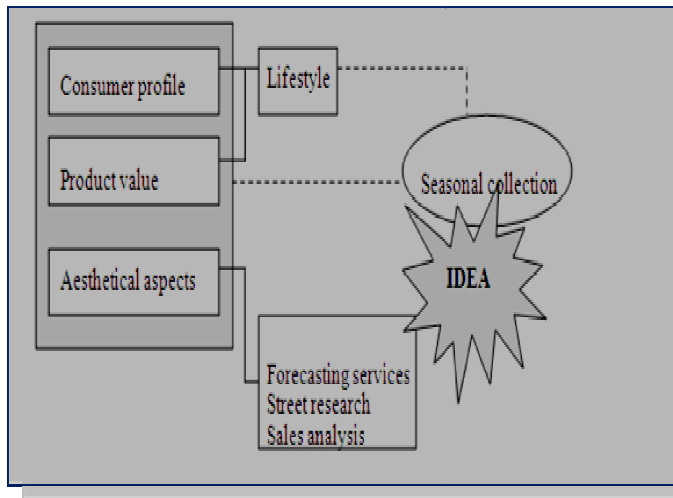


Figure 7
The Fashion Image in the Marketing Communication Process

The identity search is obviously one of the aspects to consider in the design of fashion collections and in the message to use in marketing communications¹¹. The identification of the fashion image, which Wolfe¹⁴ classifies as a social need, is one that most strongly influences the adoption process. Through its intrinsic factors, such as tastes and values, the brand image of fashion products expresses the social role and image that the consumer intends to communicate and that allows him to be identified with a particular lifestyle or social group. Agreeing with the idea presented by Wolfe, Barnard⁶, describing fashion as the most significant way in which social relations between people are constructed, experienced and understood, defining it as the most direct and individual form of communication in the group and society¹³. The store image development, schematized in figure 8, is established through its geographical location, the commercial zone where it occupies and its external design, as well as by the products that it offers and their presentation in the internal space of the store¹⁴. The combination of these factors defines the store atmosphere or look⁹, or the personality of the store, which image of itself should match the customer's impression of the store¹⁴.

The total image created by the interconnection between the fashion images with the brand's image, will allow the decoding of the message at the store through the visual merchandising¹⁴. To obtain this, it has to be done at several levels, the available merchandise, considering the cycle of fashion life; the physical space of the store (creation of the environment and the rank of the product in displays); sales force (the appearance, the availability and the position); the offered services (for example: credit privileges, return service, telephone orders, home delivers, space presentation of the dressing rooms, bar, free parking, alterations and repairs)¹⁴. The disposal of the fashion products at the store implies an adequate distribution of items on the shelves and stands and can be carried through the

presentation of the main subject or colour palette of each collection, or by the exhibition of an item that permits a good subject definition¹¹. The use of the aesthetic aspects and the harmonious co-ordination of the elements of design of each collection, associated with the environment created by the decoration, the rank of the displays and other elements like the music, lead to the development of the atmosphere in the store able to call the consumer's attention and to show combinations of items of the new collection¹⁶.

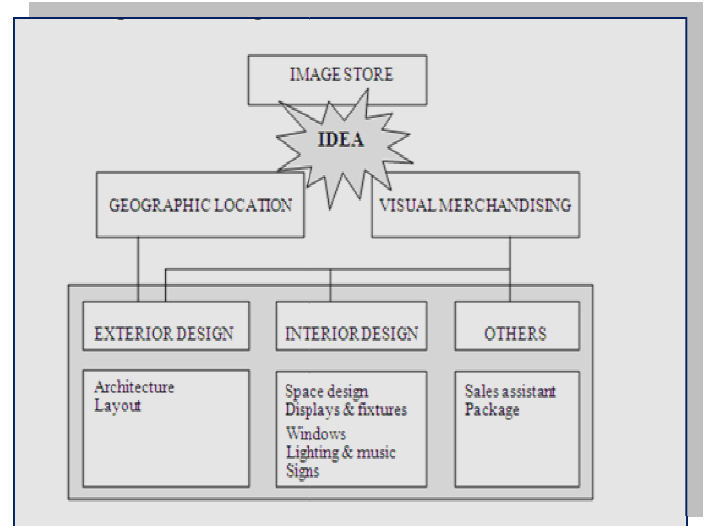


Figure-8
The Store Image in the Marketing Communication Process

Conclusion

The main objectives of clothing fashion brand images development through a marketing communication plan, is an integrated perspective for clothing branding, and to influence the buying process, to increase brand awareness or to conquer the consumer through the fashion image they desire to adopt. This means that the brand becomes a guarantee for fashion image and lifestyle demands, or for the identification with a specific social group. The success of this communication process between the brand and the target audience depends on the idea of continuity, initially defined for the brand and for the product, and usually called the message. This should lead to the selection of themes for the product design of each collection and the marketing communication plan, including visual merchandising at the store. The main objective of the continuity of this process is the development of the brand awareness, built through its total image.

As a communication process clothing fashion becomes a code used by the brands to answer the target needs and desires. The idea that the brand intends to communicate should influence the theme selection and design elements for all the items of a seasonal collection, which implies that the fashion image

adopted for the brand should be flexible since the desired fashion image may change.

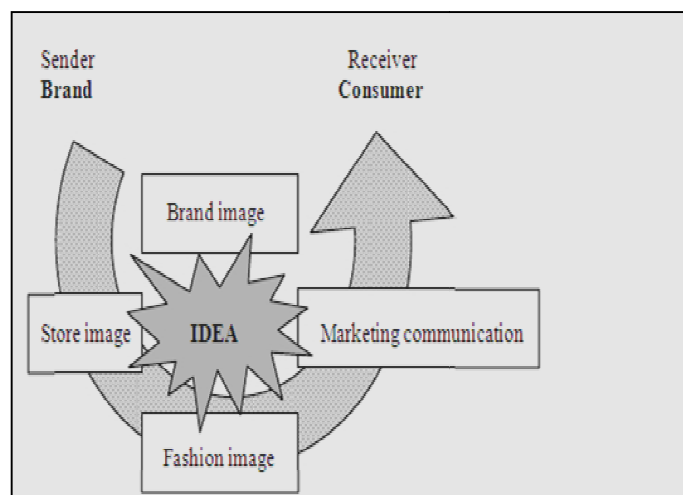


Figure-9

The Idea Development in Branding of Fashion Products

The brand message will achieve its goal only if all marketing communication efforts present the same language or code, even if they communicate through different channels and media. This process implies a context presentation, where the product and the fashion image, presented by the brand for a specific season, are shown to the target audience. In order for the message to be understood and accepted by the consumer it should be according to the fashion code and image the brand intends to create and, above all, it should develop expectations and curiosity about the products collection. The adoption of the fashion image and the buying process will be influenced at the store. That is why the same idea should be used as a guide to atmosphere creation at the store. The visual merchandising needs to use the same language (theme and design elements) of the product. The store image is a crucial element of the brand total image, because it is where the consumer will meet the product and will decide the purchase.

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