Chapter. Brand awareness among Polish consumers

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Abstract. This paper will in particular focus on issues connected with brand awareness among Polish consumers. Firstly, the general idea of the brand including brand equity and awareness will be introduced together with its important role of integrating a company with its products and products with the customer. Some more in-depth analysis of Polish consumers will be conducted based on empirical data regarding their relationship to brands, advertising and shopping. The data was obtained from the national survey carried out by the Research Institute of Public Opinion – TNS OBOP. The results generally indicate that brand awareness among Polish consumers is still increasing. However, Polish consumers appear more aware of typical associations with a brand such as quality and longevity rather than with general satisfaction with a product, its competitiveness, availability, and range of choice. Because the level of brand awareness still has not reached the maturity stage.

Introduction

Since the fall of the iron curtain, the free market has started slowly recovering from under supply of tangible and intangible goods. With passing time, the typical features of the free market started to enter post-communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Competition, the most important factor, which previously was discouraged, became more common. Thanks to competition, the further development of the market resulted not only in a wider variety of products and their better availability, but also in their diversified price range. Following this extensive market progress, the quality of products started gaining importance together with the introduction of various brands. It is important to underline that all the above issues were quiet a novelty to consumers who were used to struggling to buy products in a market where demand exceeded supply. At that time a product’s appearance and quality played a minor role and the only important feature of a product was its utility.

For already fifteen years, Poland has participated in a free market economy where the knowledge gap regarding the difference in the level of information between marketers and consumers is significantly decreasing from year to year. Although much in the education process of consumers and marketers is still required, notably in the fields of consumer rights, brand awareness, and ethical marketing practices.

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products are introduced, which push manufacturers to make products more efficient in their use of resources, fulfilling consumers' needs and being friendly to the environment at the same time. In this case, enforcing prescriptive standards slows down the whole innovation process. Similar situation takes place whenever companies want to be ecologically reliable together with cost-efficiency through a product supply chain (including: material choice, production, packaging, distribution, sale, etc.). Because than implemented standards at one point in the chain sometimes prevent to innovate other parts of the chain. Finally, the process of innovation can be weakened by dictatorial standards which make products less distinctive from each other and influence their design rights.\(^1\)

### 1.2 Defining a brand – pragmatic and holistic view

It is possible to state that there are two different approaches of defining a brand, according to various brand definitions. The first of Aaker is the traditional one - more 
pragmatic view and perceives a brand as a product identifier, including the source of the product. According to Aaker (1991) “a brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol such as logo, trademark or package design intended to identify the goods, services or either one seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors.” The brand builds an image of the product itself and is a sort of a message devoted to potential customer. Additionally, the psychological behavior of customer defines conscious and unconscious elements that create relationship between the brand and the user. Therefore this second approach is the holistic view (Styles and Ambler, 1995), which presents a brand as something more than just the product. This view defines a brand as “the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and that provides satisfaction... The attributes that make up a brand may be real or Illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible.” (Ambler, 1997). As it is seen from the previous definition brands to some extent define our character, identify us with particular lifestyle. Besides they give us sense of belonging to a specific social group, what has been underlined by Murphy (1990), who perceives brand “not only as the actual product, but also the unique property of a specific owner and has been developed over time so as to embrace a set of values and attributes – both tangible and intangible – which meaningfully and appropriately differentiate products which are otherwise very similar.”

### 1.3 Positive assets of brand

Except the fact, that brand – is a company’s attribute, which is given to the product, it also reflects some dimension of positive assets. Whenever customers think of a branded product they usually associate only positive features as: good, valuable, efficient, tested, and durable. Therefore, considering the brand customers firstly notice a symbol afterwards quality, which is connected with this particular symbol, and finally opinion about this quality. The brand seems gaining on relevance in the current environment and becomes more autonomous. It means that brand as a feature of a product may sometimes become even more important than the product itself. In other words brand may replace the product, for instance we drink Nescafe not just coffee, we eat Milka not just a chocolate, we wear Adidas not just sport shoes, or I find McDonald’s tasty. Consumers find brands more tasty or fancy because of the fact that they simply are brands and of course if they were not brands than consumers would not find these products so tasty or fancy. From one point of view brand is a product, which is purchased, possessed, used, and is valuable. From the other, brand can also be a personification of a good name. Previously, brand was perceived in terms of a good name, but now brand has a famous or well-known name. In this case brand not only possesses human features but also those features, which are desired by humans like for example prestige. The brand takes over individual characteristics, which used to be typical only to humans – customers trust the brand, are loyal to the brand, are satisfied with the brand and have relation with the brand. For that reason, it is possible to state that a brand is a very relevant existence in customer’s life.\(^2\) In consequence, brand is a constant point of reference, according to tangible or invisible attributes it can serve to the consumer, such as:

- **Contract** – is created by sending a message to the consumer, which is a reward with satisfying experience of functional and emotional benefits in return for customers’ trust and loyalty.
- **Signpost** - to differentiate its attributes but also to reflect the fulfillment of consumers needs.
- **Relationship** – is developed by creating and maintaining a superior process in which trust and loyalty may be obtained\(^3\).

### 1.4 Unique benefits of brand

In an attempt to broaden the scope of brand’s features, it is time to focus on a combination of six unique benefits it offers to the consumer. However, firstly we have to consider the fact that a brand means a positive dimension, which actually is a subtle symbolic structure, existing only in our mind. A brand helps consumers to organize their life and relations with the world. But because each mental structure develops slowly and gradually a longer period of time must be considered to grow an attachment. This might be gained only through positive personal experiences with a product. Therefore, consumers are trying different brands for as long as they find one which fulfills their either functional or symbolic needs. Because consumers’ attitude is undergoing continuous changes due to never-ending choices, they are seeking for various benefits from a brand, such as following:

1. **Value:** Is the most common one, which is perceived in terms of a higher quality than usually delivered at a competitive price. This has been shown by Rao and Monroe (1989) that brand name is a consistent signal of product quality.

2. **Choice:** Thank to a process of innovation in terms of competition consumers may also benefit from a wide choice of brand diversity such as: quality, size, and shape, smell etc.

3. **Convenience:** Brands have their specified features such as names, logos, colors what makes them easy to be recognized and try to be widely available to offer convenience to their customers.

4. **Relevance:** It is given to the brand in order to sustain innovation which helps to adjust brands to consumers’ changing needs

5. **Reassurance:** In a brand is seen as a result of trust in the manufacturer and reliability.

6. **Satisfaction:** by the consumer is received from a purchase and in a longer period also identification with a brand may be obtained, when all the above five benefits are delivered at one time.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Standards or Strati-Jackets, AIM - European Brands Association, www.aim.be

\(^2\) Jetzy Bralczyk, professor from University of Warsaw, Press Conference of “ProMarka” Association, 10th of September 2005

\(^3\) Standards or Strati-Jackets, AIM - European Brands Association, www.aim.be

\(^4\) Standards or Strati-Jackets, AIM - European Brands Association, www.aim.be
2.1 Understanding of brand equity

The concept of brand equity has been created in order to define relationship between customers and brands (Wood, 2000). However, Farquhar (1989) describes brand equity as the added value bestowed by the brand for the purpose of the product. But extensive studies in the area of the brand equity have displayed a keen interest over the past several years. Hence, the concept of brand equity can be viewed from two perspectives:

1. Consumer oriented approach: presents the difference in which a customer perceives and responds to a branded product in contrast with a customer’s reaction to a similar product without a brand name (Keller, 1993).

2. Company oriented approach: where greater margins are earned by branded products with the help of marketing mix over similar marketing mix of the unbranded products (Simon and Sullivan, 1990).

In fact, the most synthesized definition of these two perspectives presented above has been provided by Aaker (1991). According to him, brand equity is:

A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that adds to/or detracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to the firm’s customers.

However, in the end the source of any brand value will be gained by the end user of the purchased good.

Keller (1993) went even further in his model’s concept, which refers to the theory of memory from cognitive psychology. This theory suggests that brand equity takes place when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favourable, strong, and unique brand association in a memory. All in all it is important to understand that brand equity is the intangible asset generated by the attempt of marketing (Ambler 1997). In addition, Feldwick (1996) points out in his approach that brand equity measures the attachment’s strength a consumer has to a brand. This attachment can be associated with brand loyalty. The second interpretation consists of the associations and beliefs of the consumer regarding the brand description. In this situation the brand description could be interpreted as brand image (Wood, 2000).

It is relatively common that most of the models are based on the one or more components of the Aaker model (see Figure 2). Based on Aaker’s brand equity definition, he developed a model that consists of major assets divided into five categories:

1. Brand Association: is concerned with the personal values consumers attach to the product, providing a reason for consumers to buy a brand. This perception of values could result from three images: corporate, product and user image (Biel, 1992).

2. Brand Awareness: is concerned with the strength of a brand’s presence in the consumer’s mind obtained from past exposure.

3. Perceived Quality: is defined as a measure of benefits and perceptions which affect consumer’s interpretation of the brand. But perceived quality does not always equal to the actual quality of the product. This is the consumer’s subjective evaluation of the product (Zeithaml, 1988).

4. Brand Loyalty: is defined as reasons provided by perceived quality, and the associations to tie a consumer to the company or its brand by creating a habit. It is also a commitment to repurchase a preferred product in the future despite situational influences (Oliver, 1997).

5. Other Proprietary: consist of patents, trademarks, and channel relationships to protect the brand from competitors.

Source: own compilation based on Montamemi and Shahrokhi (1998)

Figure 2: Interrelationship between two models of brand equity

Kamakura’s and Russell’s approach (1993) of the brand equity used in their scanner panel three elements that are measured:

1. Perceived value: is not identified by price and promotion but by other assets which define value of the brand.

2. Brand dominance: defines brand’s price competitiveness.

3. Intangible value: is the perceived utility minus objective utility.

All the above models of brand equity create a real association network, which is mostly supported by the associations that consumers have with a brand based on their experiences including brand awareness. Although, many researches combine brand association and brand awareness into one (Washburn and Plank, 2000), we will follow the Aaker’s concept which separates these two categories. Therefore, a deeper understanding of brand awareness will be provided.
3.1 Brand awareness – important component of brand equity

The following section provides a description of the brand awareness, which is an important component of brand equity. As mentioned before, brand awareness by Aaker (1991) refers to ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is ascribed to a certain product class. In his opinion, there are several levels of brand awareness, starting from mere recognition of the brand to dominance. Of course, it refers to the involved brand remembered by a consumer. However, the brand dominance is when the consumer can only recognize a single brand. This recognition reflects in the consumer’s familiarity with a brand based on his own experience. If the kind of experience changes from positive to negative or opposite in the occurred condition so will brand awareness change. Therefore brands can not be static and need to change with their environment (Berry, 1993).

Much of the research has been conducted within this area, which shows that although the consumer sometimes is unable to recall a place where the brand was spotted but still has positive feelings towards familiar brand than towards a brand which is completely unknown. This indicates the significant power of the brand recognition. According to Keller, brand awareness consists of both brand recognition and brand recall (Keller, 1993). He emphasizes that brand recall refers to consumer’s ability to retrieve product’s brand from a memory when it is mentioned. In other words, how easy it is for the consumer to remember the brand. Therefore it is not surprising, that Rossiter and Percy (1987) defined brand awareness in terms of ability to identify or recognize the brand by a consumer. What is more, Keller (1993) finds brand awareness as a compulsory component of a brand image creation. Brand image reflects in favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in the consumer’s memory (Keller, 2003). This definition refers to the individual consumer and the consumer’s reaction to the marketing-mix of a specific product. These are all consumers’ perceptions gained by using the brand including positive attitude which influences perceived quality. Both brand awareness including recognition and recall, together with brand image define consumer perceptions of brands recognized by Keller (1993; 1998) as brand knowledge.

Finally, when the consumer perceives the brand more positively it comes to chain reaction. It occurs in the higher consumer’s brand awareness and loyalty. Of course, in end effect it results in a higher market share, less sensitivity of a consumer to probable price increases, and eventual brand extension opportunities (Belen del Rio and Vazquez, 2001).

4.1 Different functions of the brand

Brands play an integral part in today’s economy. On one side, brands have become an important component of the marketing-mix to the company (Murphy, 1990) and on the other they are a source of information for the consumer (Aaker and Biel, 1993). Therefore in this section we intend to focus on two main market players separately: the brand’s owner and the consumer. This is because a brand provides different value, benefits and meaning for the manufacturer and for the consumer due to the perspective it is viewed from.

1. Manufacturer’s brand
   is possessed by the producer of a particular product, who created a brand (Kotler and Armstrong, 1996). In this meaning a brand fulfills various important functions, it:
   • legally protects unique product features,
   • creates a corporate image, helping to launch new brands and gain acceptance (Kotler and Armstrong, 1997),
   • secures financial returns (Collins-Dood and Louviere, 1999),

   • is an identification tool to distinguish the product from others on the market,
   • signals tangible and intangible characteristics of a product such as: quality, price, content (Ambler, 1997),
   • gains a competitive advantage (Skinner, 1990),
   • helps to create brand associations in consumer’s memory to differentiate, position, generate positive attributes of purchasing a particular brand (Aaker, 1991).

2. The consumer
   is an individual or a household, who buys goods or services for own consumption (Kotler and Armstrong, 1996). The consumer’s decision of purchase may be influenced by a brand or other product’s features, which are usually connected to a brand. Also from the consumer’s perspective in this meaning a brand fulfills several important functions, it:
   • guarantees the quality of the product (Kotler and Armstrong, 1996),
   • reduces a level of risk perceived by a consumer during intention of purchase (Janiszewski and van Osselaer, 2000),
   • identifies product class and source, and ascribes responsibility for this product to its producer (Lassar and Mittal, 1995),
   • it uses brand associations to help making purchase decisions (Aaker, 1991),
   • reduces search costs of gathering information about the product (Biswas, 1992).

5.1 Brand awareness among Polish consumers – presentation of survey results

5.1.1 Survey purpose and data collection

The purpose of the survey was to recognize how consumers perceive the brand and to examine their attitudes and opinions towards the branded products during daily purchasing. Besides, factors influencing the purchase of branded products were to be identified. Additionally, review and understanding of clichés concerning the brand should be measured. Finally, the actual advantages of purchasing branded products for the consumer were recognized and categorized.

The data presented in this article were obtained from the national survey carried out by the Research Institute of Public Opinion - TNS OBOP between June and July 2005. This survey was carried out upon order of the “ProMarka” (ProBrand) - Association of Producers of Branded Products. To collect the data three methods were used. Firstly, the analysis of historical data of TNS OBOP was used, based on:

- Information about brands coming from surveys such as Omninas conducted in 2003 and 2004
- Perception of the brand in Poland versus perception of the brand in Europe in 2002

The purpose of it was to determine whether consumers’ attitudes to brands have changed in any respect during such range of time.

Secondly, a quantitative analysis was done on a sample of 1000 participants aged from 15 years from all over Poland. Finally, the qualitative details were collected from two focus group interviews, which included participants of both genders, aged between 25 and 35 years old who were purchasing branded fast moving goods and clothes.
5.1.2 Survey results

The results of the survey present an image of the Polish consumer - the person who values quality and functionality of the product and is not influenced much by advertising. In addition, Polish consumer uses own experience as a guideline in choosing branded products. The survey verifies relevant product factors such as: brand, quality, safety and price. These factors were tested in different product categories - toothpastes, detergents, soft drinks, spices, and food. The below analysis is based on some selected results from the survey.

Because of the fact, that TNS OBOP has to its disposition results of the tracking project “Poles at shopping” dating from 1994, it was possible to verify consumer trends. The far most important factors have been since 1994 and now are the rational ones: price and product quality. The turning point for price was the year 1996 and for quality 2000. Since then both of these factors have started gaining in importance in the purchase of everyday products. Since the year 2000 attention to price as a factor has been constant. But attention given to the product quality is still growing, and received nearly 85% of the importance. When we consider brand and well known manufacturer, slight increase has been observed since 2000 (see Figure 3). Actually, in the year 2005, this factor was the third choice in a closed-end question where up to 3 answers were accepted, and received 30%. The branded product is more relevant to Poles than the fact that a product is manufactured in Poland. This significant difference is observed between the year 2003 and 2005. Traditionally Polish consumers consider any opinions of relatives and friends before purchase. Therefore this factor is in the fourth place. Surprisingly, the factor such as package has been quite constant since 1994 and is still below 10%.

Source: TNS OBOP for ProMarka Association

Figure 3: Poles shopping trends

In terms of the features of branded products, high quality was the highest indicated one – 73%. This feature was followed by known producer and durability of a product. However these two features received respectively much lower rates – 52% and 45%. Among eleven features of a branded products evaluated by consumers such feature as a commonly known brand received much lower percentage in comparison to the first three ones, because only 36% and was followed by a feature of a brand known for years with 35%, what is possible to see on the figure below. The high availability of a branded product was the least important feature from all presented ones.

In another open-end question regarding perception of branded products consumers answered many questions spontaneously. The four frequent responses were almost exactly the same as in the case of features of branded products, with the only one difference that high price was one place was in the third place and durability in the fourth one.

Source: TNS OBOP for ProMarka Association

Figure 4: Characteristics of branded products

Figure 5 presents major choice criteria while purchasing everyday goods. It was a closed-end question with answers on a scale from 1 to 10, ………. Again, price is in the first place which is followed by experience and quality of a product. However, the difference among those three top criteria is rather slight. Importance of a brand is on the seventh position in a top three criteria from the end and received 6.45 points. Only two other criteria were declared as less important than a brand – friends’ opinion and commercials with 4.6 and 3.7 points respectively.

Source: TNS OBOP for ProMarka Association

Figure 5: Major decision purchasing criteria
On a daily basis, Poles willingly buy branded products. Only less than 1/6 of the respondents declare that they buy branded products very rarely or never. But only 1/10 of questioned consumers purchase such products always and very often (see Figure 6). Among people who buy branded products very often are: the young, singles, employed, university graduates, and people with high income. On the contrary, those who never purchase branded products are people with no higher education, unemployed ones and elderly.

![Pie chart showing frequency of purchasing branded products]

Source: TNS OBOP for ProMarka Association

Figure 6: Frequency of purchasing branded products

Respondents asked about actual advantages perceived in branded products have various associations. Firstly, 92% of them believe that branded products are made of high quality materials. Besides, 45% of respondents claim that branded products are durable one. More than half of consumers feel safe while using the branded products in case when a manufacturer is well-known.

BRAND
- High quality of the product
- Guaranteed satisfaction
- Feelings of safety
- Innovation

Source: TNS OBOP for ProMarka Association

Figure 7: Consumer advantages of purchasing branded products

This feeling of safety is also perceived in terms of safety usage of branded products and was declared by 24%. Besides, 22% of consumers gain feelings of safety when claims of branded products are accepted. Finally, 75% of consumers have quite high associations with state-of-the-art technologies which are used while producing branded products.

According to consumers’ reactions to some statements regarding their behaviors and opinions when they consider everyday shopping, various results were achieved. There are 50% of the respondents who rather ‘have preferred brands that they usually buy’. But only 29% strongly agreed with that sentence. With the statement that buying branded products is usually a pleasant experience only 23% asked consumers strongly agreed, where 43% rather agreed and only 15% rather did not agreed. Finally, 27% rather did not agreed with a fact that if a new product of a brand a consumer is accustomed to appears will be certainly bought by this person. The majority – 35% rather agreed where only 17% did strongly agree. In all three statements only 2, 4 and 6% of asked respondents did not agree at all.

Conclusions

Significant changes in behavior and opinions of Poles have been observed since joining the European Union in 2004. There is a slight increase of citizen’s wealth due to EU enlargement. This growing tendency causes that more consumers focus on product’s quality. The same attitude has been observed in terms of branded products and well-known producer since 2003. Because of globalization of mass produced goods it is not surprising that product’s brand is more relevant than a Polish origin of that product. Although producers of goods compete in inventing unusual packages in order to draw attention of potential consumers but results of the study indicate law influences of the package on the consumers.

The aspect of high availability of branded products is not perceived as relevant feature because these products are widely available. It is important to underline that high quality of a branded product is in a superior position comparing to well-known brand. Actually a well-known brand gained recognition due to high quality of a branded product. This divergence may be either a result of wrongly formulated question or because basic features of a branded product are not essential choice criteria during a purchase.

In the discussed context, results of the survey do not confirm a significant brand feature in choosing purchase criteria. In this case it raises doubts whether consumer does not identify product’s brand with its quality.

Socio-economic condition of Polish consumers causes that in 80 cases for 100 consumers who have preferred brands will usually by them. However in 52 cases for 100 a consumer will buy a branded product if a new product of a brand that consumer is attached to appears. It means that a consumer is not strongly attached to the brand because new product attracts a consumer with new product features rather than a brand itself. Therefore previous relations are true as consumers identify brand with high quality of a product.

Finally, Polish consumers appear more aware of typical associations with a brand such as quality and longevity rather than with general satisfaction with a product, its competitiveness, availability, and range of choice. Because the level of brand awareness still has not reached the maturity stage. Manufacturers should perceive and care about the brand in terms of high quality, innovation, durability and all of these for reasonable price accepted by the consumer.
References