

The Use of Marketing Communications in the Clothing Industry in Slovenia

Abstract

This article presents the role of marketing communication research in the clothing industry in Slovenia. The aim of our research was to show how these clothing and textile companies use a marketing communication mix for the promotion of products and brands. Our findings suggest that a properly used marketing communication mix is a factor for success in the Slovenian clothing industry. The research results address three groups of companies. Companies with a more developed brand name place more importance on advertising in the marketing communications mix, while the second and third groups of companies give more importance to personal selling. Differences between the groups are obvious, and these correlate to the development of a brand name.

Key words: fashion, clothing industry, fashion clothes, fashion marketing, brand name, marketing communications.

Introduction

The textile and clothing industry is one of the largest industrial processing branches in the world. The number of workers employed and the share of the social product within the industrial sector actually makes it the leading branch in many countries. It ranges from heavily capital-intensive industries (spinning, weaving, knitting, textile coating) to classical labour-intensive work (clothes confectioning).

Fashion predominates in the clothing industry, which makes it specifically and constantly influenced by the culture of fashion. Design and trade marks represent intangible assets, which create relatively permanent sources of competitive advantage, and therefore depend crucially on communication.

Understanding the antecedents and consequences of involvement in fashion clothing is important, as fashionable clothing occupies a focal position in the lives of many people and, as such, has both significant social and economic value in many societies. The focus on fashionable clothing is significant because of its economic value and the significant social functions & meaning it provides in consumers' lives [1].

Fashion products can reflect self-image and can assume personal importance to the individual [2].

Fashion 'brands' appear to be becoming more and more important as they act as symbolic signifiers of values, encompassing certain identities in creating community [3].

Marketing communications in the clothing industry represent the network of relationships that forms between the manufacturer,

retailer and customer. The essential target of communicating in the field of clothing and fashion is to influence the consumer and direct his/her purchasing pattern. By integrating the consumer into an organisation, we encounter a change in the nature of communication from one-way to two-way communication, from monologue to dialogue. The product itself, namely the fashion clothing, as well as the changing prices and accessibility of that product in an open market and increased competition, are not enough. An enterprise should follow a specific marketing concept, and marketing communications are a very important part of addressing that concept.

Fashion marketing concept

Fashion marketing is the application of a range of techniques and a business philosophy that centres upon the customer and potential customer of clothing and clothing-related products and services, in order to meet the long-term goals of the organisation.

There is another way to view the relationship between marketing and design, and this is termed the fashion marketing concept. The idea that good fashion design only requires sufficient promotion to succeed is only applicable to a very limited number of businesses, usually those producing expensive garments for an elite market.

The alternative view of fashion design as a function of marketing research fails

to acknowledge that many people either do not know what they will like until presented with choices, or that their preferences change over time. For example, many who profess to hate a design seen on the catwalk may later come to like it when they try the garment themselves, or realise others have signalled their acceptance. Good fashion design can challenge conventional views. It should be recognised that consumers vary in the conservatism they have towards fashion styles, as well as in the speed and readiness with which they change their opinions.

A simple model of the interrelationship of fashion design and marketing can be seen in Table 1.

In the matrix above, it can be seen that low concern for customers, profit and design leads to failure. This occurs as a consequence of over-estimating design ability whilst disregarding customers' preferences and the need for profit.

The fashion marketing concept attempts to embrace the positive aspects of high concern for design, customers and profit by recognising the interdependence of marketing and design. If designers understand how marketing can enhance the creative process, and marketing personnel appreciate that within the fashion industry design can lead as well as respond to customer requirements, progress can be made. Market researchers can establish the sizing information which customers want on garments, and can also

Table 1. The fashion marketing concept. Source: M. Easey. *Fashion Marketing*. Blackwell Science. London 2002, p. 7.

Concern for Fashion Design	High	Design-centred	Fashion marketing concept
	Low	Failure	Marketing-centred
		Low	High
Concern for customers and profit			

analyse reactions to several provisional illustrations, but they cannot produce detailed styling specifications. Marketing as applied to the fashion industry must appreciate the role of design [4].

The role of marketing communications in fashion

Marketing communications is defined as the communications in marketing that is used to create a favourable predisposition toward a brand of product or service, an idea, or even a person [5]. The role of marketing communications is to support the marketing plan and help key audiences understand and believe in the marketer's advantage over the competition [6].

Marketing communications consists of all the promotional elements which involve the communications between an organisation and its target audiences on all matters that affect marketing performance [7, 8].

The importance of marketing communications has grown in recent years for several reasons. More and more products and services are seen as having arrived at the maturity stage of their life cycle. As a result, points-of-difference to distinguish brands which are related to the inherent qualities of the product or service have become harder to come by. By transcending these inherent qualities, marketing communications can provide information to create points of difference, which would otherwise not be possible. On the global marketplace, marketing communications can allow brands to stand out and help consumers appreciate their comparative advantages [9].

Marketing communications allow marketers to inform, persuade, motivate and remind consumers. Product attributes can be translated to benefits and related to higher-order values. Consumers can be told or shown how and why a product is used, by what kind of person, and where and when; they can learn about who makes the product and what the company and brand stand for; and they can be given an incentive or reward for trial or usage [10].

Companies entering the market with fashion clothes can use all elements of the communications mix in their communication; advertising, personal selling and sales promotion, as well as public relations.

- **Advertising.** Any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion

of ideas, goods or services by any identified sponsor [11]. The pages of professional newsletters and magazines are common avenues for advertising information related to a firm's products. [12]. It is mainly used to build up the awareness of the brand's existence, keeping in clients' minds that the product is available on the market. Its aim is also to show a given product in comparison to the competitors' products [13]. Effective communication using a media assortment and advertising can distinguish a firm from its less focused competitors [14].

- **Sales promotion.** Short-term incentives to encourage the trial or purchase of a product or service, such as discounts for access to a database over a limited time period [15, 16].
- **Public relations and publicity.** Programmes designed to promote and/or protect a company's image, or those of its products, including product literature, exhibitions and articles about organisations' products in professional or even in consumer publications [17].
- **Personal selling.** Face-to-face interactions with one or more prospective purchasers, for the purpose of making sales. In business-to-business marketing, sales are generally the primary means of selling business goods and services [18]. Other elements of the promotional mix are frequently employed to support or augment the persuasive nature of the personal selling function [19].

Each instrument of marketing communications has its own features and specific functions, and can be most effective in reaching a very specific communication target. However, the greatest beneficial effects for the company can be obtained by the integration of individual elements of the communication mix, a concept/process often referred to as integrated marketing communication.

An empirical research of marketing communications in the clothing industry in Slovenia

Characteristics of the sample

The research was conducted in Slovenia. The results offered in this paper are related to a sample of 35 respondents. Although the sample included only these 35 companies, it represents the entire

Slovenian fashion industry. We believe that the sample was unique in terms of its characteristics in describing the entire Slovenian fashion industry. The data were collected through mailings and telephone & personal interviews. We received a total of 28 responses, which represented a response rate of 80%. The data were analysed using the SPSS program and Microsoft Excel.

The companies in the sample were divided according to the number of employees, their share of rework business, their individual distribution network and their individual brand name. Using this process/methodology, we determined three groups of companies:

- **Group 1**
Companies with their own brand name and their own retail stores.
- **Group 2**
Companies without their own brand name, but with their own retail stores.
- **Group 3**
Companies without their own brand name and without their own retail stores.

The size of the companies was determined based on the Slovenian Law of Business Companies. A company with no more than 100 employees was considered a small company, a company with 101 to 250 employees was considered a medium-sized company, and a company with over 251 employees was considered a large company.

The first group of companies encompassed 78.57% of the total sample, the second and third group of companies represented 10.71% of the companies in the sample. The results show that the share of rework business grows in proportion to the growth of the size of company, while at the same time the share of their own brand name diminishes. Another interesting finding was that there was a large number of employees in the first group of companies compared to the second and third group of companies. This is explained by the fact that the first group of companies are mostly large companies. However, we also found a growth of employees in medium-sized companies as well. The first group of companies encompassed the large, medium-sized and small companies, while the second and third group of companies only encompassed medium-sized and small companies [20]. The characteristic of the sample shows Table 2.

Results of the empirical research

Organisation of the marketing function

The first aim of our empirical research was to explore the organisation of the marketing function in the sample companies. The values presented in Table 3 refer to the marketing organisation's proportion of companies in the individual group that responded to the questions.

A total of 40.91% of the companies in the first group had a marketing department. This was the only group in the survey sample that had a marketing department. A marketing department is one of the conditions for the development of a brand name and of retailing. In the other two groups, no company that had its own marketing department responded. From these results, we can conclude that the second group of companies have well-organised sales departments, which results in the development of retailing without their own brand name. In the third group of companies, commercial and product managers dealt with the marketing activities.

Marketing communications mix in the sample companies

The respondents were asked to indicate the importance of their different marketing communications instruments on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = 'extremely important' to 1 = 'of little importance'). The results are presented in Table 4.

Differences between the groups were obvious, and those differences correlated to the development of a brand name. Companies with a more developed brand name gave more importance to advertising in their marketing communications mix. Advertising was the most important instrument of marketing communications in the first group of companies, followed by sales promotion, personal selling, and public relations.

The second and third groups of companies placed more importance on personal selling, but we found differences regarding the importance of other instruments of marketing communications. The second group of companies indicated personal selling as their most important marketing communications instrument, followed by sales promotion and advertising. Respondents from the second group indicated public relations as a less important instrument of marketing communications. The third group of companies placed more importance on public relations than adver-

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample.

Group	Characteristics	Small company	Middle size company	Large company
Group 1	Average number of employees	22.00	192.33	1352.50
	Average percent of rework business	19.25	38.75	74.17
	Average number of own brand name	80.75	61.25	25.83
	Number of companies	4	12	6
Group 2	Average number of employees		66.67	
	Average percent of rework business		100.00	
	Average number of own brand name		0.00	
	Number of companies		3	
Group 3	Average number of employees		76.00	
	Average percent of rework business		100.00	
	Average number of own brand name		0.00	
	Number of companies		3	
Overall Average number of employees		22.00	152.00	1352.50
Number of companies		4	18	6

Table 3. Organisation of the marketing function.

Marketing organisation	Group of companies		
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Marketing department, %	40.91	0.00	0.00
Sales department, %	40.91	33.33	0.00
Other, %	18.18	66.67	100.00
Total, %	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 4. The importance of different instruments of marketing communications.

Marketing communications mix	Group of companies		
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Advertising	4.36	2.33	1.00
Personal selling	3.55	4.33	4.33
Sales promotion	3.68	2.67	2.33
Public relations	2.82	1.33	1.33

Table 5. Budget allocation within the marketing communications mix.

Marketing communications mix	Group of companies		
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Advertising	44.85	16.67	1.67
Personal selling	22.47	60.00	53.33
Sales promotion	23.63	20.00	41.67
Public relations	9.05	3.33	3.33
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00

tising, which indicated advertising was a less important marketing communications instrument for them.

Advertising was the most important marketing communications instrument in the first group of companies, perhaps because of the size of that first group (78.57% of companies in the sample). Personal selling was reported by respondents of the second and third groups as being a more important marketing communications instrument compared with others. This result leads to the conclusion that a strong sales orientation existed in these two groups. These results can be the

consequence of having a non-developed brand name. It was also interesting that in all three groups, a low importance of public relations was assigned within the marketing communications mix.

Budget allocation to different marketing communications instruments

The results in Table 5 show the average share of budget allocated to different marketing communications instruments within each group.

Advertising was the most important communications instrument, and had the larg-

Table 6. The effect of the marketing communications mix on consume information and opinion.

Marketing communications mix	Group of companies		
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Advertising	4.36	3.33	2.00
Sales promotion	3.59	3.00	3.67
Personal selling	3.50	3.67	4.33
Public relations	2.77	1.67	1.67

Table 7. The effect of communication sources on consumers.

Communication sources	Groups of companies		
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Specialised fashion sources	3.77	3.00	3.33
Mass media	3.09	3.67	3.67
Personal communication 1	4.05	3.67	4.00
Personal communication 2	3.64	4.00	4.00

Table 8. Assessment of sources where consumers get more information about a fashion mode.

Information sources	Groups of companies		
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Visiting retail store	35.45	30.00	31.67
Specialised fashion sources	20.91	21.67	26.67
Mass media	12.73	21.67	16.67
Communication mouth to mouth (friends, colleagues, neighbours)	25.86	25.00	21.67
Other	5.50	1.67	3.33

est share of the marketing communications budget; on the other hand; the second and third groups of companies allotted the most money to personal selling within their marketing communications mix.

The effect of different marketing communication instruments

Another objective of our research was to find out what effects different marketing communications instruments can have on the consumers' point of view. We were interested in discovering at which level the different marketing information instruments informed consumers about textile products.

Respondents assessed the effect of different marketing communication instruments on a five-point Likert scale from 5 = 'large effect' to 1 = 'little effect'.

The study results show that the respondents determined that all instruments of marketing communication mix have an effect on consumer information about Slovenian textile products. The results also showed the average mean of the effect of these different instruments.

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The effect of different sources on consumer information

One of the primary aims of our research was to identify which communication sources had the biggest effect on consumers (Table 7).

Respondents assessed the effect of different communication sources on a five-point Likert scale from 5 = 'large effect' to 1 = 'little effect'.

Specialised fashion sources were defined as the following: trade fairs for clothes, fashion journals, specialised trade journals for clothing and fashion, television transmissions, etc.

We understood the concept of 'personal communications 1' to mean communications between sellers in the shops and the final consumer (suggestions, advertisements, individual advice etc.)

The concept of 'personal communication 2' was understood to mean communication

about Slovenian clothing products between friends, acquaintances, relatives, etc.

The results indicated the average respondent's scores in each group regarding the effect of different communication sources on consumers.

From these results we determined an interesting finding. The first group of companies gave higher importance to personal communication (personal selling) and lower importance to mass media (advertising). We also found one contradictory statement in the first group. Companies in this group said that they spent more money and gave more importance to advertising; however, they assessed the effect of sources related to advertising as being less important.

This contradictory response could form an interesting basis for further future research. Inertia of behaviour may be one possible explanation for the response. Advertising is considered a 'must have', despite the fact that the companies in the first group believe that this instrument does not have a great effect on consumer information. At the same time, these results may mean that companies are aware of the importance of the sellers' knowledge of products and brand names. Just being a loyal consumer to a brand or a product can promote a company's products and stimulate purchases.

Information sources about fashion

Table 8 shows the average scores within different groups of companies regarding the type of sources where consumers get the most information about the adoption of fashion.

Respondents assessed their sources in terms of where they get the most information about fashion (adaptation and diffusion of fashion). As for the concept of diffusion of fashion, we understand this as the process whereby people accept a new fashion under the effect of different factors, as a result of the expansion of new methods or innovations in fashion.

The respondents in all three groups agreed that the consumer is well-informed about fashion through visiting shops (advertisement arrangement of the shop, and exhibitions). The sales point is not just a place where a transaction is made. Today, a shop is a gallery, where visitors can look at the fashion as it is manifested in its colours, content of the materials exposed, surface, samples and different creations of the clothes and clothes supplements.

Table 9. The effect of different information on purchase decisions for clothes.

Type of information	Groups of companies		
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Fashion trends	2.75	2.44	2.67
Products maintenance	2.00	2.11	2.17
Price of products	2.25	2.50	2.33
Composition of material	1.75	2.22	2.00
Comparison of quality	1.75	2.00	1.83
Personal income	2.25	2.61	2.67
Service and suggestions	2.75	2.72	2.50

Here we can once again confirm the same finding as for the previous issues. The first group of companies found advertising to be the most important marketing communication instrument in the clothing industry (performed through the mass and specialised media). This group did not place much importance on specialist and mass media. The first group of companies also agreed that mass media is even less informative regarding fashion modes.

The other two groups of companies give less importance to advertising, and instead place more importance on personal selling; they assessed that specialised fashion sources are important because of their informative nature.

The effect of information on purchase decisions

The analyses presented in Table 9 show the average score on the effect of different information on the purchase decision in the groups. Respondents assessed the effect of the importance of information according to the following classes: rarely or never (1); sometimes (2); often or always (3).

The results show that service, suggestions, and fashion trends have the greatest impact on a consumer's decision-making process. We can therefore conclude that Slovenian clothing manufacturers are more aware of the importance of the seller's role in a successful sale and gaining customer satisfaction.

Another interesting finding was that the respondent's opinion of quality and composition of material was based least on consumer decisions, although the first group had a higher quality and price position in the market compared to the second and third groups. This result is at the same time a contradictory finding for the first group, because although the first company group produces high-quality products, the respondents placed the least amount of importance on this factor in terms of a purchase decision.

At the same time, the first group companies gave a great deal of importance to personal income and to price, although they produced products with higher prices compared to the products of the second and third group of companies. Because they placed the most importance on service, suggestions, and fashion trends, we assume that personal selling is given more importance in that group than advertising.

Conclusion

- The research confirmed that the structure of marketing communications mix in the sample of clothing companies in Slovenia did not deviate from the theory proposed by eminent authors in this field around the world. The research found that advertising is one of the most important instruments of marketing communications mix in the clothing industry in Slovenia. Also important are personal selling and sales promotion & public relations. However, Slovenian clothing companies do not have enough of their own brand names to be able to use promotion in their domestic and foreign markets.
- It should be emphasised that a collection of quality and fashionably designed clothes, appropriate prices of products, and appropriate distribution are the preliminary conditions for marketing communication being able to contribute to a company.
- The respondents in all three groups agree that consumers become well-informed about fashion through by visiting shops (receiving advice from sales personnel, the arrangement of the shop, and exhibitions).
- We can thus conclude that companies can use various marketing communication instruments effectively. However, the key success factor for companies in the clothing industry is developing and implementing their marketing communications mix.

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