

Monika Malinowska-Olszowy

Department of Global Economy  
and Textile Marketing  
Technical University of Łódź  
ul. Żeromskiego 116, 90-543 Łódź, Poland  
E-mail: monika10@p.lodz.pl

# The Ability to Build a Brand in the Single European Market for the Polish Sportswear Sector

## Abstract

*Integration with the European Union is connected with the necessity to adjust Polish light industry to function in the common market, which mostly requires enhancing the competitiveness of products. So far, results of the restructuring process have been inadequate for the stable functioning of this sector. It is necessary to introduce a strategy which will show the right path for preparing enterprises to compete in the Single European Market. The aim of the article is to see whether Polish sportswear producers are forming and executing successful brand strategies and other marketing actions in order to compete in the Single European Market. To do so, empirical studies using questionnaires were carried out among Polish sportswear producers. Thanks to this paper it is possible to specify the direction of future changes and activities in order that the clothing industry has a chance to rebuild and hold a strong position both in Poland and abroad. Another aim is to increase awareness among businessmen that a strong brand is the most precious company asset, and it should be placed at the top of the list, underlying the whole management of a company.*

**Key words:** Polish sportswear market, brand strategy, management.

## Introduction

Market research was conducted on a representative group of the clothing industry which produces sportswear, such as winter sports clothing, e.g. clothing for snowboard and skiing, fitness, bicycle, diving and surfing wear. The research was carried out, by using questionnaires and by directly interviewing the people who manage these companies among others. The data which were collected during 2006 and 2007 and are presented in this article are the result of a research attempt the first time carried out in Poland.

## Results of research

The research mainly concerned studying the abilities connected with building brand strategy i.e., proper use of marketing action, building image in order to get clients' attention, to obtain legal brand protection etc, which are indispensable for the correct functioning of a company.

Whilst conducting research connected with this issue, a key question was asked that was to check if the brand is important for the activities of those companies.

The question was: "Is brand a key element of product strategy and does it have a great influence on the attractiveness of what you offer?"

The results prove that the companies should undertake action that would make building a brand a crucial element in their company strategies.

If this is true, it will be seen from further, more detailed research whether any special actions of the companies have been undertaken connected with using branding.

At first, main aims were created by the companies. Out of eight possibilities, the companies highlighted two of them which were the most important to them. The answers are in Figure 1.

The results show a very positive image of the companies. They confirm the hypothesis that a brand strategy is a company's most important aim. It can also be seen that the companies are aware of this, over 60% of the respondents claimed that the main aim for the company was establishing a brand product.

A question arises here whether the companies who see brand building as most important also create it in a correct way. Further results reveal a worrying fact: only 14% of companies want to get into market niches, as well as it is precisely searching for, and acting in market niches, notwithstanding that it is the main chance for the Polish sportswear market to become viable [1].

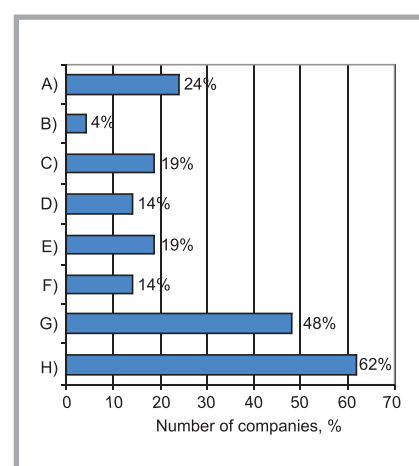
When offering a product to clients, it is necessary to use correct marketing action which might help to create a brand and show the consumer that they need to buy the product.

That is why it is extremely important, from the viewpoint of brand strategy, to

choose the best instruments for specific market needs.

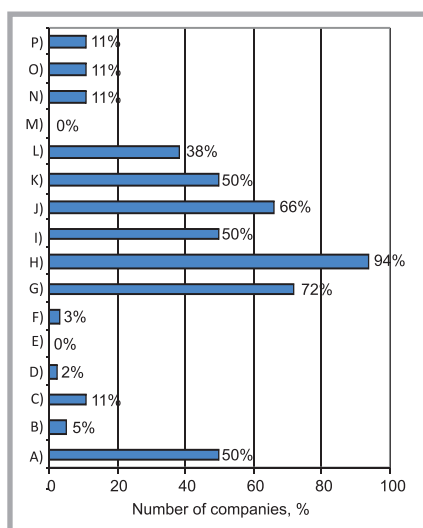
The best instruments in the sportswear market are sales, internet advertising and newspaper advertising in specific magazines [2].

The results of the studies show that Polish sportswear producers can use direction promotion—mix instruments quite well in their market. Over 90% of the companies studied have their own website and internet advertising is the main instrument to attract clients.

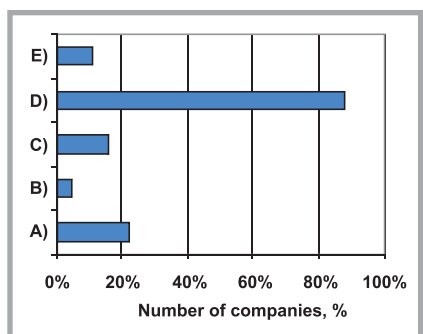


**Figure 1.** The most important aims to achieve among sportswear producers; A) greater profit, B) introducing new services, C) introducing new products on the market, D) entering market niches and new market, E) greater share in the market, F) greater turnover, G) increase in sales, H) establishing products. **Source for Figures 1 - 13:** Self-research based on a survey carried out in companies;

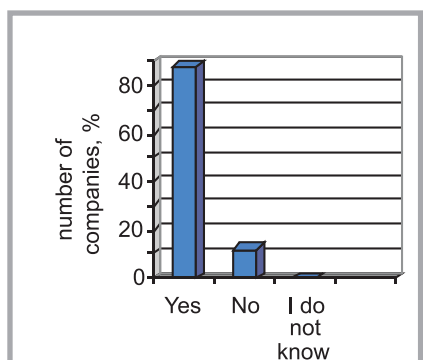
Next on the list are sponsoring, press advertising, personal sales, and presenting products at fairs. Too little emphasis is placed on sales promotion, which is only used by 38% of respondents; it should



**Figure 2.** Promotion – mix instruments used by Polish sportswear producers; A) press advertising, B) TV advertising, C) radio advertising, D) mail advertising, E) cinema advertising, F) posters, G) internet advertising, H) website, I) personal sale, J) sponsoring, K) fairs, L) sale promotion, M) tele-marketing, N) public relations, O) product placement, P) others.



**Figure 3.** Sales promotion instruments used by Polish sportswear producers; A) loyalty programmes, B) competitions, C) bonus/rewards, D) discounts, E) product placement.



**Figure 4.** Visual identifiers in the companies surveyed.

have a prominent role in the market studied. It is surprising that the group using sponsoring is extremely large, with an international name, which can afford such a form of promotion, and that smaller enterprises also try to use this form, which can strengthen their brand.

Exact data is shown in Figure 2.

In the “others” section, companies mainly highlighted environmental marketing and advertising banners.

The group was also asked which one of the promotion forms listed was the most important to them in gaining clients. A great majority pointed to internet advertising and their own website.

Because of the importance of using sales promotion in the sportswear market, different types of such promotion were tested, which is shown in Figure 3.

The results show that practically all the companies surveyed mainly used sales promotion in the form of discounts, whereas other forms did not matter so much.

Further questions directed at the companies were strictly connected with brand strategy.

The first question was to do with brand identifiers, which are an indispensable element of creating a successful brand. Here the research shows those companies in a positive light. To the question: “Does your company/product have visual identifiers (name, logo, colour)?”, most respondents answered positively. None of the companies answered “I do not know”, which shows knowledge of the issue.

The results are presented in the Figure 4.

The degree of identifiers and their importance to the brand were also tested as part of marketing action (Figure 5).

The results show that creating brand identifiers plays a very important role in running general marketing action by the companies.

Over 70% of respondents highlighted this as a crucial element in their action. Much worse was the question of whether their brand had a positive image and was widely recognized among clients. In this case, only 40% of the companies asked claimed

to have such a brand, which is a worrying fact. It shows that they do not care for their brand, and do not carry out market research, and are not aware of the issue.

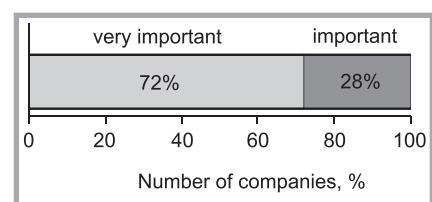
Results are shown in Figure 6.

A very important element of this hypothesis is to establish if the companies build their brand well.

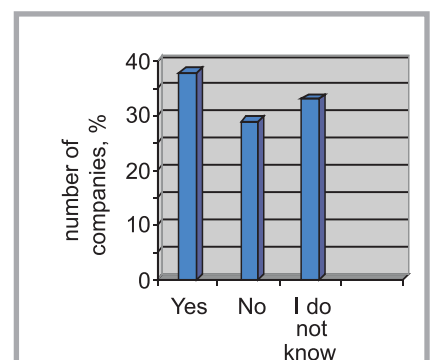
A proper way of building a brand needs to include the following 7 stages of action: determining the needs of customers, determining identity and building desirable brand image, testing the product, choosing the best project, law protection of brand, introducing brand to the market by means of marketing activity, controlling introduced brand on the market, which will guarantee efficiency among the enterprises [3].

Omitting any of them will not allow the brand to function well, develop or be perceived well by potential clients.

Analysing the data received, it needs to be stressed that Polish companies producing sportswear do not have a good image in the field of brand creation. Only 5% of the companies tested go through all seven of the stages. A conclusion can be made that Polish sportswear producers cannot build a brand effectively, which



**Figure 5.** Importance of brand identifiers for marketing action among Polish sportswear producers.



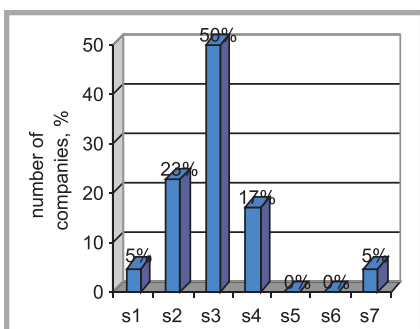
**Figure 6.** Those companies having a positive brand image and a high degree of recognition among the Polish sportswear producers.

surely lessens their competitiveness in the Single European Market. Detailed results are presented in Figures 7 and 8.

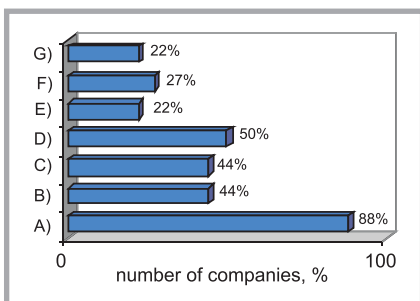
From the data presented in the graph, it can be seen that companies mostly use only 3 stages in creating their brand. Most often they specify buyers' "needs", which shows that they use marketing analysis, which is, of course, beneficial, but not enough to create a strong brand. More rarely they use "legal brand protection" and "controlling of the brand introduced on the market".

Results of the research unfortunately show that in the market analysed the process of creating a brand does not flow in a continuous and planned way; very often it does not include many important elements, and because of which producers do not have an opportunity to build a really famous brand which would build the company's esteem.

Another very important question which influences company success is for a brand



**Figure 7.** Number of stages used by the Polish sportswear producers in creating a brand.



**Figure 8.** Use of individual stages of brand creation by the Polish sportswear producers A) determining the mood of customers, B) determining identity and building desirable brand image, C) testing the product, D) choosing the best project, E) legal protection of brand, F) introducing brand to the market by means of marketing activity, G) controlling the brands introduced on the market.

to have a positive image which produces favourable opinions among clients, and makes company workers feel more a part of the corporation.

Most of the time marketing is associated with action directed at the external client. In campaigns promoting a company's brand, they do not always appreciate the significance of another important group – their own workers.

Their conviction towards the brand and their faith in its success undoubtedly increases the efficiency of the company's operation. It is important that worker activity is in accordance with the promotion campaign and with the intentions of the directors. Mostly, however, internal communication is limited to informing workers generally about the planned actions of the company.

Stressing internal communication makes workers understand the brand, and maybe even gets them really engaged in the company's development. Furthermore, it allows workers to maintain a vision of the brand while performing everyday duties [4]. Also, this element was touched upon in the research.

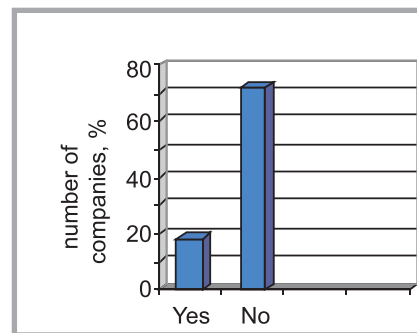
Respondents were asked two questions, thanks to which a picture of a company's internal communication was created.

At first, they were asked whether there had been research concerning how the brand was perceived by the workers. This was performed in order to ascertain whether the directors' assumptions were in accordance with the workers' actions, and whether communication was working properly. The second question concerned this issue in the future. The results are shown in Figures 9 and 10.

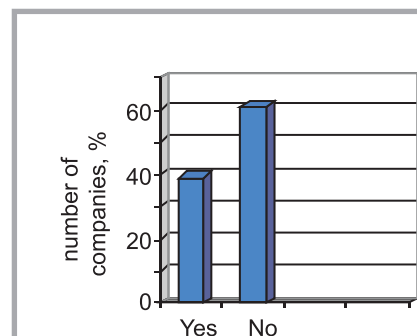
The results above show that most of the companies do not use the possibility given by internal communication, which is a lost opportunity to build brand identity and create a positive image.

The same question was asked about clients and the situation looked a bit more favourable, but a change in thinking is also necessary. Client loyalty is conditioned by many factors and it is more and more difficult to gain.

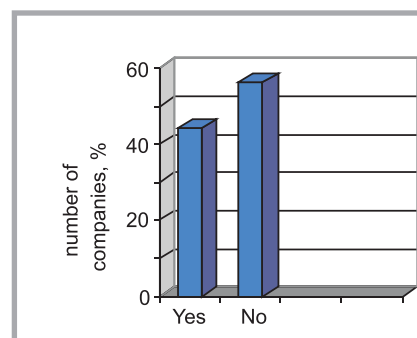
Therefore, it is necessary to get all these information from clients which will help to create a better brand. It increases the



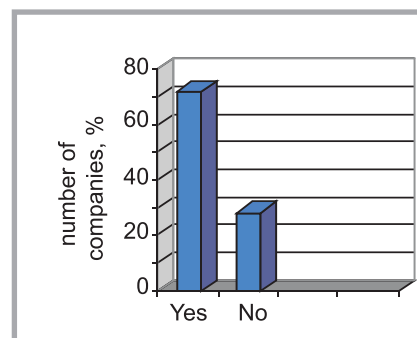
**Figure 9.** The number of companies among the Polish sportswear producers where there were researches among the workers concerning what they think of the brand.



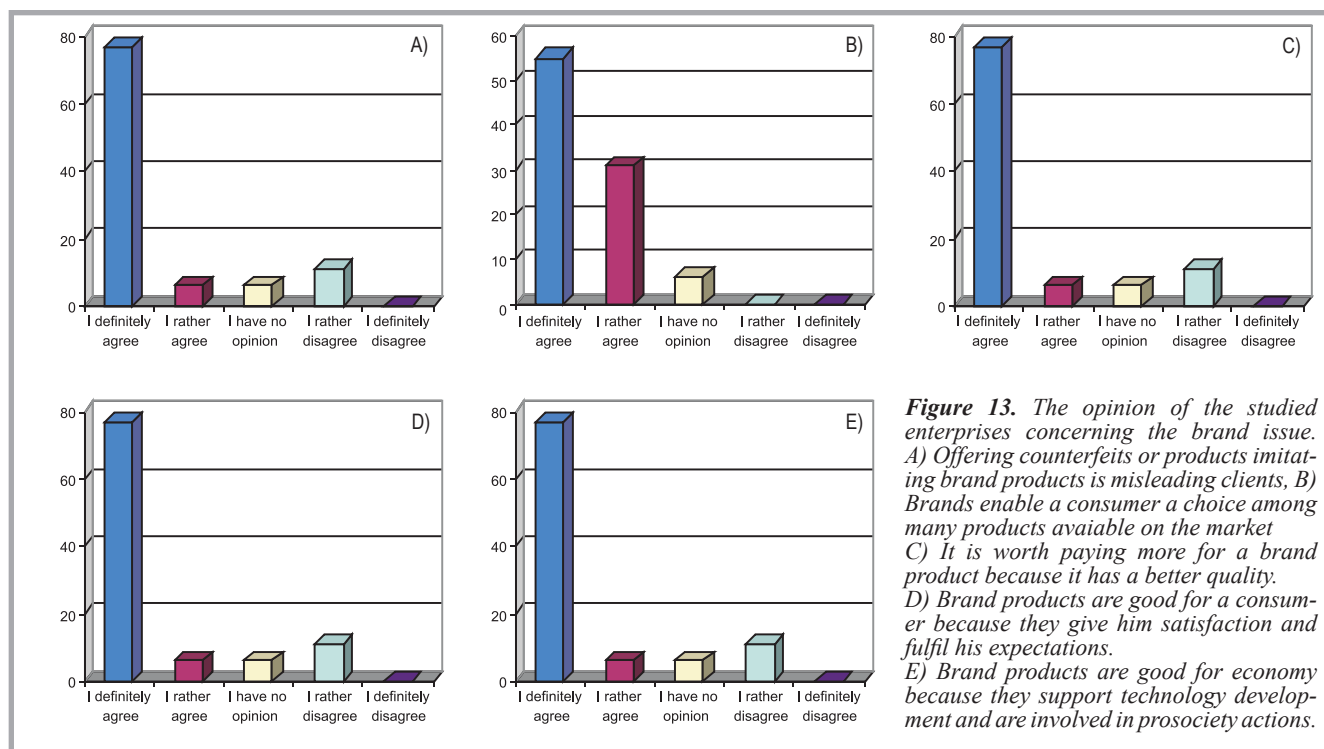
**Figure 10.** The number of companies among the Polish sportswear producers where there will be research among company workers concerning what they think of the company's brand.



**Figure 11.** Number of companies where there were questionnaires among clients concerning what they think about the brand.



**Figure 12.** Number of companies where there will be questionnaires among clients concerning what they think about brand.



possibility of adjusting the product to individual clients. Although these aims are more difficult to achieve, their realisation gives the company a chance to be more competitive. The number of companies where there were questionnaires among clients concerning what they think about the brand is presented in Figure 11, while as those when will be questionnaires are presented in Figure 12 (see page 9).

There are especially optimistic results of the research for the future, as over 70% of the companies are going to carry out studies among clients, but among workers there was only 39%.

It will dramatically increase the brand's position. There is a necessity of positioning the results due to the fact that on almost every market there are many brand competing directly with each other.

A frontal attack usually leads to using these arguments and cannot be effective. Only offering something completely different guarantees keeping the market.

Positioning allows objective evaluation of all marketing action that has been undertaken with a view to long-term brand development. Unfortunately, the research shows that in almost 90% of cases positioning is not done, that is the brand is not evaluated, and companies do not try to stress the features which would give them the chance to stand out in the market.

As regards the legal protection of a trade mark, the situation is much better. From the research it is evident that over 60% of respondents had undertaken certain actions, which were to protect their brand against illegal use by a third party. It shows that this as an important element of a company which needs to be protected.

It can also be seen from businessmen's opinions concerning the brand. In the study there were numerous literature fragments connected with the brand to which those questioned had to relate.

There were five positive statements describing elements connected with the brand [5].

The respondents' opinions in response to the question are presented in graph form Figure 13.

As seen in Figure 13, almost in every case, approximately 60% of those questioned, agree with the statements presented. This confirms their awareness that the brand is the overriding asset of a company, and the only way to remain competitive in the Single European Market.

## Conclusions

The analysis above concerning the ability of Polish sportswear producers to create a brand strategy leads to the following conclusions:

1. Polish sportswear producers are greatly aware of the fact that building a brand and undertaking a strategy connected with it is the key to achieving a higher level of competence.
2. Polish sportswear producers do not have enough knowledge to build and manage a brand properly, because of which about 90% of those surveyed do not build their brand well.
3. Only about 20% of the companies tested linked their actions to searching for and working in market niches, which are a chance to develop in the sportswear market in Poland.
4. Polish sportswear producers use promotion-mix instruments correctly, choosing those that are the best for their market.

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