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Postmodernism and Brand Management in Fashion Industry: Zara as a Case Study

Dr. Faical Chanour

Researcher, Department of Management,
University of Bolton, England

Abstract:

The present article addresses the postmodern interpretation of brand management in tandem with fashion industry. Contrary to modern perceptions, consumers are no longer docile and passive elements in the marketing chain. In contemporary brand management, consumers exert paramount pressure on brand construction, so much so that the two are irreconcilable. This study underscores the value of postmodern management on Zara as a fashion brand. Upon affirming this claim, this study employs phenomenology as a methodological framework. Phenomenology explores the subjective relations that underpin the relationship between brand management and postmodern marketing strategies. The investigation of this relationship engenders an abductive approach. This abductive approach tackles consumer traits like fragmentation, uncertainty, and perpetual change in the light of generating a postmodern insight. The validity of this postmodern insight rests on how it effectively resonates with brand management. The data of this study is collected through in-depth interviews and secondary literature that features books, articles, and marketing documents. As for the data analysis, this study employs a qualitative approach based on the extraction and interpretation of themes. These themes express how postmodern marketing introduces consumer complexity into brand management. This study concludes with the claim that the generated data remains utterly subjective and interpretive.

Keywords: Postmodernism, brand management, marketing management, fashion business

1. Introduction

When you purchase anything, you expect it to have a certain set of features, benefits, and services that are unique to the product or service (Kotler 1993). According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) (2008), a brand is a symbolic representation that has its own name, characteristics, and design all of its own. The modernist concept of consistency and unity is much to blame for such a conventional approach to brand management. In modern marketing literature, the supposed primacy of the seller as the major creator, manager, and controller of a brand structure is questioned. In the modernist view of brand management, the inherent contradictions and fragmentations that continue to shape brands today are left unexplained. Brand managers are influenced by the intricacy of the consumer's participation in the brand creation to rethink modernist brand management.

Nowadays, customers don't want to stick to a single brand or identity. According to Muzellec (2007), customers are no longer passive end users in the brand development process in the postmodern period. Instead, they are active participants. Postmodernism sees reality as multifaceted and kaleidoscopic, unlike modernism. If you're looking for a modern approach to brand management, you won't find one that marginalizes customers. To put it simply, a postmodernist view of the brand as an unchanging, predefined and unchanging image of a business is under review. Constant reformulation is inherent in brands since they are constantly changed by the good relationship between the buyer and seller (Shultz 1997). Postmodernism, on the other hand, provides a more open and flexible alternative to current brand management practices.

Zara is one of several global corporations that has effectively embraced a postmodern approach to brand management. Consumer identity is always evolving, which necessitates new postmodern techniques from the textile industry. Fashion has been changed by Zara's foundation in fashion marketing, and now the brand identity of the corporation begins to dwell in interactions between customers and the corporate itself. Because of this, Zara's fashion company has seen unparalleled success.

1.1. Study Objectives

It is the primary goal of this study to critically evaluate the postmodern brand management as a reaction to today's fragmented and open market. Research in this area will suggest that both modernist and postmodernist marketing methods may contribute to a successful brand management strategy in the current day. Therefore, this research will be aiming at:

- Critique modernist brand management and illustrate how it overlooks current alternatives in its building of branding.

- Assess the relevance of postmodern brand management.
- Research Zara's brand management approach using primary and secondary sources.
- Assess Zara's brand management's use of postmodernism and determine whether or not such a philosophy is suitable.

1.2. Research Questions

- In the modern era of branding, why is modernist brand management so ineffective?
- What is the role of postmodernism in marketing strategy?
- What is Zara's marketing and brand management philosophy?
- To what extent does postmodernism fit in Zara marketing management?
- What are the key postmodern features in Zara brand management?

1.3. Rationale of the Study

This study's purpose is to add to the body of knowledge on marketing management. Brand management must be reformulated as a static entity in the postmodern period because to the complexity and fragmentation of identities. The complexity of the customer and the firm may thus be taken into consideration positively by management.

1.4. Scope of the Study

For this study, postmodernism and Zara fashion are highlighted, as well as how the two relate. This study will focus on theories of modern and postmodern marketing. Additionally, this study will focus on Zara's usage of strategic theories and models to market its brand.

2. Literature Review

Postmodern academics have panned the classic modernist approach to Brand management that is founded on a modernist theoretical framework. Since the 1980s, postmodernism has infiltrated practically every academic field, including marketing, consumer relationships, and brand management, whereas the modernist approach dominated in the 1960s and 1970s (Brown, 1993). A variety of themes and dichotomies that have emerged in the context of postmodernism will be examined in this examination, including the following: realism vs. hyper-reality, delineation/openness, consistency/flexibility/uniqueness/multiplicity/controlled/uncontrolled branding (Kapferer, 2004). Modernism, postmodernism, consumerism, and brand management are among the many ideologies that have shaped the review's framework. This literature analysis will shed light on the role of postmodernism in marketing strategies by comparing current and postmodern branding aspects.

This literature research will look at a variety of relevant sources in order to have a better grasp of how postmodernism might fit into the fashion business, specifically Zara fashion. To understand the impact of postmodernism on current marketing and the fashion business, academic publications, websites, and relevant textbooks should be consulted. According to a literature review's significance, brand management must keep pace with the complexity of today's customers, who are more fragmented and unsure in a global world (Shultz 1997).

2.1. Reality vs. Hyperreality

In every modernist marketing textbook, analysis, planning, implementation, and control are emphasized as integral processes for any effective marketing planning (Kotler1991). In the modernist view, a brand's ideals may be both real and abstract. Symbols, phrases, and slogans go under the first category, whereas all of a brand's values and beliefs fall under the second (Kapferer 2004). One reality is emphasized in modern brand management, where items or services are valued through brand design and maintenance of the brand (Keller 1998). Modernist brand management's purposeful control of identity implies that managers have direct access to reality with all of its variables, which is not the case at all. As a trademark, a company's name and logo are connected to a physical service or product. When the value of a brand's products and services are increased, consumers can greatly enjoy the brand (Chernatony 1993).

Although there are many other ways to define a postmodern brand, the most common is to refer to it as one that incorporates a mix of concrete and intangible characteristics. He claims that postmodernism is a realm of simulation where images and thoughts have no connection to the outside world.

When it comes to brands, Baudrillard (1993) asserts that they are both virtual and hyperreal. As Quentin Tarantino utilized Red-Apple Cigarettes in 'Pulp Fiction,' Muzellec (2007) uses the fictional brand 'Red-Apple' to demonstrate how a fictitious brand, like 'Red-Apple,' reveals emotional characteristics much like a genuine one does. Fragmentation, pastiche, juxtaposition, and Hyperreality are some of the essential qualities of a postmodern fictional brand. There is no consistent and singular reality in postmodern branding because of all of these postmodern traits (Firat 1997).

2.2. Delineation vs. Openness

According to Kapferer (2004), a modernist brand stresses a number of standards and values that may be traced back to a company's philosophical foundations. Because they are so ingrained in a company's identity, such principles and ideals are nearly impossible to alter. The modernist brand emphasizes the importance of a great narrative and a series of interconnected ideals. In the modernist brand, these ideals have a salient influence on the single reality and unity of the brand itself.

All values and beliefs are welcome in postmodernism, which rejects big narratives and is open to all possibilities (Shultz 1997). To be successful in the postmodern world of brand management, one must be tolerant and flexible while dealing with a wide range of viewpoints and contradictory views and ideals. An anti-foundationalist approach to brand management must embrace kaleidoscopic patterns and ideals, according to Brown (1995).

2.3. Consistency vs. Flexibility

The challenge with a modernist view of a brand is that it claims to be consistent (Key 2006). In order for customers to be able to relate to a brand, brand managers try to establish a set of shared values and conventions. There is no one-size-fits-all brand, Shultz (1997) said, since in the postmodern period, brands and their identities are always evolving, and so is the consumer's identity. Instead of emphasizing rigidity and uniformity in customer identification, postmodern brands are more accepting of the variety of ways people choose to represent themselves (Firat and Shultz 1997). According to Firat (1995), in order for a brand to thrive, it must go through a constant re-creation of marketing symbols, reformulation, repositioning, and regeneration. Reproducing a brand is possible because intangible values have become commodities in the postmodern paradigm, and so they may be regenerated (Adorno 1950).

2.4. Uniqueness vs. Multiplicity

The logic of distinction is emphasized in the traditional view of branding (Kay 2005). The rationale for this is to ensure that they have legal ownership and protection of their brands. Today's consumers are more dispersed than ever before, finding it challenging for brands to maintain a single, consistent image. TV ad breaks are a good example of this fragmentation in action. In a fast and frequent manner, these adverts and commercials irritate the customer by displaying disruptive and disharmonic images and symbols. Thus, the consumer's sense of self and awareness remain fractured (Firat and Schultz 1997). A 'bricolage' market seems to dominate branding philosophy due to the difficulty in separating consumer preferences and addressing them objectively as a result of the complexity and fragmentation of the consumer experience. As a result, brand images and different representations are assembled into a 'jigsaw collage' to address the fluid and ever-changing experiences of consumers (Cova 2013). According to Derrida (1966), 'a play' between the subject and object is important since neither of them is the focus. Interaction between them produces and dissipates their sense of self. Consumer and brand identities are neither different from one another, nor are they combined into a single identity; rather, they are constructed and reconstructed through a 'give and take' game in which neither party has the ability to define the other. Such play allows for a wide range of possibilities, such as openness, diversity, and re-creation.

2.5. Controllable vs. Non-Controllable

Traditionally, the focus of brand management has been on establishing a firm grip on a company's image so that it can be seen throughout the whole company. Therefore, the organization's activities, strategic management and planning should be founded on their brand's identity. (Simoes 2001). Manage a brand in an atmosphere where the brand draws a passive customer to identify with the brand's ideology has always been organized and regulated. Even Nevertheless, managers in today's postmodern world recognize the difficulties of maintaining brand management in an increasingly fragmented and unpredictable world. To stay up with today's turbulent consumer experience, managers are being compelled by this new condition of existence to reexamine and revise their procedures (Firat 1997).

Marketing in the postmodern era blurs the line between types and categories. Advertising can be featured in commercial breaks, but it can also be incorporated into the narratives of movies. Advertising, like a film, may also use a narrative to tell a story. Similarly, the retail business expresses this 'de-differentiation' when shopping complexes provide entertainment services and vice versa. (Brown 1997). Because of this, marketing categories no longer have designated functions.

2.6. Zara as a Postmodern Brand

The fashion business, in particular, has been impacted by postmodernism's influence on marketing theory in general. Consumers not only buy items and services, but also images and symbols that serve as hyperreal representations of those products and services. Zara serves as a good illustration of the postmodern brand and consumer in the fashion business. In the same way that postmodern thought ignores high culture's superiority over low culture, Zara's success may be linked to its blurring of the divide between 'high fashion' and 'low fashion.' Other high-end apparel firms like Louis Vuitton have impacted Zara's design team, which caters to minority customers. Zara's use of pastiche design has made 'high fashion' accessible to middle-class consumers (Hansen 2013).

So long as the building of an identity is ever-changing owing to a swift rhythm of style and trend, it is impractical for Zara customers to establish a single identity. Deconstructing the alleged customer self-centered current marketing, such a component in Zara's approach provides a new paradigm in which Zara's brand and consumer identity interact. As a result of this, the existence and identity of each part is dependent on the other parts. With its new brand strategy, Zara seeks to purchase historic stores and introduce fashionable clothing to invoke nostalgic memories, which has proven to be an extremely successful brand strategy for Zara branding, postmodernism seeks to undermine the idea that our existence is a positive linear development of our existence.

Postmodern theorists, as stated, embrace a purely theoretical approach to marketing. Many people have a problem with postmodern marketing because of the emphasis it places on relativism. In reality, cultural, political, and economic shifts do not always invalidate modernist and positivist marketing ideas as eternal truths (Robson & Rowe 1997). Philip Kotler, a modern marketing icon, is frequently attacked by detractors who seek to dissect the modernist

approach to marketing without supplying any alternatives. Indeed, postmodernism cannot exist on its own since it is a fractured and fluid form of being that cannot live in isolation. 'A temporary remedy [to overcome the fragmentations of postmodernism] may be allowing and judging postmodern solutions,' suggests Hahen (2010: p.12). Modern and postmodern marketing can function together in contemporary marketing without necessarily being adversaries, but rather as driving theoretical forces in the field. Indeed, postmodernist theorists have mostly employed constructive critique to dismantle modernism as their primary technique of inquiry.

This study's findings about modernist brand management are based on a comparison and contrast of both modernism and postmodernism. Conceptualizations like the one presented here emphasize the significance of postmodern branding techniques.

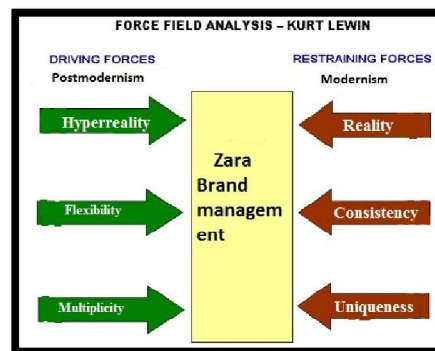


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

It was Lewin (1951) who first proposed the force field analysis as a useful tool for understanding the factors that influence personal and business growth. When it comes to brand strategy, it's important to take into account the postmodern influences of today's consumers in order to be successful. Rather of pitting postmodern and contemporary paradigms against one another, Lewin's antagonistic forces framework allows them to work together to build a successful brand. When applied to contemporary brand management, this paradigm demonstrates that the postmodern worldview is constantly present. Modern brand management is unsustainable in today's fragmented, unpredictable, and ever-changing customer landscape.

3. Methodology and Design

3.1. Philosophy of the Study

Research in this topic will concentrate on a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological method highlights the subjectivity in understanding brands and how marketing in the present day is intimately connected with various disciplines and ideologies since the research aims are theoretically oriented. The connection between brands and customers cannot be evaluated objectively from a positivist standpoint. As the distinctions between disciplines have been increasingly blurred as a result of globalization, political, cultural, and economic factors have a direct impact on how consumers perceive numerous businesses. Brand management should be approached from the perspective of psychology, as this is the most appropriate philosophy for doing so. A case study of Zara fashion will provide an objective view on this philosophical approach, as will an assessment and evaluation of postmodernism's subjective theoretical underpinning. Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, claim that there are numerous realities in existence, and that each of these realities may affect our perception of existence and hence marketing. Consequently, this research's very nature underlines an interpretivist viewpoint while criticizing the supremacy of objectivity.

The goal of the research methodology is to explain and defend the procedures used throughout the course of this investigation. Interpretive and phenomenological research philosophies will be used because the study is qualitatively focused. It is the fundamental goal of this research approach to link theory and practice abductively from a case study to general assumptions and from general hypotheses to a case study. Secondary research and interviews will be the primary means of gathering data in effort to match this goal.

Furthermore, it is critical that the study technique under consideration reflects the stated objectives, including dependability, validity, and ethical concerns. In order to ensure the highest level of validity, all research processes will be carried out consistently. The methodological and ethical goals of this study can only be realized if ethical considerations are accounted for.

3.2. Approach of the Study

3.2.1. Abductive Approach

An abductive technique begins with evidence that is derived from specific observations. As a result of these findings, a hypothesis has been formed. After then, the theory is connected to additional facts or regulations. In this process, the facts are connected and integrated into a more comprehensive statement in the form of a theory.

Additionally, this research is founded on postmodern philosophy and will begin by examining the current era's consumer traits including fragmentation, uncertainty, and constant change. In light of the notion that postmodernism

might positively contribute to brand management, this study will investigate and evaluate it deductively. Verifying the theory's assumptions requires a close look into Zara's brand strategy, which can only be found in action.

3.3. Design of the Study

This study will make use of exploratory, descriptive, and analytical methodologies. Using Zara's case study, a descriptive technique is used to generate theoretical hypotheses. In addition to evaluating postmodernism in brand tactics, it is vital to explain Zara's inductively or deductively postmodern philosophy. There will also be an investigation of the use of postmodernism in Zara's brand management strategy.

The most essential application of exploratory research will be to analyze and test the postmodernism of the fashion industry in general and of Zara in particular. In this study, descriptive and exploratory methods were used because descriptive technique reveals key elements of Zara brand management while exploratory approach emphasizes patterns and ideas that may be evaluated. The abductive strategy that this study will take is shown in the descriptive and exploratory methods used together with the analytical approach.

3.4. Methods of the Study

3.4.1. Primary Study

Zara's postmodern trend will be studied through three long and detailed interviews in order to better regulate data collecting. Before the research begins, two focus groups will be held, one with a marketing manager and the other with a chief designer. In the third interview, you'll be working with a marketing director after you've reviewed your findings from the previous two interviews. Because the interviewer can maintain the interviewee's attention as he or she responds to tough, subjective, and abstract questions, this research uses interviews instead of other data gathering methods. This study is more likely to be objective if the participants are chosen based on their involvement in the brand and marketing initiatives.

Secondary Study

The primary source of information for this study will be secondary research. Philosophical literature, such as marketing journals and books and articles, will form the foundation of this study because of the theoretical aspect of the research. Various Zara brand management records, including marketing reports, strategic planning sources, websites, and visual materials and posters in various Zara subsidiaries, will be available to the researcher.

Postmodernism is an essential part of Zara's marketing strategy, and secondary sources will show how this marketing strategy is reflected in Zara's products.

4. Data Analysis Method

4.1. Qualitative Analysis

Through in-depth interviews, this study will focus on qualitative analysis. Qualitative data analysis reveals the subjectivity and pliability of data interpretation. Qualitative data analysis. Interviewees might create or test postmodern fashion theory inductively from the responses given by participants.

Although unstructured interviews are more likely to be subjective in data analysis, content analysis will give a good way for thematically gathering information. As a result, a number of actions will be taken to ensure as much accuracy as possible in data collection:

- Step one: The important themes mentioned in the interviews will be identified by the interview though this might be challenging since interviewees use different terms to describe their meaning, distinct topics can be assigned codes.
- Step two: The interviewer will organize the topics into broad theories for future investigation. As a result, the general subjects of this inquiry will be postmodernism and modernism.
- Step 3: the next stage is to understand and incorporate the key themes from the study into the final report. Descriptive models and analytical models will both be used at this level.

4.2. Research Limitations

It is critical to point out that the presented case study is not a typical illustration of a brand strategy. The postmodern theory in brand management appears to be most relevant to the fashion sector and design items because of Zara's creative content. This study's theoretical assumptions are not meant to be all-inclusive or conclusive, but rather are open for debate and critique. This is due in part to the fact that interpretative and phenomenological techniques are subjective and personal in character, and hence do not deliver entirely objective outcomes in terms of Zara's brand management. Interviews are not exempt from criticism because of the potential for them to be deeply personal and emotionally charged. Qualitative data cannot be relied upon since validity and reliability are more commonly employed in quantitative research. Using the same quantitative methodologies for a qualitative study may not be appropriate.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Cardiff School of Management's ethical research rules (Cardiff 2009) and the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics are adhered to in this study (ESRC 2015). In order to get respondents to be more forthcoming, the interviews will be done with confidence. The interviewer and interviewees will have more trust in one another as a result of this. In

addition, the research's final goal will be made clear to the participants before the interviews begin. For the purpose of secrecy and privacy, interviewees will not be required to answer all of the questions designed by the interviewer. Respecting the intellectual property of all authors referred to in citations is also a matter of ethics in this study. These ethical considerations are essential if we are to maintain objectivity and impartiality throughout the study process.

Developing a large acquaintance with the interviewees, especially since they all have a high position in their organization, is a huge risk that might impair the quality of the interviews. As a result, the interviewer will establish a rapport rather than a relationship in an effort to foster a relaxed atmosphere while maintaining a professional distance. Also, the researcher will not intrude on the personal time, space, or lives of the interviewees. Using the most objective methods possible, the collected data will be thoroughly examined in order to exclude the possibility of any incorrect or fraudulent interpretations. No willful misinterpretation of the marketing management of the case study will be made here in order to align Zara's brand strategy to postmodernism. For the reasons already indicated, Zara's brand strategy exemplifies postmodern elements as fundamental but not limited to the fashion industry.

4.4. Reliability and Validity

Consistent and accurate outcomes throughout time are considered reliable by Joppe (2000). Reproducing a study using the same approach increases the validity of the findings. Because of its subjectivity, qualitative research cannot always be replicated in different situations, Joppe's concept is more appropriate in quantitative research. The scientific rigor of quantitative research has been challenged as lacking in qualitative research. This might have an impact on the validity of the qualitative research. For quantitative research to be as rigorous as it should be, however, Lincoln and Guba(1985) established additional criterion: neutrality, application, and consistency. Setting the outline, doing the study, and reporting the results should all follow a well-defined format. In addition, it is critical to ensure that discoveries may be used in various situations. With no personal biases interfering in the evaluation of data, outcomes may be seen objectively and objectively a clear and open approach should be taken to the interpretation of interviews and the case study's brand strategy.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Without attempting to generalize, we conducted in-depth interviews and document observation. The in-depth interviews showed that several entities were similar across the contexts. A close analysis revealed a more nuanced picture of how Zara displayed a postmodern insight to brand management. Both the marketing manager and the chief designer demonstrated a similar understanding of how Zara promotes its brand. It happens that Zara inculcates a postmodern insight. That is, as postmodern brand, Zara effaces the parity between 'high' and 'low' culture, chiefly due to the accelerated obsolescence and the plurality of commercial networks.

The participants were aware of fashion brands. The participants were active fashion consumers with a clear interest in the fashion brands that they considered represented their personality, goals, and lifestyle, based on their stories and buying preferences. Adult values, brand behavior instilled at home, and peer influence all contributed to the interest in fashion companies. The usage of fashion labels was also discovered to be an essential aspect in adult relationships, which both facilitated and complicated relationship formation.

Moreover, and in relation to the qualitative analysis, the thematic analysis revealed how postmodern brand management engenders an inclusive study of consumers, both as a customizers and authorial entities. This inclusive study features the construction of a contingent consumer identity, the privilege of in-group and kinship demands, and the social symbolism that characterizes group identifications. Through constant negotiation, brand management hinges on different facets of consumerist experience which blur the line between the consumer and the marketed product.

As for the conclusion, this study has shown to greater depth how brand management necessitates a postmodern approach tailored to the postmodern consumer. Postmodern marketing is a necessary system that brand managers have to embrace, chiefly because of the globalized nature of contemporary thought. The word 'brand' has ample weight in contemporary marketing. Instead of indicating stable image factors, brands are complex forms of reality that constantly reformulate the interaction between the consumer and the seller. The constant reformulation of reality is a testament to the complexity of postmodern marketing and its contingent demands. Postmodern marketing engenders the claim that consumers have driven needs rather than needs driven by stable forms of reality.

Branding, therefore, is concomitant with the forces that render societies contingent and able to experience alterity. The customer, to be precise, has plural needs which testify to the rise of information society in the postmodern world.

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