

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF (INTER)NATIONAL BRANDS: IKEA, L'ORÉAL, STARBUCKS AND FORD, BASED ON THE OPINION OF CONSUMERS

ERIKA KULCSÁR¹, BLANKA BALÁZS², NORBERT BADI³,
CSILLA-TIMA BEDER⁴, OTTILIA OPRA⁵,
BRIGITTA SZABÓ⁶, NÓRA SZABÓ⁷

ABSTRACT. In our everyday lives the presence of global brands is indisputable, as we decorate our homes with furnishings, purchase cosmetics to reverse the time, use services to make our everyday lives more enjoyable and purchase cars, all of which are available in several countries. It is also true that we typically buy and use those products and services that contribute to our personal appearance and to the development of our personality. In addition, the country of origin of a given product/brand also plays an important role in our purchasing decision. There are products/brands that we immediately associate with a particular country and nation, but there are countries to which we cannot associate any product or brand. This paper analyses the

¹ Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: erika.kulcsar@econ.ubbcluj.ro.

² Bachelor of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: balazsblanka@yahoo.com.

³ Bachelor of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: mr_badinorbert@yahoo.com.

⁴ Bachelor of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: csillucytimike_beder@yahoo.com.

⁵ Bachelor of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: oprattici@yahoo.com.

⁶ Bachelor of MBA, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: szabobrige@gmail.com.

⁷ Undergraduate student in Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: sz.nori@yahoo.com.

consumer opinions of international brands that are strongly associated with a particular country. The objectives of the analyses are the following: to identify (1) the strengths - (2) weaknesses of IKEA, L'Oréal, Starbucks and Ford, (3) to identify those factors, based on the results, that have an important role in case of two (inter)national brands at least, even though they represent different products/services, and finally, (4) to describe the opinion of the participants.

Keywords: IKEA, L'Oréal, Starbucks, Ford, consumer opinion, strengths and weaknesses

JEL Classification: M31

Recommended citation: Kulcsar, E., Balazs, B., Badi, N., Beder, C-T., Opra, O., Szabo, B., Szabo, N., *Strengths and weaknesses of (inter)national brands: IKEA, L'Oréal, Starbucks and Ford based on the opinion of consumers*, Studia UBB Negotia, vol. 65, issue 1 (March), 2020, pp. 69-94, doi: 10.24193/subbnegotia.2020.1.04

Introduction and Review of Literature

It is clear that international brands are not (totally) independent of the influence of their country of origin. Nebenzahl's research concludes that consumers' perceptions of the value of a product change, which is "evidenced by brand-country dimensions" (Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1996, p. 5). Furthermore "the reputational capital of a nation with respect to a product category will influence choice more than a nation's overall attractiveness, though fragments of a nation's imagery may nonetheless be successfully exploited" (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000, p. 56). From this point of view, it does not matter what consumers know about a particular nation or country, which concepts are associated with them. Some countries are very fortunate in this respect. The Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, Louvre, Sacré Coeur, Moulin Rouge, Cannes Film Festival, Chanel, Dior, Givenchy, Louis Vuitton, L'Oréal, Estée Lauder, Bordeaux, Burgundy,

Champagne, the baguette, the croissant, the éclairs, the béchamel, Michelin star are all products that have made France one of the best-known and most popular tourist destinations in the world at a certain point of time. The roulette⁸, the ballet, the Matryoshka dolls, the Molotov cocktail are specific products of Russia. The flamenco, the bullfight (fiesta brava)⁹, the bull-run (the festival of San Fermín), the Fallas Festival in València, the paella, gazpacho, churro and the sangria are Spain's heritage on the other hand. The most valuable trademark of Hungary is folk music, acknowledged even internationally, which focuses on topics like love and sorrow, life and death, exile, poverty and wealth. The best-known folk song is entitled 'Spring wind floods water', was also sang by Freddie Mercury in Budapest at a concert in 1986 – and the song 'Love, love' (performed by Márta Sebestyén) has become part of the soundtrack of the movie: *The English Patient*. Music has also significantly contributed to the promotion of Romania, as Gheorghe Zamfir is the only European performer to win two gold discs rewards in the United States (Brădăţeanu, 2018, available at: <http://www.rador.ro/2018/04/06/portret-gheorghe-zamfir-cel-mai-important-interpret-la-nai-din-toate-timpurile-un-rebel-care-a-metamorfozat-sunetul-2/>), and at the same time, he made the pan flute world famous. The above mentioned examples are of national value and their importance will not diminish as long as customers are aware which country has proven to have the best products throughout history. It is accepted that the Scots make the best whisky, the Russians make the best vodka, while the Cubans make the

⁸ "However dangerous (...) Russian roulette is, it is well-suited to national identity. It blends romance into a gesture, the legendary unfathomability of the Russian soul, the stylization of death as a playmate - it is all conceivable." (available at: <http://oroszk.reblog.hu/az-orosz-rulett-titka>)

⁹ The astonishing spectacle also sparks contradictory views in Spain, as there are regular animal protection demonstrations and there is a growing popular belief that this is just a barbaric habit that by no means follows today's social norms. The International Council of Bullfighting (ILC), formed in 2018, is just the opposite, and aims to promote the cultural, economic, social and educational values of bullfights. (available at: <https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bikaviadal>)

best cigar; and elegance, the “haute couture” is associated with the French, while style is the trademarks of the Italians. The relationship between a nation and a brand is very strong and deeply embedded in collective consciousness. The Volvo brand remains a Swedish brand, even if it was bought by the American company Ford, then by the Chinese Geely Holding Group. In fact, people buy Volvo cars as they believe in Swedish values: well-built, safe, not ostentatious but yet self-conscious (Olins, 2004). Another well-known Swedish brand, standing in the centre of attention, is the brand IKEA. A number of scientific articles have been written in order to comprehensively study the IKEA phenomenon. According to research results, the following factors play a significant role in its success:

(1) low prices, colourful product range (Salzer, 1994). At the same time,

(2) consumers believe that self-made products are competitive with products created by experts (Norton et al. 2012), because assembling products fulfils a core psychological need, namely that consumers feel competent, which leads to products’ increased valuation (Mochon et al., 2012). Furthermore,

- a “visual and olfactory sensory cues have a positive impact on shoppers’ touching behaviour, purchase intentions and total sale” (Hultén, 2012, available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09590551211211774/full/html>), as well as

- “the standardization of IKEA products, rather than a creative constraint, is seen as a benefit to communication and sharing” (Rosner & Bean, 2009, p. 2) as the consumer needs to recognize the IKEA product no matter where they meet it (Jonsson and Foss, 2011). It is also a fact, that

(3) “the hierarchical-type of value-chain governance” does not characterize overall the IKEA, “except in a few special fields (Swedwood)” (Ivarsson & Alvstam, 2010, p. 21) and at the same time “the loading ledge increases the adaptability of IKEA’s packaging system, making it more adaptable to different logistics activities and markets” (Hellström & Nilsson, 2011, p. 651). In conclusion the IKEA is characterized by:

(4) “a strong and dynamic service culture” (Edvardsson & Enquist, 2002, p. 153) because the “IKEA has become the world’s most recognized and reproduced archive of Swedish national culture” (Lindqvist, 2009, p. 46).

Home furnishing is very popular nowadays, as there are many brands and experts who specialize in this area and make homes that satisfy or represent the personality of the customers. At the same time, the market is also attentive to the needs of those who design their own homes. In this case, the various interior design magazines, online platforms and specialized sites are of great help, and provide ideas based on the latest trends to help their customers find the perfect solution for their home decoration and furnishing.

On the other hand, brands of home furnishings should not overlook the fact that home and interior design significantly determines home furnishing, which strongly influences the decor of homes. In order to investigate interior design, it is necessary to analyse the following criteria: (1) pattern following: hierarchy of cultural values and norms, (2) identification and conformity, norms and conventions, (3) the importance of certain forms of consumption (Nagy, 1987, pp. 175-176). The factors of interior design are determined by (1) family structure and function, (2) household size and composition, (3) use of dwellings, (4) interaction and communication among household members, (5) residents’ value system (Nagy, 1987, p. 27).

Personality is reflected not only in the furnishings of the home but also in the cosmetics we use. Furthermore, using cosmetics gives us the feeling that we have made steps in order to preserve our youth. And preserving youth is a priority for most people. It is a well-known fact that the French are at the forefront regarding beauty and cosmetics. L’Oréal proves to be the world’s most valuable brand in this field. L’Oréal, in our opinion, has also become one of the best brands in the world because it makes effort and does a lot to highlight the importance of women’s role in areas dominated by men. In most countries women are still highly under-represented in scientific careers, even more strikingly than in other fields, as many young women do not dare to pursue a scientific

career because of social stereotypes. The L'Oréal - UNESCO for Women in Science Award was created because of the conviction that the world needs science and science needs women. Each year, the program encourages and rewards women around the world who have contributed to the advancement of science through their discoveries (available at: <https://www.loreal.hu/csr-%E2%80%93-t%C3%A1rsadalmi-felel%C5%91ss%C3%A9gv%C3%A1llal%C3%A1s/l%E2%80%99or%C3%A9al-%E2%80%93-unesco-a-n%C5%91k%C3%A9rt-%C3%A9s-a-tudom%C3%A1ny%C3%A9rt>). L'Oréal - UNESCO's Program for Women in Science awards women in three categories: (1) L'Oréal - UNESCO's Women in Science International Awards program rewards women who have achieved significant results in their research "either in Life sciences or in the fields of Physical sciences, Mathematics and Computer science" (available at: <https://www.forwomeninscience.com/en/awards>). (2) L'Oréal - UNESCO's Women in Science International Rising Talents Award aims to support young talented researchers in their careers, (3) National and Regional Programmes L'Oréal - UNESCO for Woman in Science encourages young researchers to continue their scientific careers in their own countries (available at: <https://www.loreal.hu/csr-%E2%80%93-t%C3%A1rsadalmi-felel%C5%91ss%C3%A9gv%C3%A1llal%C3%A1s/l%E2%80%99or%C3%A9al-%E2%80%93-unesco-a-n%C5%91k%C3%A9rt-%C3%A9s-a-tudom%C3%A1ny%C3%A9rt>).

Using the services of a particular cafe chain, we "communicate" something about ourselves/our personality. We also communicate by using services of cafes, since we, as customers, typically buy brands that come with a brand personality similar to ours. The logo, however, is one of the central elements of the brand identity, which expresses the personality of the company/brand (Németh, 2018, available at: <http://blog.webshark.hu/2018/06/04/milyen-jo-logo/>). The world's most well-known coffee chain logo is that of the American Starbucks, which has evolved over the years together with the company, but its basic elements have remained the same: the two-tailed mermaid has always been in the centre. In the international arena, the significance of brand image elements becomes even more important. Moreover, brand identity, as a concept, includes

the brand's "uniqueness, meaning, purpose, values and individuality" (Janonis et al., 2007, p. 77). The research by He et al. "confirms the presence of significant direct and indirect effects of brand identity and brand identification on traditional antecedents of brand loyalty (i.e. perceived value, satisfaction and trust)" (He et al., 2012, p. 648). In addition, emphasis should be placed on the internal factors of the organization and on the role of employees in the brand building process (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001).

Personalization is not new in the car industry either, as, undoubtedly, vehicles make a major contribution to a better representation of our personality and can even appear as symbols of status. When we talk about Ford and its history, everyone is familiar with the saying that "From the beginning of the century, American industry stands for Ford" (available at: <http://mediapedia.hu/ford>). This has become a meaningful statement in the car industry, because when people buy a product they actually buy stories, legends and emotions (Stompff, 2003). Ford means a lot to the American nation, and the brand devoted itself to remain one of the world's most valuable automotive brands, as engineers make improvements (in partnership with other international brands) that make driving more comfortable and enjoyable: (1) the BLIS (Blind Spot Information System) is a function designed for providing support for the driver when driving in dense traffic on roads with several lanes in the same direction, and reacts if another vehicle is quickly approaching the vehicle, (2) the Stop-start is a system on most modern cars that cuts the engine when the car is stationary, in order to reduce fuel consumption and emissions. The engine starts again when the clutch is engaged or the brake is released, or when the driver is ready to move again. This technology is very effective when waiting for red lights or in traffic jams. When the engine is restarted, all you need to do is push the accelerator, (3) the Roll Advance Trac Roll Stability Control (RSC) is an electronic stability system that helps the driver navigate through tough terrains like ice, snow, gravel, and dry pavement. The Advance Trac is designed to enhance stability and traction in the vehicle, (4) the Hill Start Assist Control maintains the brake pressure for a set period of time while

switching from the brakes to the gas pedal in order to prevent the vehicle from accidentally rolling backwards (available at: <https://www.ford.com/suvs-crossovers/ecosport/>).

Material and Method(s)

- The following criteria were taken into account when selecting the products to be included in the analysis:

1. The product contributes to a better expression of the consumer / user personality.
2. The selected brand is strongly linked to a particular nation / country.
3. The selected brand is present on Interbrand's Best Global Brands 2019 ranking and had a growth in 2019, compared to 2018.

- The following products / brands were included in the analysis:

1. Decor products – IKEA.
2. Cosmetics - L'Oréal.
3. Coffee chain – Starbucks.
4. Vehicles – Ford.

The above mentioned brands were selected, because:

1. IKEA is one of Sweden's best known and most valued brands, being the 30th best brand in the world in 2019, increasing its brand value by 5% compared to 2018 (available at: <https://www.interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2019/ranking/>). No other furniture / home furnishing retail chain has achieved such a performance.

2. Cosmetics are closely linked to France. L'Oréal is the world's most valuable cosmetics brand and managed to increase its brand value by 5% in 2019 compared to 2018 (available at: <https://www.interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2019/ranking/>). In addition, L'Oréal is also a valuable (international) brand because it plays a major role in increasing the number of women in science.

3. American brands actually dominate the Best Global Brands rankings¹⁰. One of the most well-known brands in the US is Ford, which has greatly contributed to the development of the industry. For many years, Ford was in the top 10 of the best brands list. In 2019, Ford was the 5th best car brand in the world. In 2019, it recorded a 2% increase compared to the previous year (available at: <https://www.interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2019/ranking/>). Starbucks managed the presentation of changes over time in its logo very well and managed to preserve its core values. Starbucks recorded significant growth (23%) in 2019 compared to 2018. Starbucks is one of the most well-known and most valuable cafe chains in the world (available at: <https://www.interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2019/ranking/>).

- There are several sites presenting opinions on different brands, but in many cases the same person expresses opinions several times (especially when dissatisfied with the quality level of a particular international brand): this behaviour leads to distortion of results. The Consumer Affairs website avoids this problem, and it has been proven to be the best in terms of credibility.

1. Source of IKEA customer/consumer reviews:
<https://www.consumeraffairs.com/furniture/ikea.html>.
2. Source of L'Oréal customer/consumer reviews:
<https://www.consumeraffairs.com/retail/loreal.html>.
3. Source of Starbucks reviews:
4. <https://www.consumeraffairs.com/food/starbucks.html>.
5. The source of reviews regarding Ford:
<https://www.consumeraffairs.com/automotive/ford-cars-and-trucks.html>.

- Reviewers could rate the product / service with the help of stars (1* very bad, 5* very good).

¹⁰ This is the reason why two global American brands have been selected.

- Reviews provided over the year 2019 were included in the analysis (sort: top reviews, filter by: any).
- Time interval set for reading the reviews [01.01.2020 – 05.01.2020]¹¹.
 - After reading the reviews for each brand, the first step was to identify the positive and negative aspects. The next step was to group these aspects based on criteria regarding their significant role in marketing. These are the following:
 - A. Product,
 - B. Price,
 - C. Market manipulation,
 - D. Employees,
 - E. Additional services,
 - F. Communication (between company and customers, employees and customers),
 - G. Process,
 - H. Physical evidence/Physical environment,
 - I. Customer complaint management.
 - While reading the reviews, the most striking, interesting aspects were recorded.

Results and Discussions

In the following we present the strengths and weaknesses of (international) brands involved in the analysis, based on the criteria that determine marketing and thus have a significant impact on consumer satisfaction.

¹¹ We consider it important to mention the time interval for data collection because of consumers “may choose to change a star rating after communicating and working with a company with regards to review or comment” (available at: <https://www.consumer-affairs.com/about/faq/#what-is-consumeraffairs-for-brands>)

The strengths and weaknesses of IKEA

The reviewers expressed their positive opinion regarding the following:

A. Product

1. Wide range of products (including the complementary products as well).
2. Level of quality (for example: good, awesome).
3. The frequency of new products.
4. The products inspire the customers (they could even create a new function for a particular products).
5. IKEA is the best choice if customer loves assembling their own products.
6. Products have (visual/emotional) value because they are lovable, beautiful, nice, and pleasant to look at, and bring happiness.

B. Price (for example: appropriate, modest, favourable, and very good).

C. Market manipulation

1. Direct sale: sales staff is helpful.
2. The atmosphere of the shop: presentation of the goods.

D. Employees

1. During face-to-face conversation they are kind and patient.

E. Additional services/Complementary products

1. Delivery service (for example: each all parts were present, product is not damaged, delivery time is correct).
2. Restaurant service (good quality).

F. Process

1. The shopping process is fun, provides good experience.

G. Customer complaint management

1. Efficiency¹² (for example: kind, patient, friendly, pleasant, helpful, and very polite).
2. Compensation (making apology is part of the process).
3. After-sale service policy (for example: fast product exchange, delivery service fee refund).

The weaknesses of IKEA are the following:

A. Product

1. Quality (for example: the softness of wood, manufacture error).
2. Removal of previously introduced products from the supply chain, which makes it difficult/impossible to comply with the warranty promises.
3. Ignoring differences regarding differences between geographical regions (i.e. sizes).

B. Price (high).

C. Market manipulation

1. Direct sale: product description (for example: Employees assure the customer that the size of the product to be shipped is as expected and this is not proven after purchase).
2. Sales incentives: the coupon is not applied and the discounted price is not met.

D. Employees

1. Lack of cooperation (they do not meet expectations).
2. Irresponsible behaviour (for example: the returned product is replaced by a non-conforming product, the consumer has paid twice which is due to the employee's fault).

¹² Refers to the attitudes and behavior of employees dealing with complaints.

E. Additional services/Complementary products

1. Delivery service (for example: defective products, ordered products are incomplete, delivery time is long, failure to meet deadlines is an extra expense, not the ordered items are delivered, employee behaviour: mislead the consumer, they are impolite, inattentive).
2. Assembly service (for example: abominable, fraudulent, and violent behaviour on the part of employees regarding the use of these additional services). The assembly instructions are difficult to understand/follow.
3. Lack of delivery/assembly services.
4. Measurement services (for example: erroneous/poor measurement resulting in: sale of inadequate parts, improper installation, and waste).
5. Restaurant services with inappropriate quality (including the quality of coffee as well).

F. Communication

1. Incomplete or no communication (for example: failure to call customer/ consumer attention to every detail, invalid order without buyer's consent, blocked credit card for no reason).

G. Process

1. The online shopping process is cumbersome, complex because it is:
 - A larger amount is deducted than the total purchase value.
 - The website is not working properly (blueprints cannot be saved).
 - The information is incorrect (the online system shows stock of particular product, however the information is not up-to-date).
 - Tracking of goods is unreliable or difficult (order number is required).

H. Customer complaint management

1. Being well-prepared and competent (for example: ignoring company policy, being not helpful, rude, unfriendly, uneducated or uncivilized; showing lack of knowledge, mistakes being not acknowledged, not following the needs of customers, not responding to each written comment).
2. Compensation (for example: no compensation or lack of apology, no price discount regardless of inconvenience; however, if given the discount is usually of low value).
3. After sale service policy (for example: defective product replacement is time consuming, refund shipping fee is refused).

Conclusions based on reviews:

- Review writing consumers gave the lowest rating (1 star) even if there were positively rated details. Despite of the good quality of the product, or the positive evaluation of the delivery service, if the assembly cannot be carried out due to the lack of an item, the consumer is disappointed: the review is not an unbiased one then.
- Previously loyal customer becomes disloyal to the brand even if he or she has had a positive experience for ten years.
- IKEA has a better reputation in Europe than in the United States.
- Loyal consumers expect to be treated in an exceptional but fair way.
- Although the literature mentions saving time as one of the benefits of online shopping, reviewers believe it is much more beneficial to shop in stores if saving time and money is a primary consideration. Online shopping leads to waste of time and money.
- Problem solving (in many cases) is simpler through face-to-face encounter.

- Closer coordination between departments is needed, especially with regard to transport. XPO logistics does not meet consumer expectations.
- Consumers value quality on the basis of price.
- Reducing the number of employees leads to overload, which is immediately perceived by customers.
- If everything is not perfect (e.g. assembly/installation), the customer will encounter a feeling of lack.
- It is not always possible to cancel an order.
- There are also cases where unilateral decision is made.
- IKEA products evoke emotions (happiness) and contribute to personal development (creativity) of consumers.

Positive and negative aspects of L'Oréal

Positive aspects have been identified in case of L'Oréal products, such as:

A. Product

1. Variety of product range (such as: foundations and powders match so many different complexion, blushes and eye shadows come in a variety of complementing colours).
2. Quality (such as: truly waterproof mascara, does not dry out or cake up and crack, sustainable, all products are hypoallergenic, natural sun kissed glow, light weight).
3. Easy application.

B. Price (such as: affordable, very reasonable).

Negative aspects have been identified, such as:

A. Product

1. Quality (very poor standards).
2. Withdrawal of previously launched (original) products.

B. Market manipulation

1. Commercial: the TV commercial promises are not kept by the product

C. Communication (such as: change of product ingredients without informing consumers, the information on the packaging does not correspond to reality).

D. Customer complaint management

1. After-sale service policy (the product was not taken back after a single use).

Conclusions regarding reviews:

- A brand switching customer can also become a loyal customer.
- Buying hair-related products is the biggest risk factor.
- Consumers expect to be notified of changes in product composition.

The bright and dark side of Starbucks

The positive aspects of Starbucks are the following:

A. Product

1. Quality (for example: creamy texture and taste, professional, not too hot).

B. Employees (for example: nice, friendly, emphatic, they help to solve personal problems: it can be felt that the consumer who uses the service comes first).

C. Physical evidence/Physical environment (background music also plays a significant role in creating a pleasant environment).

D. Customer complaint management

1. Preparedness (appropriate).

2. Compensation (for example: there is a discount or free product if the order is not trouble-free).

The negative aspects of Starbucks are the following:

A. Product

1. Quality (for example: appearance of health issues, too hot, burnt taste experienced, the 80-85% of the product is foam, plastic found in the cake).

B. Price (for example: high price, rising price).

C. Market manipulation

1. Promotional promises are not kept.

D. Employees (for example: inexperienced, rude, inattentive, untrained, do not meet expectations, their behaviour disturb users/customers).

E. Communication (for example: do not inform users/customers about changes related to the product, credit cards are blocked without the customer's knowledge).

F. Physical evidence/Physical environment (for example: needs of seniors not taken into account; no seating or mirror in the toilets; inadequate cleanliness, lack of neatness; pets are allowed).

G. Customer complaint management

1. Preparedness (for example: consumers are not treated as customers, lack of explanations, and lack of solution to the problems).
2. Compensation (lack of discount for inconveniences).

Conclusions regarding reviews:

- Management does not pay attention to environmental protection (a female customer, however, mentioned the use of transparent plastic wrap), greedy CEO.
- Customers expect to use gift cards anywhere they want (not to be linked to a particular outlet).

- A smile (for users/customers) should be part of the service product - however, it is missed in certain cases.
- Management must be aware that customers notice changes in the quality and quantity of products.
- Although the coffee chain is the same, the experience is different depending on the place where customers use the service.
- Customers expect special (fair) treatment.
- Experience is very important in judging a service product.
- Compensation alone is not enough: a solution to the problem must be found.
- The workload and underpayment of employees has an effect on the perceived quality.
- Knowing client's name expresses a sense of empathy.

Positive and negative aspects of Ford

Positive aspects have been identified in case of the Ford brand:

A. Product

1. Speed (excellent acceleration).
2. Safety (such as: very responsive ABS braking system, reliable vehicle, centre lane is great as well as the adaptive control which works even in slow traffic, safety features).
3. Consumption (for example: ok, great).
4. Adaptation to driving circumstances (for example: equally good in urban or mountain environment, good in any weather).
5. Towing capacity.
6. Many technological features, the Microsoft Sync system and USB plug-ins, build jukebox.

B. Price (such as: ok, "right", affordable).

- #### **C. Employees (for example: honest, very approachable and knowledgeable).**

D. Physical evidence/Physical environment¹³

1. Cargo space (for example: huge, roomy compartment).
2. Comfort/ergonomics (for example: spacious interior, good shocks and very comfortable seats with lumbar support, the needs of seniors are also kept in mind when it comes to ergonomics, automatic folding seats, plus room for two more passengers).
3. Ambient (for example: light colour selections, well-designed dashboard).

The negative aspects of the Ford brand are the following:

A. Product

1. Servicing (for example: very high servicing fees/replacement of parts is expensive, frequency of repairs due to poor quality workmanship/parts).
2. Fuel consumption (is not good).
3. Safety (for example: use of chrome rear-view mirror, loose wires, warning lights are problematic, the shifter reflected the sun in the most intense way, blind spots on driver and passengers side near mirrors is dangerous, lost power, design flaw: rodents can destroy wires).
4. Loss of engine oil pressure.
5. Collisions sensor and some of the USB connections with the Phone does not work properly.
6. The radio would not turn off causing the battery to die.
7. Withdrawal of certain models/types from production (“not everyone wants to drive an SUV”).

B. Communication (for example: there are details not communicated towards the customer: the Navigation only works if the vehicle has an SD card, the service manager cannot give a meaningful answer regarding repairs not requested by the customer).

¹³ In this case, it does not assume the environment in which the vehicle is purchased, but refers to the interior design/construction and physical evidence of the vehicle itself.

- C. Physical evidence/Physical environment (“feel like you’re driving in a moving clean glass box”).
- D. Customer complaint management
 - 1. After sale service policy (for example: there is no appointment communicated regarding the solution of the problem, there is a long waiting time for the solution of the problem).

Conclusions regarding reviews:

- Driving a Ford vehicle is comfortable and fun.
- Negative opinions do not rule out the possibility that other costumers will be satisfied with the car they have purchased.
- Old vehicles work well, and hybrid models are surprisingly responsive (agile responsive).
- Reviewers tend to give a 3 star, even if the purchase has turned out to be a wrong decision.
- More intensive application of innovation is a female need.
- Reviewer gave only a 4 star, even if no negative aspects were met.
- The number of employees is low, which has a negative effect on perceived facts.
- Attention to every detail appears as a customer demand.
- Attention is paid to senior customers’ needs.
- It fulfils warranty obligations.

Conclusion

The relationship between nations and brands is significant, as the values that define a particular nation are transferred to the products/brands of that nation. Moreover, the brands will be judged according to these values, before their purchase. Among the motivational tools to

become a global brand, competition also appears as an incentive, as a brand has to compete on an international scale if (1) it wants to take advantage of new opportunities in new markets before its competitors become stronger, and (2) it has to protect domestic market from global, larger-scale competitors (Randall, 2000), as foreign direct investments of global brands can pose potential threats to national brands (Mihailovich, 2006). From this approach, each country has the right to make decisions that serve to protect the values of its own nation. Giving up on this right, national identity would be undermined.

In the following, aspects that are common in case of several brands included in the analysis are listed below.

- Whether it is a physical product or a service, the values of a brand are perceived by customers through employees, because despite the increasing range of communication channels/opportunities, a brand communicates with its actual and potential customers/consumers primarily through their employees. However, performance fluctuates over time, presenting a big risk for brands, for a number of reasons, because in case of multi-person services the quality of services also varies due to different abilities of individuals (Veres, 2005). Regarding international brands, the problem becomes even more complex by the fact that the brand is represented by employees belonging to different nations. The number of employees, how motivated they are, and the extent to which they identify themselves with the brand they represent can be reflected by customer satisfaction.

- Close collaboration between company departments: process managers need to work with marketers, as this is the only way to prove if the process system itself is working well, and if it can meet fluctuations in demand and staff to a certain extent.

- Subjectivity is unavoidable, no brand can steer clear of it, and it may represent an obstacle for them. Consumer behaviour is not always consistent.

- The importance of additional services is undeniable and their impact is significant in terms of customer satisfaction, whether these services happen before, during or after transactions. Providing information,

setting dates and resolving complaints are all important to consumers. Consequently, treating additional services as part of an extended marketing mix is, in our view, justified.

- A brand is (also) judged on the basis of its response to a particular problem, i.e. the response is: yes, no, reluctant or negative.
- Neither the user nor the customer, who has already had a positive experience, ignores the mistakes. Not all customers give a second chance.
- A weak link in the purchasing process is enough to give a brand a negative overall rating.
- Consumers are frustrated with the withdrawal of previously introduced products.
- Consumers expect communication to be continuous: if something changes, they expect the company/employees to communicate it.
- Customers expect more attention/care.
- Consumers demand that old products be kept in the supply basket.
- The importance of customer service should not be underestimated in terms of consumer satisfaction.

With regard to the reviewers' opinion, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Dissatisfied customers express their opinions in much more detail way than satisfied ones.
- Dissatisfied users are more active in terms of word of mouth than satisfied ones.
- Overestimation is less visible in the evaluations than underestimation, as the buyer/ consumer gave only one star even if he/she had a positive experience with the given brand, or did not rate it as high as possible even in the absence of a negative feature. However, there was also a case where a brand received an acceptable (3 star) rating despite the consumer being dissatisfied with their purchase decision.

To be successful, companies need to know consumers' "beliefs, behaviours, product or service attributes, and competitors" (Ghodeswar,

2008, p. 4) which actually presupposes a holistic approach. Holistic knowledge of consumers and an appropriate approach to complaint management represent two problems that no (inter)national brand can ignore, as:

- caring attitude of employees, paying attention to consumers' personal problems and solving them also adds value to a brand. Of course, this kind of care is not necessarily assessed positively by everyone: a person working in the front line needs to know / feel where the limit lies. Limited openness in this case appears as a selection criterion for human resources,

- compensation should only be used if the dissatisfied consumer feels that it has relevance: there is no point in making unnecessary compensation if customers do not feel that the company does everything in order to remedy the problem or prevent it from happening again in the future. An empty apology does not improve, but rather worsens the relationship between a particular brand and the customer. Furthermore, employees with the most comprehensive knowledge should be involved in handling of complaints, as otherwise the principle of competence is violated. However, the value of the principle of preparedness can only be achieved if the particular customer becomes a satisfied customer again.

In conclusion, the possibility of creativity, the ease of use of the product, empathy (knowing the name of the customer); solving the personal problems of the users/customers, paying attention to the seniors appear as a differentiating element in the life of the brands and significantly contribute to their assessment.

Acknowledgment: The present paper is dedicated to Géza Bodoki, Tünde Elek, Melinda Ferencz, Erzsébet Gál, Kinga-Imola Kádár and Szende Szigeti

REFERENCES

- Edvardsson, B. and Enquist, B. (2002), "'The IKEA Saga': How Service Culture Drives Service Strategy", *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 153-186
- Ghodeswar, B. M. (2008), "Building brand identity in competitive markets: a conceptual model", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 17 No 1, pp. 4-12
- Harris, F. and de Chernatony, L. (2001), "Corporate branding and corporate brand performance", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 35 No. 3/4, pp. 441-456
- He, H., Li, Y. and Harris, L. (2012), "Social identity perspective on brand loyalty", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 65 No. 5, pp. 648-657
- Hellström, D. and Nilsson, F. (2011), "Logistics-driven packaging innovation: a case study at IKEA", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 39 No. 9, pp. 638-657
- Hultén, B. (2012), "Sensory cues and shoppers' touching behaviour: the case of IKEA", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 40 No. 4, pp. 273-289.
- Ivarsson, I. and Alvstam, C. G. (2010), "Upgrading in global value-chains: a case study of technology-learning among IKEA-suppliers in China and Southeast Asia", available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.954.8430&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Janonis, V., Dovaliené, A. and Virvilaitė, R. (2007), "Relationship of Brand Identity and Image", *Engineering Economics*, Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 69-79
- Jonsson, A. and Foss, N. J. (2011), "International expansion through flexible replication: Learning from the internationalization experience of IKEA", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 42 No. 9, pp. 1079-1102
- Lindqvist, U. (2009), "The Cultural Archive of the IKEA Store", *Space and Culture*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 43-62
- Mihailovich, P. (2006), "Kinship branding: A concept of holism and evolution for the nation brand", *Place Brand Public*, Vol. 2 No 3, pp. 229-247

- Mochon, D., Norton, M. I. and Ariely, D. (2012), "Bolstering and restoring feelings of competence via the IKEA effect", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 363-369
- Nebenzahl, I. D. and Jaffe, E. D. (1996), "Measuring the joint effect of brand and country image in consumer evaluation of global products", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 5-22
- Norton, M. I., Mochon, D. and Ariely, D. (2012), "The IKEA Effect: When Labor Leads to Love", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 453-460
- O'Shaughnessy, J. and O'Shaughnessy, N. J. (2000), "Treating the Nation as a Brand: Some Neglected Issues", *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 56-64
- Olins W. (2004), *A márkák: A márkák világa, a világ márkái [The Brands: the World of the Brands, the World's Brands]*, József Műhely Publisher, Budapest
- Randall G. (2000), *Márkázás a gyakorlatban [Branding in Practice]*, Geomédia Szakkönyvek Publisher, Budapest
- Rosner, D. and Bean, J. (2009), "Learning from IKEA Hacking: 'I'm Not One to Decoupage a Tabletop and Call It a Day'", available at: http://faculty.washington.edu/dkrosner/research/Rosner_Ikea-hacking.pdf
- S. Nagy K. (1987), *Lakberendezési szokások [Home furnishing habits]*, Magvető Publisher, Budapest
- Salzer, M. (1994), "Identity Across Borders. A Study in the 'IKEA-World'", available at: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:603282/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Stompff, G. (2003), "The forgotten bond: brand identity and product design", *Design Management Journal*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 26-32
- Veres Z, (2004), *Szolgáltatásmarketing [Service marketing]*, KJK Kerszöv Publisher, Budapest
- Brădăţeanu, V. (2018), "PORTRET. Gheorghe Zamfir – cel mai important interpret la nai din toate timpurile, un rebel care a metamorfozat sunetul", [PORTRAIT. Gheorghe Zamfir - The most important performer of all time, a rebel who metamorphosed the sound] available at: <http://www.rador.ro/2018/04/06/portret-gheorghe-zamfir-cel-mai-important-interpret-la-nai-din-toate-timpurile-un-rebel-care-a-metamorfozat-sunetul-2/>, accessed on: 15.01.2020

Németh, K. (2018), "Milyen a jó logó? Mire figyelj a tervezésnél?" ["What makes a logo great? What to pay attention when designing one?"], available at: <http://blog.webshark.hu/2018/06/04/milyen-jo-logo/>, accessed on: 15.01.2020

<http://oroszok.reblog.hu/az-orosz-ulett-titka>, accessed on: 25.01.2020

<https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bikaviadal>, accessed on: 17.11.2019

<https://www.interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2019/ranking/>, accessed on: 05.12.2019

<https://www.loreal.hu/csr-%E2%80%93-t%C3%A1rsadalmi-felel%C5%91ss%C3%A9gv%C3%A1llal%C3%A1s/l%E2%80%99or%C3%A1l-%E2%80%93-unesco-a-n%C5%91k%C3%A9rt-%C3%A9s-a-tudom%C3%A1ny%C3%A9rt>, accessed on: 18.12.2019

<https://www.forwomeninscience.com/en/awards>, accessed on: 18.12.2019

<http://mediapedia.hu/ford>, accessed on: 20.12.2019

<https://www.ford.com/suvs-crossovers/ecosport/>, accessed on: 20.12.2019

<https://www.consumeraffairs.com/furniture/ikea.html>, accessed on: 01.01.2020 – 02.01.2020

<https://www.consumeraffairs.com/retail/loreal.html>, accessed on: 02.01.2020

<https://www.consumeraffairs.com/food/starbucks.html>, accessed on: 03.01.2020

<https://www.consumeraffairs.com/automotive/ford-cars-and-trucks.html>, accessed on: 04.01.2020 – 05.01.2020

<https://www.consumeraffairs.com/about/faq/#what-is-consumeraffairs-for-brands>, accessed on: 03.01.2020