

THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL BRANDING ON CONSUMERS IN CROATIAN NORTHERN REGION

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KRISTIAN STANČIN

STUDENT

kstancin@foi.hr kristian.stancin@yahoo.com

IVA GREGUREC

PhD, SENIOR TEACHING ASSISTANT

iva.gregurec@foi.hr

FOR BOTH AUTHORS:

FACULTY OF ORGANIZATION AND INFORMATICS
UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB
VARAŽDIN, CROATIA

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, brands are perceived at the level of feelings and identity, which are one of the most important features by which they differ from each other. According to this, today's companies are working on increasing the emotional connection between consumers and brands, which is known as a term emotional branding. The main purpose of emotional branding is the systematic integration of all senses in order to cause a certain emotion and induce the consumer to purchase products or to use services. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to describe the role of emotions in creating a brand and discover the extent to which consumers are emotionally attached to a particular brand. The paper is created as a result of a research study established for writing a master's thesis.

KEY WORDS: brand, emotions, emotional branding, consumers.

1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, product manufacturing was the core of industrial economy. But with more and more manufacturers entering the market comes oversaturation, but also recession and some of the world's strongest manufacturers are beginning to weaken. At the time, a new type of corporation started to emerge, which understood that manufacturing isn't the only strategic action, so their products were manufactured by contract manufacturers in different countries, while the corporation itself worked on manufacturing the brand image. When that turned out to be a very lucrative business strategy, more and more corporations started to incorporate this kind of business style, while they also had to know what is important to the customers in order to create a good image. Marketing was born in that time period, and it was assigned to research consumers' wants and needs in order to create an image that will be suitable for consumers.

In this article we talk about emotional branding and everything that is needed to create a brand to which consumers will have an emotional attachment to. Results of the research conducted on consumers and their emotional attachment to a brand are at the end of the article.

2. BRAND IDENTITY

A prerequisite to building a strong and successful brand, besides assumed quality, is a brand identity that has to

show the value of the brand to consumers in a realistic and reliable way (Kapferer, 2008, p. 183). The brand's identity is realized through elements of the identity and that is everything that is used for identification of the brand and differentiating it from other brands, for example, name, web address, logo, character or a person, jingle, slogan or packaging (Keller, 2013, p. 142). Distinguishing between certain products is possible only because of the brand, that is, associations that consumers use to connect to them. For example, a certain brand (and because of it, the product itself) can be classified as "masculine", "feminine", "children's" or "young adult" even though one cannot say that about the product.

Choosing the elements of the brand is a condition for achieving its visibility through unique and desirable perception and feeling toward it (Vranešević, 2007, p. 41). Most common elements of a brand's identity on which companies put their focus on are: name, logo, characters, slogans, jingles, packaging and color.

Brand name. The brand name is the central brand element, one that can be spoken (Vranešević, 2007, p. 43-44). Assigning a name is a key stage of defining verbal elements for creation of the brand's identity because it represents the first signal of recognizing and knowing the brand which is never neutral, but which has to have an emotional and/or rational meaning, depending on the goals of its choice (Chevalier, Mazzalovo, 2004, p. 29).

Logo. Brand signs enable faster and easier understanding of the culture and personality of the brand, so companies can, only through name and logo (sign, symbol), elicit positive associations, liking and desired perceptions in the consumer who doesn't have experience with what the brand is representing (Vranešević, 2007, p. 51-52).

Characters. Characters as brand elements are also frequently used, mainly by being added to the brand so they can additionally influence the creation of wanted perception of the brand and they are the basis around which campaigns for achieving recognition and remembering the brand revolve (Vranešević, 2007, p. 53).

Slogans. Slogans are sayings that are tied to the brands and they have informative and persuasive meaning. Their main advantage is offering possibilities of larger experimentation and more creative expression. When big recognition of the slogan is achieved, it gains meaning as an efficient reminder of the brand, even in atypical situations where the product is used (Vranešević, 2007, p. 53-54).

Jingles. Jingles are usually written by professional lyricists and they are usually easy to remember and stay in our thoughts even if we do not want them to. They represent musical messages which are tied to the brand. They can be seen as a way of warning, informing and reminding people about the brand in an indirect way by inducing associations which can be transmitted through sound (Keller, 2013, p. 164).

Packaging. A number of brands became so powerful exactly because of the special packaging, for example, Toblerone, Ritter Sport, After Eight, Ferrero Rocher and the like. Packaging, but also the appearance of the final product as a touchable element of the brand identity, has to be harmonious in order to achieve adequate visual brand expression. Packaging elements encompass shape, size, material, sign, text, proportions, visibility and graphic design (Ellwood, 2002, p. 89).

Color. Some packaging designers believe that consumers have a "color dictionary" and that they expect that certain products have a predetermined appearance and color. For example, it would be more difficult to sell milk if it were not packaged in a white or blue carton or bottle (Keller, 2013, p. 166).

3. WHAT IS EMOTIONAL BRANDING?

The concept of emotional branding is complex and hard to define because the limits are not clearly established. The concept of emotions is complex because people behave differently under the influence of emotions. Also, to this day there is still no definitive scientific answer to the question of what emotions are. Nevertheless, one definition says that they are "experiences of our evaluation and subjective

relationship toward objects, people, events and our own actions" (Andrilović, Čudina-Obradović, 1994, p. 82). From the aforementioned definition one can see that emotions actually represent the experience of an individual divided in four main groups: objects, people, events and actions of the individual. All four groups are of great importance for marketing and individuals are being influenced through all of them lately. Objects represent the product itself or a service that is sold to the consumer; people represent consumer's environment, referable groups or even a famous person who is a role model; events are referring to various marketing campaigns that are trying to awaken certain feelings, while actions of the individual represent the product purchase itself.

Definition of emotional branding from the aforementioned is self-evident: directing and managing the brand which is focused on consumer engagement on the emotional and sensory levels (Pavlek, 2008, p. 166). In today's world, it is not enough to only offer a good service or product to the consumer, but it is necessary to establish a good relationship and interaction with them in order to elicit emotions, attitudes and desires so they can share them with other people.

Lindstrom (2009, p. 94) says that product marking always relied on establishing emotional connections between the consumer and the brand and emotions are based upon information which is acquired through the senses. Marketing experts used exactly this fact in order to create sensory branding which tries to initiate consumer's relationship with the brand, optimize consumer's impulsive behavior, initiate interest and enable emotional reaction to overcome rational behavior. Because of this, it can be said that emotional branding and sensory or auditory branding are actually synonyms because a sensory stimulus is needed for initiating emotions.

Many authors are talking lately about experiential marketing. While traditional marketing focuses on expected benefit as the carrier of the brand's value, a new approach advocates that consumers should expect that the product, communication and marketing campaign should touch them deeply and trigger their senses, heart and stimulate their brain (Lenderman, 2005, p. 18). This means it is necessary to include the consumer in the process of creating the experience itself because experiences create emotional values that substitute functional ones. Experiences actually emerge when individuals are being exposed to a real situation through which they are going through, which also has a wider social meaning, because the brand connects the company and consumer's lifestyle (Schmitt, 1999, p. 57-59).

Emotional link with the consumers is the main generator of additional value of the brand. We can say that a brand is more valued and appreciated when it has, beside the awareness about it, pronounced differentiation, uniqueness, relevancy, loyalty but also emotional connectivity which doesn't have to affect only the individual but also the culture of the group or an entire nation. Modern brands became part of the culture of

society, close to the individual and they are identified more and more by the brand personality that the creators imposed on them (Pavlek, 2008, p. 166).

According to Lindstrom (2009, p. 97-98), emotional branding adds four important dimensions to the brand:

- emotional connection which is closely connected with consumer's loyalty and which will be described in detail in next chapter,
- optimal harmonization between perception and reality where the aim is for reality to surpass perception,
- creating a platform for the brand which enables the spread of the product, which means it is necessary to establish an emotional connection between various products through sensory tactile areas that are consistently repeated in each new category of products of the same brand,
- signature sign which means that every aspect of the sensory attraction of the brand can be protected – shape, smell, sound, texture, taste and so on.

4. FIVE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL

Until recently, company's communication with consumers through products or the brand was limited to a two-dimensional model, which consisted of sight and hearing with occasional ability to test a certain perfume with smell. However, if the company wants to reach the consumer better, it needs a transition from a two-dimensional model to a five-dimensional one that encompasses all five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and smell, which is not an easy assignment because it is necessary to research each sensory possibility with the goal of improving the product, and establishing a stronger and more solid connection between the consumer and the brand (Lindstrom, 2009, p. 54).

Experiencing the brand through the sense of sight.

Maven (2009, p. 54) says how sight is actually "the most powerful sense which has an influence that prevails in the entirety of an experience", through which we receive images and create ideas in our head, based on which we make or add to estimations and choices of action. Sight has an advantage in branding because of the realization that shapes and colors affect attraction and recognizability. Information received through sight can be transferred and processed quickly which allows the consumer to react promptly, even faster than when thinking consciously. That is why visual information has an advantage and why color, besides name, is added into the signature sign (Pavlek, 2008, p. 179).

Brand experience through the sense of hearing.

Sound is used for creating mood and atmosphere that can elicit positive and negative reactions. Concepts of hearing and listening are clearly distinct in communication. Sound can be heard, but listening represents a gift through which understanding for

people is gained and where loyal and respectful relationships are created. Sound can be heard, but it can also be ignored (for example, traffic noise when we are inside). Listening is actually discerning what is important and what is not, which is of great importance in marketing where we strive to reach into the soul, into the basis of motives and decisions that are not always clear, that are not only based on the rational and conscious but also on the emotional, which comes from the subconscious (Pavlek, 2008, p. 186-188).

Brand experience through touch. The best known example that illustrates creating a brand's identity through touch is advertisement of the Coca Cola Company. The design of the Coca Cola bottle came into existence in 1915 when campaign president A. Candler said the famous sentence: "we need a bottle that will be instantly recognizable, even by touching it in the dark". Touching the brand or the product is largely connected to perceivable quality that consumers assign to certain products. Consumers are in general inclined to touch the merchandise in all stores. They like to touch leather purses, fabric, suits, cosmetics, food, furniture and everything else. Nobody likes to shop blindly because most consumers try to justify their purchase and convince themselves that they chose a good product.

Brand experience through taste. A well-known example is IKEA where they offer meals alongside their varied assortment, while a chain of American bookstores Barnes and Noble also offers coffee, hot-dogs and similar products. These companies realized that if the customer spends a greater deal of time in the store, he deserves to sit down and relax with a meal, coffee or cake. This way, consumers are staying in the store longer and they are being persuaded to come back. Most of the companies, besides those that produce food and drinks, have a hard time including taste in their brands. Besides the aforementioned non-food companies, Colgate is one of the companies that uses taste by patenting a characteristic taste for their toothpastes, but unfortunately, they did not transfer that taste to their other products, like their dental floss, and with that, they did not maintain right coherence of the company (Lindstrom, 2009, p. 34).

Brand experience through smell. Smell is also a very important characteristic of a product, it can induce a pleasant or an unpleasant feeling. M. Gobe (Pavlek, 2008, p. 193) claims that according to the results of research, smell elicits our emotions stronger than all the other senses. If we go from the assumption that most decisions are taken emotionally, then it is understandable why an atmosphere is attempted to be created in stores where a particular aroma dominates, because it creates a pleasant feeling, elicits positive associations and encourages shopping. Smell is one of the powerful drivers of human action because certain smells awaken strong associative processes. Perceptions

of smell are stored in long term memory and they represent a filter for decoding new situations and help in recognizing serious or everyday situations (Maven, 2009, p. 42-43). Hence, smell is a sense that we cannot avoid. We can close our eyes, plug our ears, but we cannot not breathe. In a world where visual effects are becoming more pronounced and aggressive, companies see the escape from consumers' ignoring of the visual because of overstimulation in smell, which is used more and more. Ideal example of this are almost all store chains that are introducing their own bakeries inside their stores lately, in order to influence consumers to buy bread, but also so they can feel more comfortable during shopping and while being in the store.

Sensory integration. Emotional connection of the brands gives value by which it differentiates from products that have the same physical quality and structure. That is why, possibilities that senses give have to be used in order to create that connection and a positive relationship between the consumer and the brand. When we take synergy into account, in other words, provoking one sense on the perception of the other, it is good to have in mind that it is necessary to go toward optimal structure that leads to stronger actions (Pavlek, 2008, p. 194-195).

5. BRAND AS A LIFESTYLE

Cult brands and icon brands that represent a lifestyle of an individual can be sorted under the experiential branding framework. We have for example, Gucci, Gillette, Mercedes, Barbie, Starbucks and even Oprah Winfrey and Madonna. Since we are discussing social phenomena here, movements of entire groups, the phenomenon can be observed as a sociologic occurrence that represents a new dimension where it is a key of communication between consumers and the brand. In contrast to classical brands that build their emotional connections inside a framework of predetermined processes, essence, category and their identity on associations they invoke, cult brands and icon brands have an even stronger reliance on emotional lives of people and communities. Aforementioned connections are not based on a rational or analytical approach, but on self-confirmation, identity and beliefs. Pavlek (2008, p. 207) states that the basic distinction between an icon brand and a cult brand is the degree of exclusivity because the cult expects adherence to strict rules of the brotherhood, military organization or personalities who are asking for submission in the name of an idea or their own cult. Brand as a cult has its own smaller niche of impassioned fans who are exclusively focused on that brand and are very emotionally connected to it. On the other hand, icon brand offers the consumers value and in the center of attention puts ideas with which a certain group feels unity with and in which they find themselves. Icon brand has mass recognition, is led by unique emotional connections and belief, and the consumer identifies with it because the brand "gets" him. This kind of brand tells a story which becomes a part of consumer's identity, but it also creates new experiences.

6. BRAND AS A RELIGION

For some consumers, a certain brand represents passion toward which they feel trust and loyalty, to the extent where that passion can be equated with religious fanaticism, that is above all, based on deep seated beliefs. To a large percentage of people, religion offers support in a world that changes with unthinkable speed. It shows how to live, which way to take toward the future and even promises security after death. Brand creators are constantly trying to reach authenticity and create a connection with their consumers that will last from birth to death. By its own longevity, religion brings about an authentic, loyal and lifelong connection with its followers, and similarly, companies are trying to create brands that will last "forever" (Lindstrom, 2009, p. 145-148). Brand as a religion actually becomes a collection of ideas and values, which certain groups in the society believe are important to them, through which they are trying to express themselves and affirm their identity with it. In so doing, the brand that strives to become a religion has its own story that is a powerful weapon in communication (Pavlek, 2008, p. 209-216).

People are always in search for emotional fulfilment, and given that rational evidence and thinking, but also measurable outcomes are distinctly emphasized in today's world, the need for an emotional connection grows even stronger. Lately, we can see an ever increasing chasm between rational assumptions of modern brands and the need for products, services and beliefs to offer emotional satisfaction. This necessity fulfills religion in the right way and so the brands should strive to establish stronger and not overly intrusive emotional connections with consumers (Lindstrom, 2009, p. 149).

7. RESEARCH

The main problem of this study is to research the emotional connection between consumer and a brand. This problem is recognized due to an assumption that the appearance of the current economic crisis caused its fall. Consumers more often choose products within a lower price range, regardless of the brand or quality and that is why it is important to research if (and to what extent) consumers get attached to a certain brand. With this we arrive at the goals of the study, and they are: to discover the level of emotional attachment between the consumer and the brand and to detect potential reasons for emotional connection.

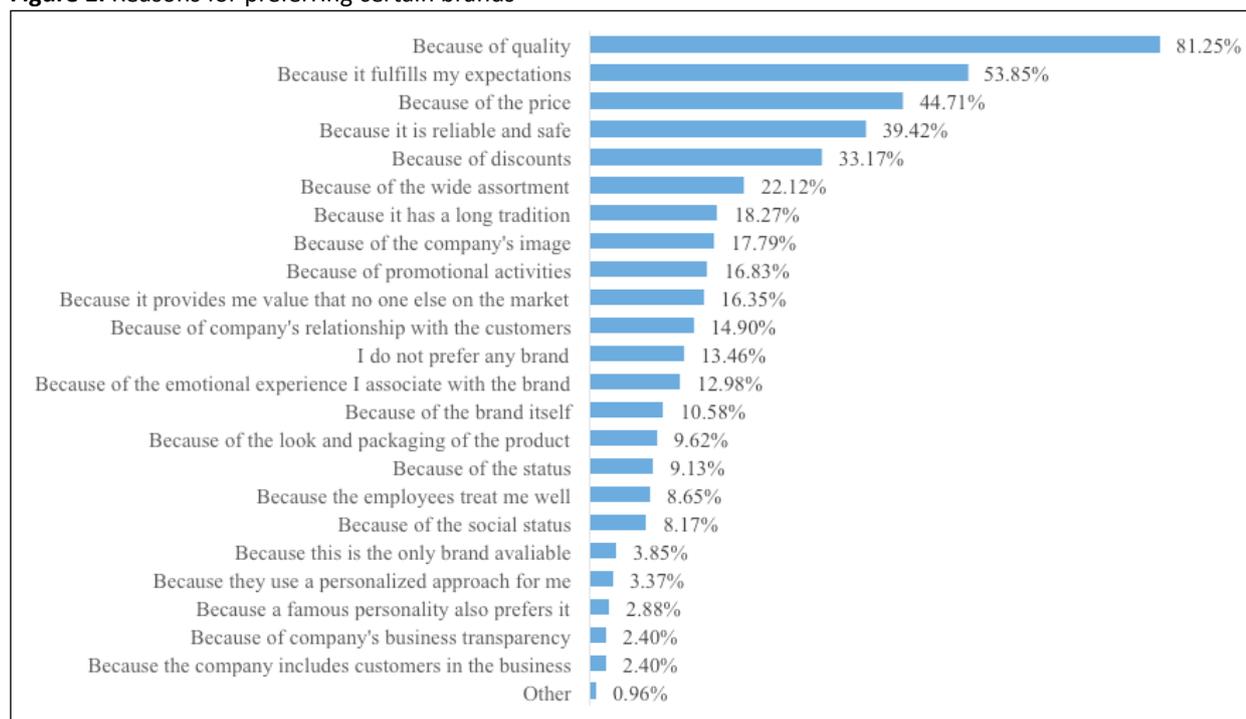
For the purposes of the paper a descriptive quantitative survey was conducted on an adequate sample which results were shown collectively. Based on collected secondary data, a survey questionnaire was created that served as an instrument of primary data collection. In it there were, besides demographic questions, 28 claims in which the participant's decided to what degree they agree with given claims through a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5 where 1 represented complete disagreement and 5 complete agreement with the claim. Besides the claims tied to testing emotional connections of the consumer with the brand, questions were asked about

reasons for preferring a certain brand, which brand comes to the participant's mind first and to which one does he feel most emotionally attached to. At the question that tests preference of a certain brand, the participant could choose one or more offered reasons, mark that he doesn't prefer a certain brand or refer to his own reason of preference. In questions where concrete brands are supposed to be written, the consumer received no suggestions and he independently wrote an answer in the appropriate box. The survey questionnaire was created in the survey system Lime Survey Software (available at <http://limesurvey.srce.hr>) to which access is enabled at the Faculty of Organization and Informatics of University of Zagreb. A pre-study was conducted for the purpose of testing the survey questionnaire as a measuring instrument. Its main goal was to find any vagueness in the survey, ambiguous questions and defining necessary time for filling out the survey. Data analysis gathered through primary research was conducted in the statistical tool IBM SPSS Statistics version 24. The survey was conducted through internet by sending it to e-mail and through a social network post. The survey was sent on two occasions. Given that the population of the research encompassed all consumers of the region without exception, number of population units could not be determined and

so the method of intentional sampling was applied for data acquiring on an adequate sample of 208 participants. That way, research was conducted on those participants who were available to the authors in certain time which makes an intentional, adequate sample. Out of the total number of participants, 58% are female and 42% are male. Given that participants who were available to the authors were mostly of younger ages, most of the participants, namely 43% are participants ranging from 15 to 24 years of age, 29% of the participants are between 25 to 34 years of age, 15% between ages 35 and 44, 12% between ages 45 and 54 and 1% are between 55 and 64 years of age.

Investigating reasons for preferring a certain brand, participants (81% of them) gave as the main reason for preference quality of the product or service, in other words, the brand. Right behind the brand quality 54% of participants said that the brand fulfills their expectations while the third reason for preference is the price of the brand (45% participants). Furthermore, reasons for which more than 20% of participants says are important are a reliable and safe brand, brand on sale and brand that offers a wide assortment. Overview of all the reasons for preferring a certain brand are on figure 1.

Figure 1. Reasons for preferring certain brands



Source: Authors

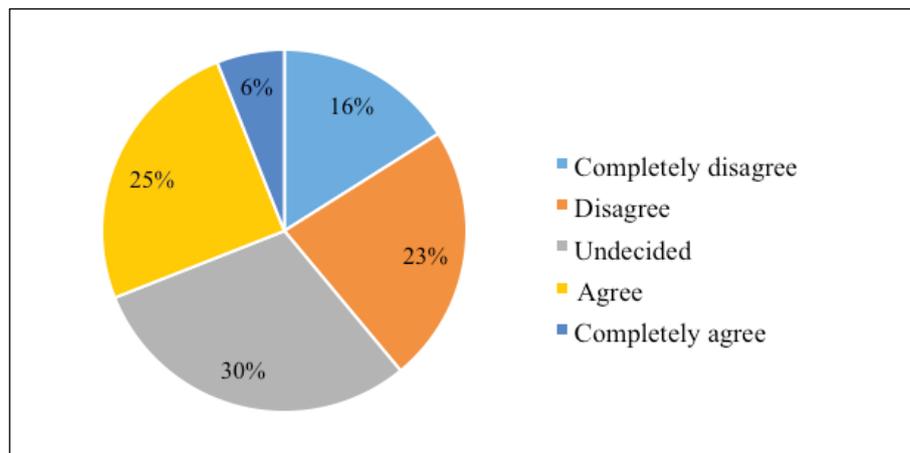
Also, from figure 1 it can be seen how company's business transparency, including consumers into business, but also preferring a brand from a famous personality have a weak influence on consumer's brand preference.

Two hypotheses were set up within the research, one of them being:

H1: Consumers are emotionally attached to a certain brand.

With the claim "I have a brand that I connect to emotionally" through which the proposed hypothesis was

observed, 31% of participants agree or completely agree that they have a brand that they connect to emotionally, 30% are undecided while 39% of participants disagree or completely disagree, which means that the hypothesis H1 cannot be accepted. Same can be seen if the mean value for this claim is observed, which is 2,83 based on which it can be established that the participants are on average undecided. Detailed percentages can be found on figure 2.

Figure 2. Participants' answers to the claim "I have a brand that I connect to emotionally"

Source: Authors

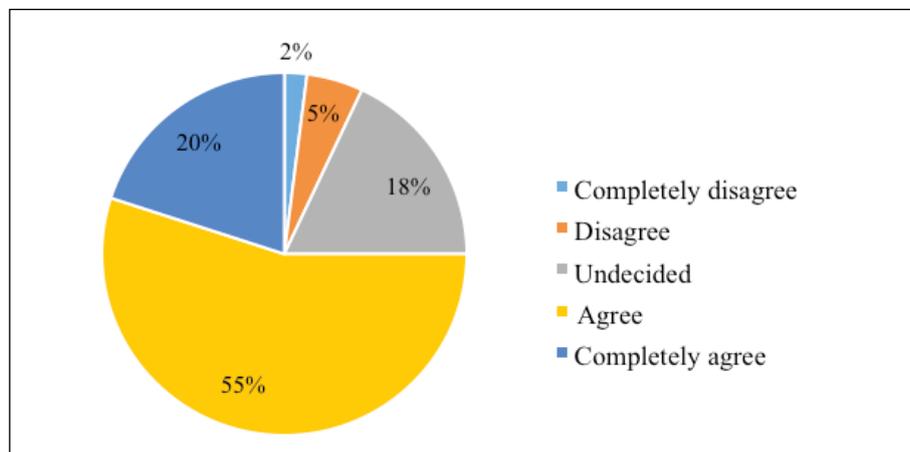
Even though the hypothesis cannot be confirmed, it does not mean that consumers do not get emotionally attached to a certain brand, but only that they do not admit it explicitly. Namely, according to other survey questions 69% of the participants claims they have a brand they trust, 72% of them feel good when they buy a brand they trust, 75% of them are linked to the brand by some positive experience and 70% of participants believe that a certain brand gives them satisfaction when they consume it, wear it or have it near them. According to theory analysis and research results, it can be concluded that the participants attach emotionally to certain brands anyway, just that this connection is not very pronounced nor is it overly strong which the results of the research themselves show. 22% of participants can express themselves well through a certain brand while 31% of them feel good after buying a brand product that has a good status in society. Only 8% of participants feel as if they are betraying their preferred brand when they are buying a brand they do not usually buy, and 12% of them claim that a certain brand represents an integral part of their lives. Previously mentioned suggests that to participants, a brand does not represent a lifestyle nor do they think it is a

religion, but they have certain preferences toward certain brands they trust anyway.

Second hypothesis in the paper was:

H2: Consumers always buy/consume brands with which they have had positive experiences.

According to answers to the claim "I always buy brands with which I have had positive experiences" it can be seen that 75% of participants always buy brands with which they have had positive experiences, 18% of participants are undecided about the abovementioned claim and only 7% disagree with the claim (figure 3). Given that the mean value is 3, 87, hypothesis H3 can be accepted as true. Therefore, most of the consumers will buy a product again if they had a positive experience with it. This is exactly on what emotional branding is based – on evoking pleasure and excitement in the consumer. Pleasure can be created by stimulating all those senses which will prompt the consumers for a repeat purchase, and with time, the repeat purchase will bring loyalty.

Figure 3. Participants' answers to the claim "I always buy brands with which I have had positive experiences"

Source: Authors

Most common answer to the survey question “which brand can you think of first” was Nike, which 53 participants provided, followed by Adidas on the second place with 31 vote. Furthermore, to the question “I feel the most connected with” 28 participants finished the sentence with Nike brand, 19 of them with Adidas brand while 23 of them said they do not feel attached to any brand.

8. STUDY LIMITATIONS

As in most research studies, it is necessary to point out certain limitations of this study. Seeing that this study, like most marketing studies, has been conducted in a given moment and sample, testing the consumers during longer time period and on a bigger sample group would contribute to a better reliability of results. It is also important to mention the narrow regional characteristic of the study because it was conducted on participants of north-east Croatia and larger geographic area could give different results. Beside that, over 43% of participants are in the age group 15 to 24 years of age and only 1% in the 55 to 64 age group because of (un)availability of participants to the authors which makes the sample predominantly homogeneous. The application of a rating scale (a Likert-type scale) can be considered as a factor of limitation while conducting this study because rating scales can influence the results of the study to a certain degree in the beginning. As it was mentioned before, one of the main limitations of this quantitative study is that while conducting the study over the Internet, an adequate sample was used, in other words, a sample of a chain reaction as a type of intentional sample where participants “choose themselves” into the sample. Since a single place where a list of consumers is published does not exist, that was the most suitable method for getting to the desired number of participants. But because of the intentional sample which is not based on knowing the probability that members of the population would be chosen into the sample, it is necessary to limit the possibility of generalizing and it cannot be claimed that the study results are representative of the entire population of consumers.

CONCLUSION

Modern companies understand the importance of creating brands which will excite the consumer on all levels and recently, the focus has been more and more on the emotional level. Creating an emotional connection with consumers is a long-term process that demands a lot of engagement from companies and marketing experts in order to enter the philosophy and psychology of consumers and to discover their hidden needs through various studies.

Studies that are based on testing the consumers are very thankless because the consumers give subjective answers and can say untruths even though the studies are conducted anonymously. And so it happened that in this study, the hypothesis that consumers get emotionally attached to a certain brand cannot be confirmed. From these results it can be seen that the consumers themselves are often not even aware of their emotional attachment with a certain brand or they deny it. That is why a whole sequence of claims was set up in the survey questionnaire, based on which various levels of emotional attachment were tested and from these claims, it was possible to conclude that consumers do get emotionally attached to a certain brand, even though they do not claim this explicitly. In fact, the study has shown that 72% of participants feel good when they buy a brand they trust and 70% believe that a certain brand provides them satisfaction when they consume it, wear it or have it near them. Providing satisfaction while consuming or wearing a certain brand means that the consumers experienced a certain experience with the brand by gathering information from their surroundings through their five senses from which emotions like appreciation, love and attraction resulted. Emotionally charged experiences create an experience that is stored in the memory and which they want to invoke through repeat purchase. This is exactly the main purpose of emotional branding which is what we wanted to demonstrate with this paper.

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