

**A Consumer Behavior analysis and Retailing practices of the cosmetic industry
in Cyprus: The case of the SEVENTEEN Brand.**

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine the status of the brand “SEVENTEEN” in Cyprus and to examine the local cosmetics market with an emphasis on consumer behavior, brand image and mainly the impact of brand image on customer’s choice. Additionally, it attempts to identify the main communication (promotional) problems and Seventeen’s supply network.

Methodology

The research was focused in primary data findings, through:

1. In depth interviews with the Seventeen’s General Manager in Cyprus and the Seventeen’s Area Manager in Greece.
2. Personal semi structured interviews with the final customers at pharmacies in Cyprus.
3. A qualitative market research using semi structured questionnaires directed to the intermediaries.

Findings

Even though the brand Seventeen is only sold through pharmacies in Cyprus it is still a highly recognizable brand. Among the customers of pharmacies, the Seventeen brands has a 17.9% preference and 42.2% as the second preferred brand recognized and bought in pharmacies. As demonstrated by the research, the main factors’ affecting product selection in the cosmetic industry are quality, brand name and third is price. Women in general prefer buying cosmetic products from beauty shops and they are affected by magazine advertisements.

KEY WORDS: Cosmetics, Branding, Promotion, Consumer Behaviour

Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to examine the consumer behavior of Cypriot consumers for the cosmetic brand “SEVENTEEN. More specifically this brand has been selected due to the fact that it uses a relatively unique retailing strategy. The product is sold mainly through pharmacies and in a five department stores throughout Cyprus. In this case, a quantitative research approach has been used in order to identify the perception of both the retailers and final users about that particular brand. Additional areas that have been identified were communication (promotion), personnel recruitment and training, placing and pricing strategy. It examines the marketing of Seventeen brand, the Seventeen’s supply network and how this affect its brand image. For the local Cypriot cosmetic market it examines customers’ behavior and mainly the marketing functions that affect their purchasing decision for cosmetic products. An effort has also been made in order to examine the gap in perception between final customers and retailers.

The specific objectives of this paper are:

1. Identify the importance of branding for the brand “Seventeen”
2. Investigate and examine the customer’s attitudes and behavior related to cosmetic branding and its importance.
3. Identify the image and consumer perception of the Seventeen brand in Cyprus
4. Identify the image that intermediaries have about the “Seventeen” brand

Branding in our days

According to Fill (2002) a successful brand is one which creates and sustains a strong, positive and lasting impression in the mind of a buyer. A visual approach adopted by Assael (1990), that a brand is the name, symbol, packaging and service reputation. The differentiation approach is typified by Kotler (2000) who argues that a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of them intended to identify the goods, or services of one seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate them from those of competitors.

Quality and satisfaction through time can lead buyers to learn to trust a brand, which may lead to a priority position in the evoked set and repeat purchasing activity. The

acceptance of buyers as active problem solvers means that branding can be seen as a way that buyers can reduce the amount of decision-making time and associated perceived risk. This is because brand names provide information about content, taste, durability, quality, price and performance, without requiring the buyer to undertake time-consuming comparison tests with similar offerings or other risk-reduction approaches to purchase decisions. In some categories brands can be developed through the use of messages that are entirely emotional or image based (Fill, 2002: 339).

A successful brand is an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs most closely. Furthermore, its success results from being able to sustain these added values in the face of competition (Chernatony et al, 2003).

Brands are assets (or liabilities) that convey values, value, and meaning. For brand providers, brands can create a sustainable, competitive advantage. For users, brands are a way to choose among offerings. For employees brands provide identity, community, and opportunity. For investors, brands shape expectations of future returns. For channel partners, brands can create a shared bond of cooperation and understanding. For top management, brands act as a leadership and motivational tool (Neal and Strauss, 2008: 47).

The value to business of owning strong brands is incontestable. Brands that keep their promise attract loyal buyers who will return to them at regular intervals. The benefits to the brand owner are that forecasting cash flows becomes easier, and it becomes possible to plan and manage the development of the business with greater confidence. Thus brands with their ability to secure income can be classed as productive assets in exactly the same way as any other, more traditional assets of a business (plants, equipment, cash, investments as so on). The asset value of brands is now widely recognized, not just by brand owners but by investors. Brands can generate high-quality earnings that can directly affect the overall performance of the business and thus influence the share price (www.interbrand.com).

Safety in Cosmetics

According to the European cosmetics association (Safety is the overriding objective, 2009) the first and most important responsibility for product safety lies with manufacturers — they welcome this duty as a fundamental principle guiding everything they do. Consumer safety is the overriding objective for the manufacture and sale of cosmetics. It is the priority as manufacturers develop ever more innovative products to meet consumers' constantly growing expectations. To meet safety objectives, companies fulfill specific duties before placing a product on the market. These include safety assessment, providing product information and complying with ingredient and labeling rules. The company or person placing a cosmetics product on the market for the first time is responsible for arranging a safety assessment. The product safety assessment is one of the pieces of information that must be available, along with contact details for the person responsible for completing the assessment. Other information includes the manufacturing method, physico-chemical and microbiological specifications, and proof of the effect claimed for the product. The Cosmetics Directive lays down comprehensive requirements for the composition and labeling of cosmetics products, ensures that cosmetic products contain only safe ingredients; ingredients are described in the same way on all product labels and cosmetic products durability.

Innovations in the cosmetic industry

The cosmetics industry (Protecting Consumers through Innovation, 2009) is built on the principle of innovation. Manufacturers apply innovative developments to all the products we use, from lipstick to leg wax, shampoo to shaving cream, mascara to moisturizer and everything in between.

Innovation in make-up products allowed the first movie stars in Hollywood to appear more beautiful than anyone cinema-goers had ever seen before. Soon, everyone wanted to share the glamorous look of the stars and innovation in make-up moved onto the High Street. Thanks to innovation, sun creams protect us from harmful ultraviolet rays and the latest self-tanning products give us a natural, healthy appearance without the dreaded streaks.

Consumers have growing and more sophisticated expectations. They desire innovative cosmetic products that smell good, are easy and pleasant to use and work more effectively to give better results.

Cosmetics manufacturers do not want to disappoint their consumer. They focus on using innovation to satisfy consumers' growing needs, not only for high quality and safe products, but also for greater efficacy. The industry's capacity to innovate is fundamental to meeting consumer desires for safe, high quality products from dynamic and responsible companies. Cosmetic science has also enabled products to be formulated to be less likely to irritate sensitive skin.

Cosmetic industry in Cyprus

Imported cosmetic products dominate the cosmetic industry in Cyprus, due to the fact that Cyprus cosmetic manufacturers are limited. According to the UN-Comtrade database for Cosmetics & Toiletries (C&T) exports Cyprus is in the last place from the EU27 with an annual percentage decrease (CAGR) the last six years of -4.3%. For the cosmetic industry an external analysis (macro-environment), will be presented based on the **PESTEL** model and the information gathered from representatives of cosmetic brands in Cyprus or marketing managers of representatives/distributors, the research through the intermediaries, the research of the final customer and from cosmetic magazines from internet sites and the Governmental Statistical Department.

1. Political

In Cyprus we have a presidential system, where the president is both the chief of the state and the government. The president is elected for a five year term and he is appointing the council of ministers. Since 1974, where the Turkish invasion took place, the situation in the political stage is not at the desired level. Since May 1, 2004 with Cyprus accession as a full member in the EU, the political situation is at better level of acceptance (Cyprus Government - General, 2009).

2. Economic

In the economic section Cyprus has an open, free-market, services-based economy. Cyprus's accession as a full member to EU on May 1, 2004 has been an important milestone in its recent economic development. The GDP growth rate reached 3.8% in 2007, and 3.7% for 2008. After the economic crisis of 2008, the GDP growth in 2009 rate is forecast to reach 0.3%. The economic crisis have not affected Cyprus a lot until now but by the end of 2009 and 2010, the situation is going to be worse especially if the tourist industry faces a decline rate of more than 10%. The Cypriots are among the most prosperous people in the Mediterranean region with per capita GDP of nearly USD 21,000. The unemployment rate remains at less than 5% and inflation is under control at around 2%, the economy of Cyprus has shifted from agriculture to light manufacturing and services. The agricultural and mining sectors together contribute nearly 4.5% to the GDP and employs around 5% of the active population. The main crops are wine grapes, potatoes, cotton and fruits. Tourism (contributing 22% to GDP) and the offshore activities (estimated at 12% of GDP) are considered as two pillars of the economy. The geographical location of Cyprus (the country acts like a bridge between West and East), along with its good airline and telecommunication infrastructure, has resulted into developing the country into an important regional and international business centre. More than 50% of its trade is with the EU. The top three export partners of Cyprus are: France, the United Kingdom and Greece (Alibaba.com, 2008).

3. Social and Culture factors

Cypriots and especially Cypriot women have changed dramatically in their attitudes, life style, dressing codes, health issues and beauty treatment of their body and face the last years (CyprusWorld.eu, 2009). Cypriots are more educated and are traveling considerably abroad the last years. (Governmental Statistical Service and Cyprus Tourism Organisation-CTO, 2009).

Also the purchasing or buying behavior of Cypriots (especially women buying behavior), has changed, by trying to be more informed about the product or services they are buying according to the research results. They have also

changed their preference from lower priced products to more expensive and luxurious ones. The increase in spending on cosmetic products has undergone a parallel evolution in attitudes, interests, brand perceptions and overall psychology. Branded products are more preferable or desired than non branded products (CyprusWorld.eu, 2009).

According to the research directed to the final customer, the places where Cypriots are buying is changing, following the trend in Europe, moving from street shops to shopping centers. Cypriot women are primarily purchasing skin care products and color cosmetics. Cyprus women population (according to Cyprus governmental statistical office, 2008), is approximately 400,000 which classifies the market as a relatively small one.

The average EU12 per capita cosmetic spending is €57 per year, in comparison to the EU15 which is €150. For Greece which there is similarities in purchasing patterns, spending per capita for cosmetics is €121 (European Cosmetic Association, 2009).

4. Legal factors

Cyprus legislation is aligned with the European Regulations regarding production and safety. The regulations offer uniformity in all state members, offering high levels of safety in cosmetic products (Safety in Cosmetics, 2009).

Also the European competition policy is trying to create an open and unified European market and encourage fair competition (Alibaba.com, 2008).

5. Technological factors

Cyprus has already entered in the area of advanced technological countries and the information is easily accessible by the customers via internet, mobiles, TV, and other communication means. The majority of the companies working in Cyprus are heavily using the technology to implement their works. Also the electronic software systems are extensively used by the companies, in order to

gain competitive advantages against their rivals. The telecommunication and the bank system are well established and give a push in the market (in-business, 2008).

Research hypotheses and method

The purpose of our research was to gather information for identifying the local consumer behavior in the cosmetic industry in Cyprus and more specifically for the brand Seventeen. A quantitative research approach was used in order to collect primary data. Data was collected from the final customer, the intermediaries/retailers and Seventeen's area managers in Cyprus and Greece. Personal face-to-face interviews were conducted in the offices of the Manager of Seventeen in Cyprus and the area Manager of Seventeen in Eastern Europe and Middle East. One hundred and forty two interviews towards the final customer have taken place at pharmacies and beauty shops through a semi structured questionnaire. The interviews have taken place throughout Cyprus during the months of June and July 2010, and convenience sampling has been used during the course of research. The same research methodology was used towards 29 intermediaries through a semi structured questionnaire. Face to face interviews were conducted in all retail outlets selling the Seventeen brands. That was possible due to the small size of the country and the geographic proximity of all the major cities. Secondary data was gathered from Seventeen's databases, Seventeen's books, Seventeen's balance sheets, and books, internet-sites, journals, magazines, etc. Qualitative research provides insights and understanding of the problem, and quantitative research must be preceded by appropriate qualitative research whenever a new market research problem is being addressed (Malhotra, 1996).

The in-depth interview is used when a researcher wishes to explore a subject in detail. All respondents expressed their opinions about the issues under investigation. The sample is considered sufficient for the purpose of the current study, since sample sizes in qualitative research are most commonly between 15 and 40 responders (De Ruyter & Scholl, 1998).

The interviews were recorded for subsequent transcription. During the discussions a professional tape recorder was used in order to record the discussion, on approval of the interviewee retailers. The interviews were recorded to increase the accuracy of data collection since it permits the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee (Patton, 1987). It also allowed the authors to transcribe each interview completely to facilitate the process of content analysis. The researchers also took handwritten notes during the sessions.

After all the interviews were completed, the discussions were transcribed. The analysis was done by using an interpretation method to allow the researchers to acquire a more complete and in-depth understanding of the data. At the beginning of the analysis, close examination of the data, phrase-by-phrase took place. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) the so-called line-by-line analysis, although it is the most time-consuming form of coding, is often the most generative. This method is considered very useful, especially at the beginning of a study, so as to generate the categories to be developed.

Main Findings

The research has assisted the author to understand the acceptance, brand image, brand equity and the potential that Seventeen has in the Cyprus market. The author has identified the customers' and retailers perception about the brand. It has been demonstrated that there are considerable differences between the different types of customers in the supply chain (Final customers with Retailers) on their opinion for various brand elements.

Seventeen is a brand having a strong customer base, with a preference of 17.9% of the total market as first choice brand compared to company's own data where they have estimated a market share of approximately 12%. There is an agreement however on the total amount in money spend for cosmetic products.

The survey also demonstrated that Seventeen is a brand with the higher preference percentage as a second or occasional buying brand with 42.2% of all the customer base. Seventeen has also a good brand image ranked third from a list of brands and first compared with the direct competitors of the brand.

In Cyprus a relatively large percentage of the women are buying cosmetic products (94.8%), with the majority spending €21-€50 per month and buying less than two times per month. Compared with the data we have from Euromonitor Cypriot women demonstrate a greater spending to other European women (EU12) which more accurately is €57 per capita per year. Compared to the data published by the European Cosmetic Association on the amount spent for cosmetics by Greek women which is €121 per capita per year, Cypriot women spent even more. No statistics unfortunately are available for Cypriot womens' cosmetic purchasing habits.

The majority of women are using both color cosmetics and treatment and cleansing products. The global cosmetic, Toiletry, and Fragrance market size according to Datamonitor (Lepir 2007) is an industry worthing \$124 billion. The color cosmetics are the 36% of the market and the treatment and cleansing products the 39% of the total market.

The factors that greatly affect customers' decision for buying cosmetic products are first quality and then brand name and price. According to Dodson (2009) building cosmetic brands that consumer trust and identify with, is big bussiness. According to Slack, N. et al. (2007) high quality goods or services can give to an organisation a competitive edge, and quality is a major influence on customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Mohiuddin (2009) refers that to make color cosmetics more acceptable to consumers, manufacturers will have to convince them that their products are good value.

The women prefer to shop cosmetic products firstly from beauty shops, beauty shops in malls, pharmacies, big supermarkets and lastly from beauticians or catalogues. Seventeen's customers prefer to shop from malls first and then from pharmacies. Very importantly the results of market survey coinsides with the work done by Teller, C. as descripte in his article "Shopping streets versus shopping malls-determinants of agglomeration format attractiveness from the consumers' point of view" in 2008 that malls are gaining ground against street shops.

Women believe that the Seventeen symbol is an easily recognizable emblem, value for money brand and quality brand. Women prefer advertizing through magazines (61%). Referring to media selection in advertising findings correspond with the research findings of Barns, et al. (2008) in Journal of Marketing Management, refering that in Japan and United States the two biggest cosmetic markets, magazines

represent the most suitable media for influencing women, while TV is less effective - despite its relatively high cost.

The retailers working with Seventeen believe that they have very good or excellent co-operation (89.6%), and they believe that Seventeen is an established brand in Cyprus (89.7%). Seventeen is considered as a profitable brand by 65.5% of the retailers. The very good co-operation that Seventeen has with its retailers/intermediaries is an important asset for the brand as it is also referred by Hildegunn in his article in 2008 'Gatekeepers to consumer markets: the role of retailers in international trade'. Good co-operation with the retailers gives to any company or brand a competitive advantage against its competitors.

Almost 50% of the retailers believe that Seventeen is not having an effective promotional campaign in Cyprus. 82.7% of the retailers believe that the brochure guide for 'total solutions' greatly assists the customer in selecting Seventeen's products. An interesting finding is the gap in the perception of the final customer compared to the retailers in relation to the importance of the major elements that influence the customer decision in purchasing/selecting cosmetic products. Quality and price are expressed by both as the most important aspects for influencing customers purchasing decision. Retailers also consider advertising (86.2%) and packaging (79.3%) as very important factors where the final customers (28.2%) believe that packaging is not a major decision factor in selecting a cosmetic products where 36.4% feel that advertising does affect their purchasing decision. A perceptual gap also exists as far as sales promotions is concerned where the retailers with a percentage of 79.3% believe that it influences consumer decision where on the other hand only 50.4% of the final users feel that such promotional activities can influence their decision.

According to the research results regarding SEVENTEEN we have identified a gap between the perception of retailers to the one of the final users on a number of decision making factors. Here we have to point out that for all the factors the retailers are giving a higher percentage of importance compared to the one given by the final user. For the easily recognized emblem the retailers have given a percentage of 79.3% and the final customers 73.4%, for trendy brand the retailers gave a percentage of 93.1% and the final customer only 41.3%, for variety of products the retailer gave 96.6% and the final customer only 41.8%, for value for money the retailers gave

100% and the final customer a percentage of only 50%. For quality the retailers gave a percentage of 72.4% and the final customers 60.9%.

Referring to advertising, the retailers strongly believe that educating the final customer about the products affects sales positively (75.9%), and that there is a need for training the internal sales people (92.9%), i.e. retailers and Seventeen's sales personnel. An article in GCI Magazine (2008) stated that a sampling program should include educating the consumer on the use of the product, particularly if the proper application is critical to consumer satisfaction. Also according to a recent study (Building a sales force that pays for itself, 2008) it stated that building a sales force, especially one that pays for itself, adds value to any business. The added value of the trained sales personnel according to this approach is that the buyer will mainly feel the urge to buy the product than the seller selling the product. This urge in the perception of the customer's point of view, not only results in recurring sales but also increases the possibility for referral sales through the customer who already felt the importance of his purchase. Training sales staff to be able to sell the company product in large volume, handling any customer's flaps, is a great benefit for any company that wants to expand.

Retailers have an excellent opinion about Seventeen's personnel and they also find that the prices of Seventeen's products compared to their quality and brand image are fair. According to Kotler, P. et al. (2005) contact people are the critical link between a company and its customers. They represent the company to customers. Motivated contact persons and happy employees lead to customer satisfaction. According to Kotler, P. et al. (2005) companies set prices by selecting a general pricing approach that includes one or more of these three set of factors – costs, consumer perception, and competitors' prices. This comes in line with Seventeen's pricing strategy. Retailers also believe that they keep sufficient stock of Seventeen's products in their shops and the majority (72.4) believe that the visiting frequency by Seventeen's personnel at their premises is sufficient and should stay as it is. For this line of business it is important to keep a sufficient amount of stock especially in the cosmetic shops. But for Seventeen it is important to examine the "lean" or "just in time" approach as mentioned by Slack, N. et al. (2007). "Just in time" is a method of planning and controlling the operations that aim to meet demand instantaneously with

perfect quality and no waste. Reducing the level of inventory allows to the managers to see the problems in an operation and work to reduce them. Retailers are focusing on the absence of technology in the whole ordering procedure, and more than 41% of them have favourably accepted the suggestion of a more enriched portfolio of products in the Seventeen line and offer more space to Seventeen in their shops. Technology and data warehouse are aspects which can lead a company to success and are essential especially for international companies. All these are supported by Chan, S. (2009) and Lieberman, C. (2008) in their articles in GCI Magazine, 'Supply chain: Rapid logistics ramp up to maximize profits' and 'Reveal hidden revenue in your supply chain'.

Conclusions

Even though the Seventeen brands has a very selective distribution in Cyprus and very limited promotional budget, the research results have demonstrated a favorable brand image both among the retailers and final users. The emphasis however is the perceptual gap that exists between the retailers and final users on the factors that influence consumer behavior in the cosmetic industry. Some main findings extracted from the analysis of the data concerning Seventeen are:

- Seventeen is a brand that has a strong customer base, with a preference of 17.9% of the total market as first choice brand. Also Seventeen is a brand with the higher preference percentage as a second or occasional buying brand with 42.2% of all the customer base. Seventeen has also a good brand image ranked third from a list of brands and first compared with the direct competitors of the brand.
- In Cyprus a relatively large percentage of the women is buying cosmetic products (94.8%), with the majority spending €21-€50 per month and buying less than two times per month. The majority of the women are using both color cosmetics and treatment and cleansing products.
- The factors that affects more customers decision for buying cosmetic products are first quality and then brand name and price.
- Women prefer to shop cosmetic products from first beauty shops, beauty shops in malls then, pharmacies, big supermarkets and last from beauticians or

catalogues. Seventeen's customers prefer firstly to shop from malls and then from pharmacies.

- Women are attracted by advertising and they believe that advertizing through magazines (61%) is more effective.
- Women find Seventeen brand symbol as an easy recognizable emblem, value for money brand and quality brand.

Future Research

As suggested by Wagner (2007), an investigation using the laddering technique to uncover consumers' motivation can be considered a complementary, not competing approach to conventional quantitative studies, since the responses elicited through laddering interviews could be used as reference points for deriving relevant indicator variables of respective constructs, or attempts could be made to validate the structural relationships among the different cognitive elements inherent in the dominant motivational patterns suggested by the means-end investigation. Therefore, quantitative research could be carried out to larger and perhaps even diverse samples, data could be empirically tested, and the purpose of those studies could therefore be used to make generalizations rather than be of an exploratory nature, as was the case with this study.

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