Online Branding Strategies of Pure Fashion E-tailers in Turkey: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to evaluate pure fashion e-tailer's web sites in Turkey,in regardsto online branding strategies.A content analysis was conducted to answerthe research questions. Findings show that there was a considerable difference between private online shopping clubs and online shopping sites. These dimensions of online branding strategies are: career information, mission statement, brand values/strapline, brand ambassador usage, sharing the product with friends' option, the opportunity of online reviews/customer evaluation, e-newsletter service, blogs, the opportunity of discount on recommendation and loyalty program practices.

Keywords: Online branding,Onlinefashion retailing, Pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey

Introduction

In today's business environment, many companies havean online presence like a corporate web site or a social networking site. The online marketplace not only provides an extensive information opportunity but also hasamazing volumes of spending and cost effective benefits. Instead of looking at the internet as another medium for information and transactions, firms must take into account the internet for the brand building process (Bandyopadhyay and Serjak, 2009). According to Salmeron and Hurtado (2006), the most important three factors that are associated with the reason to establish e-commerce are: increase of revenue, facilitation of the purchases from consumers and amplification of the brand recognition.The internet has changed due to the connection of consumers with brands; it is transforming marketing and outdating traditional branding strategies. That means, traditional branding strategies must be redesigned in accordance with the changing relationship of customer and brand (Goswami, 2015). Additionally, the advent of the internet has made branding more complex and a dynamic challenge (Simmons, 2007). In this context,online branding strategies haveincreasingly become an important topic.

The recent growth of online retailing is a fact that can't be ignored within the framework of e-commerce.According to Harris and Dennis as cited by Dennis *et al.* (2005), the business of online retailingcan be defined as the sale of goods and services via internet or other electronic channels, for personal or household use by consumers. There are a number of advantages for online retailers. Firstly, the selling location is not important;they can ship to anywhere in the country and even overseas. Furthermore, the size of the market is unimportant; small online retailers can compete on equal terms with large ones (Dennis *et al.*, 2005).Besides many other advantages of online retailing, retailers have several types ofonline practices. Each of the brick and mortar brands or pure e-tailer brands are based on a business model which significantly improves the value equation through greater consumer interactivity, enhanced consumer experiences, tailoring and rapid response (Chernatony, 2001). Moreover, in an online shopping environment where physical interaction is reduced, online branding may be increasingly important (Rowley, 2004). 'Pure' e-tailers need an

attractive offering, a viable business model and a brand management team for competitive advantages (Bandyopadhyayand Serjak, 2009). So in the context of pure e-tailers, online branding strategies can be assumed to play an important role in this business model.

In recent years, the fashion industry has increasingly changed the way in which it operates (Salmeron and Hurtado, 2006). Retailing fashion online was seen as inefficient in the early days of online retailing because of the fact that people need to touch and try-on clothes and experience the social interaction associated with clothes shopping. Nevertheless, the volume of online selling in clothes and footwear has grown steadily, and online revenues for fashion goods have been growingfast (Rowley, 2009). In line with the increase in online fashion spending, it can be seen thatthe demandsof the customer are increasing as well.Today's online consumers don't want to encounter the limited selection, slow downloads and inadequate navigation in online retailing(Bandyopadhyay and Serjak, 2009).Furthermore, online shoppers appear to be attracted to the ease of online products, the detailed product information available and the variety of choices offered (Ward and Lee, 2000). So the pure fashion e-tailers who are unable to meet rising customer demandsand project aninadequatelydesigned online presence are doomed to failure. Essentially, it is vital to establishonline branding strategies for fashion e-tailers.

Literature Review

In this section, the relevant literature is reviewed on the concept ofonline branding and online fashion retailing.

Online Branding

Kotler (1997) defines the brand term as, "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors".Consumers can reduce complexity and information processing time with the help of branding. Moreover,branding enhances the trust between customers and companies (Goswami, 2015). But amanager's mentality needs to improve to compete successfully with brands in the digital age (Chernatony, 2001), because there are a lot of onlinefacilitieswhich can affect brands in a variety of ways (Chen, 2001).Several authors have suggested that online branding needs to build on and integrate with branding through other channels (Rowley, 2009).

First of all, it is essential to understand what we mean by an online brand. According to Rowley (2009),an online brand is "a brand that has an online presence". Dayal*et al*. (2001) states that,"the brand is the experience and the experience is the brand,"on the World Wide Web.It can be assumed that effective online branding may build up customer loyalty, provoke sale volume and cause higher revenue.Besides many other advantages of online branding, different business types have different goals for their online channels and different online branding strategies. The success of online branding depends on online branding strategies and online goals.The branding process builds the value of the brand to the business, or its brand equity(Rowley, 2009). Brands need to make their brand values very clear to be successful online for long term (Chernatony, 2001).

Present literature on online branding is in a formative stage (Dayal*et al*., 2001; Rowley, 2004; Simmons, 2007).Online branding may start with creating and registering logos, brand marks, and brand strap lines, and creating brand awareness and presence (Rowley, 2009). Further, the selection of the URL is important for brand recognition (Ifield and Winter, 2000). It is also important to keep in mind that offering better communication

facilities to build relationships with customers is a significant aspect to be successful in online branding.

Online Fashion Retailing

American Marketing Association's definition of a retailer is identifiedas a merchant middleman who is engaged primarily in selling to ultimate consumers (www.ama.org).Retailer brands are substantially different from product brands in that the actual application of branding principles mayvary. Retailer brands can rely on rich consumer experiences to impact their brand equity in nature (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Some giant retailers generate a huge amount of revenue in the business environment but aside from this opportunity, retailers have large costs in terms of employment, logistics, design, etc. According to Ashworth *et al*. (2006) online retailing represents an ideal opportunity to cut costs, improve channels to market and grow an increasingly loyal customer-base.

Online retailing which provides a location free, customer controlled and information rich retail service, has a unique opportunity to take a leading role in the global marketplace (Hashemi, 2013). To get a hold of this opportunity, the e-tailer (online retailer) provides a lot of serviceswhich are closely related to an e-tailer's brand, such as, payment, delivery, customer service etc.Brand is assumed to play an even more vital role fore-tailersthan it does in a traditional shopping environment (Chen and He, 2003). Butthe majority of the research in online retailing is concentrated on understanding consumer behavior (Chen and He, 2003; Danaher *et al*., 2003; Ward and Lee, 2000; Merrilees and Fry, 2002; Manganari*et al*., 2009), web site design (Kim *et al.*, 2007) etc., seldom discusses the importance of branding (Strebinger and Treiblmaier, 2004; Simmons *et al*., 2010; Simmons, 2007).

Fashion shoppers (i.e. consumers of apparel, shoes and accessories) spend far higher amounts than any other e-consumers (Marciniak and Bruce, 2004).Online retailing sales reached €156.28 billion in 2014 and, it will be worth €185.39 billion at the end of the year (Centre of Retail Research, 2015).According to the Mintel report (www.mintel.com) clothing and footwear is the most popular category by the number of shoppers:some 70% of UK internet shoppers have bought clothing and footwear online in 2014, followed by 68% of German internet shoppers.Although online fashion has great popularity, fashion designer retailers predominantly use their corporate web sites as an informational tool(Marciniak and Bruce, 2004). Whereas transactional e-tailers are predominantly made up of product specialist e-tailers, catalogs, pure e-tailers (pure play), bricks and mortar and multichannel(Marciniak and Bruce, 2007). Marciniak and Bruce (2007) stated that different e-tailer types have different strengths, in terms of services they provide to the consumer. Multi-channel retailers (retailers operating physical stores, catalog, and internet stores), store e-tailers (internet retailers with physical stores), and pure e-tailers(exclusively internetretailers) provide different kinds of information (Kim *et al*., 2007). It can be argued that online activities are more vital for pure e-tailers than others.

However, with the proliferation of e-tailers, sellers are having difficulty distinguishing their products or services from their competitors'. Online consumers often bypass these problems by relying on branded products (Ward and Lee, 2000).So branding is important for fashion e-tailersand play an even more vital role for pure fashion e-tailer's, but the majority of research in the area of online fashion retailing has been concentrated on consumer behavior (Rowley, 2009) and web site design issue(Jang and Burns, 2004). Prior research on fashion e-tailershas focused on fashion designers stage models (Ashworth *et al*., 2006; Salmeron and Hurtado, 2006), brand discourses (Soler*et al.*, 2015) and the importance of brandingstrategies (Rowley, 2009; Goswami, 2015).

Methodology

This study makes an attempt to contribute to the online fashion branding area by studying online activities of popular pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey. This study was applied in Turkey in 2015 because of the growing internet usage. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) Bulletin (www.tuik.gov.tr), the internet usage rate increased from 48.9 percent to 53.8 percent in 2014. Additionally, the rate of households which have internet access was 60.2 percent in 2014. Fifty-eight percent of the population in Turkey used mobile phones for internet access outside of home and the workplace. Furthermore, computer usage in Turkey was 94.4 percent in 2014 (www.tuik.gov.tr). Consequently, internet penetration for all devices has been growing fast in Turkey over the recent years. Moreover, approximately 12,000 e-commerce websites operate in Turkey (Bülent and Topanoglu, 2015). The product group with the highest volume in online sales in 2014 was clothing and sports equipment, with a ratio of 51.94%. This group of products was followed by furniture, with a ratio of 27.0% and ticketing and car rental with a ratio of 21.2% (www.tuik.gov.tr). In this context, the main purpose of this study is to evaluate pure fashion e-tailer'sweb sites in Turkey in regardsto online branding strategies.This study has three information components, brand identity and facilities for brand loyalty and brand experience. The research questions developed from the reviewof existing studies are:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the information components of different pure fashion e-tailers(private online shopping clubs and online shopping sites) in Turkey?

RQ2: How do the top pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey communicate their brand identity online?

RQ3: What facilities do the top pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey offer to create positive brand experiences and brand loyalty online?

The top pure fashion e-tailersin Turkey were selected by the list of the Alexa Analytics for the Web (www.alexa.com). Ranking scores under 1000[th]were ignored based on the belief that the web site traffic can be an indicator of brand recognition. The sample of the study includes four private online shopping club brands and four online shopping site brands. These 8 pure fashion e-tailers are: Trendyol (108th), Markafoni (120th), Morhipo (153th), 1V1Y (450th) and, Modagram (341th), Lidyana (308th), Zizigo (593th), Mizu (882th). For easy use, the sample is shown as A, B, C, D, E, F, G andH sequentially in the tables.

The research wasexploratory in nature and a quantitative data collection technique was conducted. Content analysiswas performed to investigatepure fashion e-tailers branding strategies in Turkey.Content analysis is a methodology for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh and and Shannon, 2005). A checklist that includesdata themes and attributes to evaluate the research questions wasadopted from the study of Rowley (2009) and Goswami (2015). 'Mobile application' and 'e-tailer's brand collection' itemswere added to brand experience and brand loyalty issue.The data was collected from August 3rd 2015 to August 16[th]2015.

Due to the nature of the research, reliability of the data was tested by intercoder reliability. Intercoder reliability measures the extent in which independent judges make the same coding decision in evaluating the characteristics of massages (Lombard *et al*., 2002). In order to eliminate the impact of the researcher's subjective value and judgments,

twopostgraduate students participated in the evaluation process. According to the reliability analysis results, the percentage,Cronbach'salphascore,was about97%. So the reliability of the data set isvery high.

Findings

The findings are shown based on the research questions. First of all, the relationship between the information components of different pure fashion e-tailersin Turkey is discussed to examine research question 1. The information components of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table.1. Information components of the top pure fashion e-tailers

Categories	Pure Fashion E-tailers							
	Private online shopping clubs				Online shopping sites			
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Company information	Y*	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Career information	Y	N**	Y	Y	N	Y	N	P***
Fashion and style	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Fitting and sizing	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Filters	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Transactions	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

* Y refers to 'Yes'; ** N refers to 'No'; *** Prefers to 'Partly'.

Allpure fashion e-tailersare providing information about their companies and products to their audiences.On the other hand, the company information of Modagram, Lidyana, Zizigo and Mizu doesn't cover the founding year of the company. Career informationis presented by some pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey.Trendyol offers a wide range of information about career and even an online job application. Morhipo, 1V1Y and Lidyanajust provide their e-mail addresses for job applications on their corporate web sites.Lidyana uses *Tumblr*for their job application notice. On the other hand, the career dimension of Mizu only offers a link to www.kariyer.net which is a website with Turkish content for online job applications for all companies.

All of the pure fashion e-tailersin Turkey presentfruitful fashion and style information. Markafoni has *editor's choice* and*new arrival* options. The *new arrival*opportunity is only possible for Trendyol, Markafoni, 1V1Y, Lidyana, Zizigo and Mizu. Modagram offers *trends*and *new arrival* options.The other issues which coverfashion related information is discussed below in regards to blogs, magazine and collections.

All of the pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey offer fitting and sizing information and transactions. When someone clicks on a product on 1V1Y, the product information opens in a new page. Furthermore, the size chart opens on a new page on Mizu. The size chart is available on the home page on Lidyana. The filters which cover more than one option like price, categories, etc. are available for all pure fashion e-tailers. In summary, there isn't a considerable variation between the extent of information provided by different pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey, except career information.

Second, pure fashion e-tailer's brand identity is discussed to examine research question 2. The brand identity issues of the sample are shown in Table 2 below.

Table.2. The toppure fashion e-tailer'sbrand identity

Categories	Pure Fashion E-tailers							
	Private online shopping clubs				Online shopping sites			
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**
Brand promise								
Mission statement	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Brandvalues/strap line	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Strapline on home page	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Brand ambassador	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
Brand color/logo /text								
Brand colors	Black and orange	White, lime green and pink	White	Black	Black	Black	Blue	Black and purple
Logo consistent at every page	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Brand color in text, menu and page background	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Text font consistent at every page	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Domain name								
Domain name	.com	.com	.com	.com	.com	.com	.com	.com
Brand name = Domain name	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Two of the private online shopping clubs have provided their mission statements on the *about us* page. More than half of the private online shopping club's strapline aren't available on their corporate web site but all of them make use of the strapline in their adverts. 1V1Y uses a different kind of strapline for their advertising and on its home page. Zizigo and Lidyana's straplines are on the home page.Modagram's strapline is just available on the *about us* page. All pure fashion e-tailers have advertising,except Modagram. More than half of the private online shopping clubs have brand ambassadors, yet just one online shopping sitehasa brand ambassador.

Brand colors and logos show a high level of consistency throughout the online fashion industry. The online fashion industry predominantly uses black for their brands. Logo and text consistency on every page exists for all pure fashion e-tailers. All of the pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey use their brand as their domain name. In summary, there isn't a considerable variation in brand identity in terms of color/logo/text and domain name provided by

differentpure fashion e-tailers in Turkey. But there is a considerable variation about mission statement, brand values/strapline and the brand ambassadors provided by private online shopping clubs and online shopping sites.

Finally, pure fashion e-tailer's positive brand experience and brand loyalty are discussed to examine research question 3. The brand experience and brand loyalty issues of the sample are shown in Table 3 below.

Table.3. The toppure fashion e-tailer'sbrand experiences and brand loyalty

Categories	Pure Fashion E-tailers							
	Private online shopping clubs				Online shopping sites			
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**
Contacts								
Tel contact	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Postal contact	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
E-mail	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P
Connections								
Social media	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Share to friends	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Online reviews and customer evaluation	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Advice	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Brand relationship								
FAQ	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Live chat	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Return policy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mobile application	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Community								
Brand community	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Buying guide	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Forums	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Trend information								
E-Newsletter	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	P	Y
Blogs	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Online magazine	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Brand Loyalty								
Coupons	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Discount on recommendation	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Loyalty program	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Personalization	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
E-tailer's brand collection	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y

Company contactsas a first step towards a relationship are common options for all pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey. Just Mizu offers a *contact us* option instead of an *e-mail* option. Customer service phone numbers are provided by Trendyol, Modagram and Lidyana.All pure fashion e-tailers used social networking channels, such as Facebook,

Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest and Google+. Only half of the private online shopping clubs provide a *share withfriends* option for their products but all online shopping sitesprovide this option. While many ofthe online shopping sitesallow online reviews and customer evaluation, none of the private online shopping clubs allow online reviews or customer evaluation options. Mizu and Zizigo provide an opportunity to comment on products. There is a measurement option for products based on four categories,in Modagram. Almost all pure fashion e-tailersadvisea bundle of products related to aspecific product. Online shopping sitesare better than private online shopping clubs,concerning connections.

All pure fashion e-tailers offer FAQs and a return policy. Trendyol, 1V1Y, Modagram andZizigo offer the return policy link on the home page, while the others offer it on the specific product page. But in line with the literature, live chats are not available on any of the websites. All pure fashion e-tailers offer mobile application opportunities. Online shopping sites and private online shopping clubs treat the brand relationship in the same manner. On the other hand, it can be assumed that pure fashion e-tailersare insufficient aboutbrand community dimensions.Just Trendyolprovides abuying guide on the home page.

While just one private shopping club presents an e-newsletter, more than half of the online shopping sitespresent an e-newsletter. All private online shopping clubs are present a blog yet only a half of online shopping sitespresent a blog.Trendyol and Mizu blogs offer just sharing options on social media channels, the other blogs offers acomment option about the blog postsin addition to the sharing options. Moreover, half of the private online shopping clubs and online shopping sites have an online magazine. 1V1Y Studio operates like a magazine and a blog.Morhipo Mag, 1V1Y Studio and Number L (Lidyana's magazine) present an opportunity to buy the mentioned products by clicking on the blog posts.

All pure fashion e-tailers present coupons and personalization options within the context of brand loyalty. All private online shopping clubs offer discounts on recommendations as a distinct part, aside from online shopping sites. Morhipo and 1V1Y provide an opportunity to collect shopping points as a loyalty program, while Trendyol offers an 'Elite Clientele' program. Half of the private online shopping clubs and online shopping siteshave their brand collectionslike private brand or favorites. From this point, Trendyol and Mizu have the private brand names ofMilla and Mizu. Private online shopping clubs are better than online shopping sites,concerning the brand loyalty.In summary, there are considerable variations about share withfriends options, online reviews and customer evaluation, e-newsletter, blogs, discount on recommendation and loyalty programdimensions provided by private online shopping clubs and online shopping sites.

Conclusion

Fashion shoppers (i.e. consumers of apparel, shoes and accessories) spend far higher amounts than any other e-consumers(Marciniak and Bruce, 2004). Branding is important for fashion e-tailers and plays an even more vital role for pure fashion e-tailer's.But the majority of research in the area of online fashion retailing has been concentrated on consumer behavior. There is a relatively low interest concentrated on pure fashion e-tailer's brand strategies; this study is an attempt to contribute to the online fashion branding area by studying the online activities of popular pure fashion e-tailers in Turkey.In this context, information component, brand identity and facilities for brand loyalty and brand experience are examined. Content analysis was performed to investigate research questions.

According to the research results, online shopping sites and private online shopping clubs provide information components, except career information, in the same manner. Similarly, all pure fashion e-tailers address brand identity issues,except brand promise

dimensions, in the same manner. There is considerableevidence thatprivate online shopping clubs are better aboutcareer information, mission statement, brand ambassador usage, blogs, the opportunity of discount on recommendation and loyalty programpractices than online shopping sites. There is considerableevidence that online shopping sites are better about brand values/strapline,sharing the product with friends' option, the opportunity of online reviews/customer evaluation and e-newsletter services. Moreover, it can be assumed that all pure fashion e-tailers need to improve their awareness about brand community issues in Turkey.

As seen in other studies, this study also has some limitations. For example, this study is focused solely on brand strategies of pure fashion e-tailers.Hence, the other types of e-tailers like multichannele-tailersmay be examined in the same way.The study is also limited regarding the pure fashion e-tailer types. The other business models like social media retailing can also be included to make a comparison on branding strategies. Lastly, further research can be conducted in various countries to verify the findings and contribute more to cross-cultural studies.

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