

IS THE BRANDED FINER?

PARASZT MARTA*¹, EGRI ZOLTAN²

¹*Szent Istvan University, Doctoral School of Management and Business Administration, Godollo, Hungary*

²*Szent Istvan University, Faculty of Agricultural Studies and Economics, Szarvas, Hungary*

*Corresponding author's e-mail: paraszt.marta@gk.szie.hu

Abstract: *The brand is important element of the marketing and through this the consumer's decisions'. Consumers decide between each brand to consider the weight of their value components. The generally known brandnames privilege positive associations in the circle of the consumers. So, that is why it is possible, that the consumers choose the products indicated by these brands, because they think these products have a higher value.*

Our research deals with the energy drink brand choice and wants to prove the strong influence of the brand with a blind test. The essence of the blind test (taste test), that without the knowledge of the brandname, the consumer has to classify or rank the products.

Key words: *consumer behavior, blind test, energy drink, brand*

INTRODUCTION

Consumer behaviour is a complex behaviour that includes individual needs, decisive elements of the individual's environment, as well as the buyer's information availability, the ability to evaluate alternatives, and the decision-making mechanism that the customer later might be satisfied or dissatisfied with [1] – briefly, it means pre-, in- and post-purchase activities [2].

Kotler [3] discusses consumer behaviors in the SOR (stimulus-organisation-reaction) approach. The model illustrates that the environmental factors - such as stimuli - affect the consumer, who processes them in the 'black box' – based on own individual properties, characteristics - and develops his own response, the customer's decision.

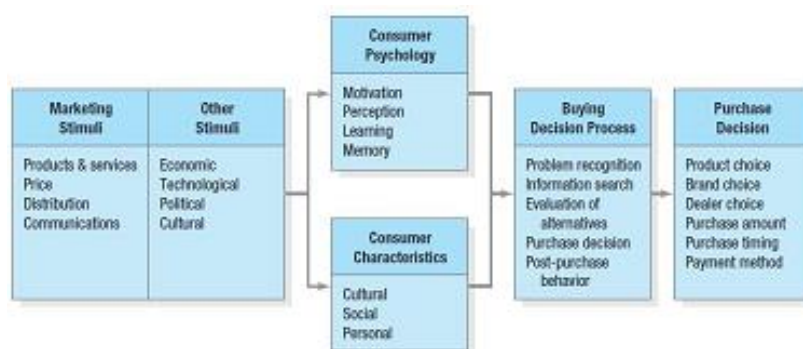


Figure 1. Customer behavior model

Source: Kotler, Keller, 2012 [4]

In our present research, the brand as an influencing factor was highlighted from the marketing stimuli group (the rest were considered as given). Brands are an integral part of everyday life. Often the main constitute a distinction between product differentiation [5].

In the international and domestic technical literature there are many brand concepts and approaches, only a few of them are mentioned, which are closely related to the subject.

The most important function and advantage of the brand is well reflected by the notion of Bauer-Berács [6]: “The brand is a set of symbols; its task is to identify products and services with a specific manufacturer, a distributor and to distinguish them from other products.”

However, the following definitions grasp the essence of the brand, relevant to the present research:

“The brand is the consumer's idea of the product. In many cases, brand-related associations of ideas contribute more to brand value than the product itself.” [7]

The brand is the ‘soul’ of the product, according to Kapferer [8]. When a consumer purchases, he decides among brands considering their various value components, for example, the symbolic value.

According to Keller [9], what distinguishes a brand from a non-branded product and gives value to it is, in fact, a combination of consumer perceptions and emotions, including brand name and brand-related companies.

The design of a good brand is not just creating a name and gets this name known by different means of communication. It means much more: a good brand represents the value that it offers to the customers in its unique offer made by the seller [10].

Overall, we could say that the brand is the ‘essence’ of the product [11], which distinguishes it from all other products. It’s the ‘creature’ of the product in the buyer's mind [12].

The technical literature dominantly approaches the relationship between branding and consumer behaviour through the issue of purchasing risk. The real problem-solving purchase decision happens during the first purchase when the customer has to choose between products or brands that have not been experienced so far [13]. In such cases, the consumer seizes the handholds during his purchases offered by the manufacturer when choosing between brands instead of products. People think of the known brand and the higher price as a guarantee of better quality [14].

The buyer believes there are significant differences between the brands [15]. This way the consumer will vote for the brand, even without a test.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In our primer, focus-group study, we wanted to represent that the more familiar brand is the more likely to be selected during the first purchase - as the brand assumes a higher value, and this ‘commitment’ does not just last until learning the prices.

In addition, we wanted to demonstrate with a blind test¹ that the branded, over-priced product – judged by the participants to be better - does not mean greater enjoyment for the test subjects.

Our hypotheses for the population were as follows:

H1: Without the knowledge of the flavours and the prices, the best-known brand would be chosen during the first purchase.

H2: After getting to know the prices, they would stick to the same brand.

H3: The most attractive packaging is also linked to the top brand.

H4: There is no substantial difference between the cheap and the expensive products. Not the best-known and the most expensive products represent the greatest enjoyment value.

The study was conducted by full-time students² of the Faculty of Agricultural and Economics at Szent Istvan University. The main population to be studied were students who have not yet or have been consumed for up to two or three times the selected product type and have not even purchased it. Based on a pre-consumer survey, the population

¹ The purpose of this test is to find out perceived properties and judgments about a product that is not affected by the brand and the manufacturer's name, so to measure the usefulness of the product. [16]

² The number of the active full-time students in the given semester (Autumn semester 2017/18) is 57 people.

consisted of 28 people, of whom four students did not want to participate in the research. The study was conducted in November 2017, in groups of 4.

We tested energy drinks during the research. The choice was justified by the fact that university students are one of the biggest target groups of the product category and that the beverage has unbeaten popularity for years³.

The tutti-frutti flavoured products of the following brands (Figure 2.) were involved in the test:

- ☺ RedBull: this brand meant the birth of the category 30 years ago, making it the most well-known energy drink⁴.
- ☺ Bomba!: It appeared in Hungary in 1997⁵ – so this drink is considered to have the second largest 'tradition' in the category.
- ☺ Hell: a Hungarian brand, which is still 'young' at the market⁶.
- ☺ Watt: a Hungarian brand as old as Hell, it has been produced by Buszesz Zrt. for a decade⁷.
- ☺ Spark: Tesco's own branded product, which appeared the latest in our country.



Figure 2. Energy drinks in the research

The research protocol was as follows:

Survey

Issues relevant to this dissertation:

1. Which product would you choose based on the brand? Which one do you think is the tastiest? In which one do you trust the most?
2. Would you choose this one as well if you knew its price?
3. Which one is the trendiest based on the packaging?
4. Which is the one you would definitely not buy based on the brand or appearance?

Blind test

For each participant, five white glasses were placed on the desk numbered from 1-5. We took a note about which brand gets which number, and then we poured from each drink - without the subjects having seen which brand was poured in which cup. During tasting, the task was to set up a sequence, which was created in the first place by the most delicious, and subsequently in descending order, by the number of drinks that were considered less tasty.

³Among Nielsen's examined top 20 food categories, energy and sports drinks grew above the average in 2016, too. [17]

⁴Red Bull is currently available in 171 countries where 62 billion cans of energy drink have already been consumed. In 2016, it won the title of the 70th most valuable brand on the Forbes list. [18]

⁵Its sale in Austria was taken over by a Hungarian company in 2011. The product is sold only in our country. [19]

⁶It was created in 2006 and became the market leader in Hungary in 2010, as well as a dominant player at the international market. [20]

⁷Most Hungarian food chains also get their energy drink produced with BUSZESZ - the first Hungarian energy drink producer. In 2015, it won the Product of the Year prize. [21]

RESEARCH RESULTS

Out of the 24 students interviewed, 20 (83%) would choose RedBull and the others (4, 17%) would choose Bomba! at the first purchase, the other brands were not even mentioned (Figure 3, column 2). The most common reasons were:

“I meet this brand most often.”

“This brand has been at the market for ages, surely it is the best.”

“It supports Formula 1.”

“I have already seen the ad on TV.”

“It gives you wings, it is sure to be tasty.”

Responder's number	Questions			
	1	2	3	4
1	RedBull	yes	RedBull	Spark
2	RedBull	no	Bomba	Spark
3	RedBull	no	RedBull	Spark
4	RedBull	yes	Hell	Spark
5	Bomba	yes	Hell	Spark
6	Bomba	yes	Bomba	Spark
7	Bomba	no	Hell	Spark
8	RedBull	no	Hell	Spark
9	RedBull	no	Hell	Watt
10	RedBull	no	Hell	Watt
11	RedBull	no	Hell	Watt
12	RedBull	no	Hell	Spark
13	RedBull	no	Hell	Watt
14	RedBull	yes	RedBull	Watt
15	RedBull	yes	RedBull	Spark
16	RedBull	yes	Hell	Spark
17	RedBull	no	Hell	Spark
18	RedBull	no	RedBull	Spark
19	RedBull	no	Hell	Watt
20	Bomba	yes	Bomba	Watt
21	RedBull	no	RedBull	Watt
22	Bomba	yes	Bomba	Spark
23	RedBull	no	Hell	Spark
24	RedBull	no	Bomba	Spark

Figure 3. Answers to the four questions

Source: own editing, 2018

Afterwards, we described the prices of each brand (RedBull: 400 Ft, Hell: 200 Ft, Watt: 180 Ft, Bomba!: 170 Ft, Spark: 125 Ft). Only slightly more than a third of the respondents (9, 37.5%) said that they would stick to the product they considered best (Figure 3, column 3).

In case of Bomba! electors, the question was irrelevant, as the price of the Bomba! is the lowest among the 5 products shown. Therefore, focusing only on those who have chosen the most expensive product (20 people), it can be found that only five of them stayed ‘brand loyal’ after getting to know the price. So 25% of test subjects would be willing to pay a higher price for the goods.

Figure 3, column 4 shows that during justifying the packaging and appearance of the product, more than half of the subjects (13, 54%) rated Hell as the trendiest product, a quarter of them rated RedBull, the others (5 people, 21 %) were the most satisfied with the appearance of Bomba!. The products of Watt and Tesco were not attractive to anyone. It can be noticed, however, that among the 9 people who still stuck to the brand after learning its price, 6 attributed to the product not only the best flavour, but also preferred the appearance the most (responder's number: 1,6,14 , 15, 20, 22).

Spark and Watt were the energy drinks that would certainly not have been removed from the shelf by the subjects at the first purchase (Figure 3, column 5).

The decrypted order as a result of the blind test is shown in Figure 4. Looking at the top-ranked first-place products, it is apparent that only 4 people (responder's number 8, 12, 18, 22) that is 17% of the sample thought that the most trustworthy product had the most enjoyable value.

Responder's number	Blind test result (place)				
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
1	Hell	Spark	RedBull	Bomba	Watt
2	Watt	Spark	Hell	Bomba	RedBull
3	Hell	RedBull	Spark	Watt	Bomba
4	Spark	Watt	RedBull	Hell	Bomba
5	Spark	RedBull	Bomba	Watt	Hell
6	Watt	Bomba	Spark	Hell	RedBull
7	Hell	RedBull	Watt	Bomba	Spark
8	RedBull	Hell	Watt	Spark	Bomba
9	Watt	Bomba	RedBull	Spark	Hell
10	Hell	Spark	Bomba	RedBull	Watt
11	Spark	RedBull	Bomba	Hell	Watt
12	RedBull	Hell	Bomba	Spark	Watt
13	Hell	Watt	Bomba	Spark	RedBull
14	Spark	Hell	Watt	Bomba	RedBull
15	Spark	Watt	Bomba	RedBull	Hell
16	Bomba	Spark	RedBull	Hell	Watt
17	Bomba	RedBull	Hell	Watt	Spark
18	RedBull	Hell	Bomba	Watt	Spark
19	Spark	Hell	RedBull	Watt	Bomba
20	Hell	RedBull	Spark	Watt	Bomba
21	Spark	Bomba	RedBull	Hell	Watt
22	RedBull	Spark	Hell	Bomba	Watt
23	Spark	Hell	RedBull	Bomba	Watt
24	Hell	Bomba	RedBull	Watt	Spark

Figure 4. Blind test rank

Source: own editing, 2018

Examining the positions given for flavour based on the preferred RedBull by the majority, it can be said that more people think (58%, 14 people) during the blind test that its enjoyment value is moderate or worse than that - and they ranked this drink to place 3-5. (Figure 5). The situation is even worse in case of Bomba!, 75% of respondents rated it to be mediocre or worse - Watt had the same result. As for Hell and Spark, many people (54% of those who did the test) thought the two products were rather tasty and ranked them to the first or second place.

	Number of positions					Medium or worse	
	1st place	2th place	3th place	4th place	5th place		
RedBull	4	6	8	2	4	14	58%
Bomba	2	4	7	6	5	18	75%
Hell	7	6	3	5	3	11	46%
Spark	8	5	3	4	4	11	46%
Watt	3	3	3	7	8	18	75%

Figure 5. Number of positions

Source: own editing, 2018

Looking at the 5 individuals (Figure 6) who voted for the premium category priced RedBull in the first and second questions, we can state that in their judgement the taste of the product is not fine (3. place or even worse).

Responder's number	Questions		Responder's number	Blind test result (place)				
	1	2		First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
1	RedBull	yes	1	Hell	Spark	RedBull	Bomba	Watt
4	RedBull	yes	4	Spark	Watt	RedBull	Hell	Bomba
14	RedBull	yes	14	Spark	Hell	Watt	Bomba	RedBull
15	RedBull	yes	15	Spark	Watt	Bomba	RedBull	Hell
16	RedBull	yes	16	Bomba	Spark	RedBull	Hell	Watt

Figure 6. Answers and blind test result 1.

Source: own editing, 2018

If we look at those who chose the same product (9 people) on the basis of both the brand name and appearance, regardless of whether they are willing to pay more for it, we get the result that only one third (responder's number: 3, 6, 18) listed their preferred brand on the basis of taste to be the best (1-2. place) (Figure 7).

Responder's number	Questions			Responder's number	Blind test result (place)				
	1	2	3		First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
1	RedBull	yes	RedBull	1	Hell	Spark	RedBull	Bomba	Watt
3	RedBull	no	RedBull	3	Hell	RedBull	Spark	Watt	Bomba
6	Bomba	yes	Bomba	6	Watt	Bomba	Spark	Hell	RedBull
14	RedBull	yes	RedBull	14	Spark	Hell	Watt	Bomba	RedBull
15	RedBull	yes	RedBull	15	Spark	Watt	Bomba	RedBull	Hell
18	RedBull	no	RedBull	18	RedBull	Hell	Bomba	Watt	Spark
20	Bomba	yes	Bomba	20	Hell	RedBull	Spark	Watt	Bomba
21	RedBull	no	RedBull	21	Spark	Bomba	RedBull	Hell	Watt
22	Bomba	yes	Bomba	22	RedBull	Spark	Hell	Bomba	Watt

Figure 7. Answers and blind test result 2.

Source: own editing, 2018

We gave a score of 1-5 for each brand based on their place, giving 5 points for the finest, and 1 point for the worst taste. The overall points show (Figure 8) that Hell and the product of Tesco (81 points) won the test, RedBull (76 points) finished third, while Bomba! (64 points) and Watt (58 points) slipped off the podium.

Responder's number	Blind test result (scores: 1-5)				
	RedBull	Hell	Bomba	Watt	Spark
1	3	5	2	1	4
2	1	3	2	5	4
3	4	5	1	2	3
4	3	2	1	4	5
5	4	1	3	2	5
6	1	2	4	5	3
7	4	5	2	3	1
8	5	4	1	3	2
9	3	1	4	5	2
10	2	5	3	1	4
11	4	2	3	1	5
12	5	4	3	1	2
13	1	5	3	4	2
14	1	4	2	3	5
15	2	1	3	4	5
16	3	2	5	1	4
17	4	3	5	2	1
18	5	4	3	2	1
19	3	4	1	2	5
20	4	5	1	2	3
21	3	2	4	1	5
22	5	3	2	1	4
23	3	4	2	1	5
24	3	5	4	2	1
	76	81	64	58	81

Figure 8. Scores

Source: own editing, 2018

CONCLUSIONS

Our first hypothesis (H1) is accepted. It has been proved that students who have not consumed energy drinks before would place the most popular branded drink in their basket at the first purchase if they do not know its price.

Our second hypothesis (H2) is not accepted. After learning the price, only a quarter of those who preferred the most expensive product would be willing to pay the higher amount of money.

Our third hypothesis (H3) is partially accepted. The most attractive packaging is not linked to the top brand. However, the majority of people, who would have been willing to pay the higher price for the brand they thought the best, also preferred it by appearance.

Our fourth hypothesis (H4) is accepted. The blind testers cannot make a substantial difference between the tastes of each brand. The flavours of the first three products are close to each other based on the scores obtained. The first place of the podium was the brand that was judged to have the most desirable appearance, and the one that was not attractive to them at all. Not the best-known as well as the most expensive product represents the greatest enjoyment value, as RedBull was ranked third in the 'enjoyment competition'.

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