

**WHAT DO OUTSTANDING SMEs IN APPAREL INDUSTRY DO
TO BE SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS?**



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WHAT DO OUTSATNDING SMEs IN APPAREL INDUSTRY DO TO BE SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR?

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to study on how entrepreneur of fashion business building their brand and what are key success factor. Moreover, this study is focusing on brand building which includes marketing strategies and relevant tools. This paper applied the customer based-brand equity model to support the analysis.

Greyhound and Kloset were selected to be case study and analysis. These two brands are well known as fashion leader. They are in fashion market for long period of time and be recognized by international market. Therefore they are interesting to be case studies for analysis.

After investigate and analyze deeply in all data provided, it was surprising that brand identity is key importance factor to building strong brand. Enhancing brand identity creates brand awareness, brand responsive and brand relationship. Essentially brand identification conveys the right experience through target customers. Beside that the brand need to use effective strategies and tools convey message to customers.

KEY WORDS: brand / brand building / brand identity / brand relationship /customer based brand equity

25 pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent of time, ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is a topic that people are well informed. Countries in ASEAN are alert to be preparing for free trading economy. It seems to be market competition is more intense. Thus countries under AEC contract will look for an effective measurement to cope with this situation and gain benefits as much as they could. Despite, it will attract new competitors into the market.

Focusing on fashion market, when we talk about “Bangkok Fashion City”, most fashionistas are familiar with this phrase. As you know that Bangkok fashion city is a project initiated by the government since 2003. It intended to make Thai apparel industry getting ready to be fashion hub in ASEAN. In addition, it will attract new competitors into the market. Therefore any people who want to create their own brand would be easy to trade the product. Moreover, it creates high competition in Thai fashion market, not only from inside the market itself but also international brands from abroad.

According to the global competitive environment, a lot of companies today have to confront with the problem that they are providing and selling products and services similar to their competitors in the market especially in consumer goods market. It becomes more complex and difficult to gain a competitive advantage due to quickly copied items by competitors. They are also facing the fast fashion trend due to the change in young consumer behavior.

Meanwhile, increasing in consumer demanding and fast fashion trend, it forces fashion retailers to provide their products and services that meet their customer's need at the right time and the right place. Beside, fast fashion is a low cost clothing collection that mimics current luxury fashion trends which can be the answer to desire among young consumers (Annamma Joy, John F. Sherry, Jr, Alladi Venkatesh, Jeff Wang and Ricky Chan, 2012). How designer or fashion owner deal

with this current situation?

As you know that Thai apparel had long history and now Thai brands are recognized in the significance of the global market and local market. The study aims to analyze on the strategies they use to compete with the competitors within the country and abroad, how branding is importance to their business? How they build their brands and their products to be unique and recognize?

The paper will analyze how they positioning and differentiating their brands and their products in the market and also how they set target of their customers and how both factors affect to their brands. Whether all those factors consist of branding, positioning and target group are their key success factors or not and also analyze what else that makes them outstanding and successful entrepreneurs.

Consequently, customers are concerned more about fashion, as a change of consumer lifestyle and behavior and fashion market supports high potential customers who have higher purchasing power and fashion product are likely to be commodity product which is easy to make purchasing decisions. A lot of people see the opportunity to enter into the market.

This paper will be beneficial and guideline to new SMEs who want to enter into this market and become outstanding and successful by learning from their pioneer's trial and error.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This paper will study and analyze on how Thai designers owned brands that are outstanding and are recognized by the global fashion as many global brands do to grow for success and how they build up their brands. The paper will focus on brand building and marketing mix.

According to Customer-based brand equity model, the model focusing on meaning of brand equity, how to build it up, how to measure and how to manage the brand. The assumption of the model is how strong brand affects to customer perception by learning, feeling, hearing and seeing about the brand. Building a strong brand is the most challenge. It has to ensure that the brand's products, services and marketing program are perceived in the right way and customer perception, opinions, feeling and believe link to the brand.

Building a strong brand can be thought as a step by step principle to build up the strong base. Referring customer based-brand equity, it can divide into 4 steps. First, brand has to ensure that brand identification is associated with customer's mind or customer perception about brand identity. After the first step, it has to establish the brand meaning in the customer's mind. Next step is creating well responsive of customers to brand meaning and identity. The last step is changing brand response to create loyalty relationship between brand and customers.

Keller, K.L. (Keller, K.L. 2001) said "Brand meaning cannot be build unless brand identity has been created. Brand response cannot be developing unless the right meaning has been creating, and a relationship cannot be committed unless brand responses have been derived". To accomplish the four steps in customer based-brand equity, it has to comply with the six brand-building blocks to create the right brand identity, brand meaning, brand response and brand relation. To reach the pinnacle of the brand building pyramid, the six brand building block must be in place.

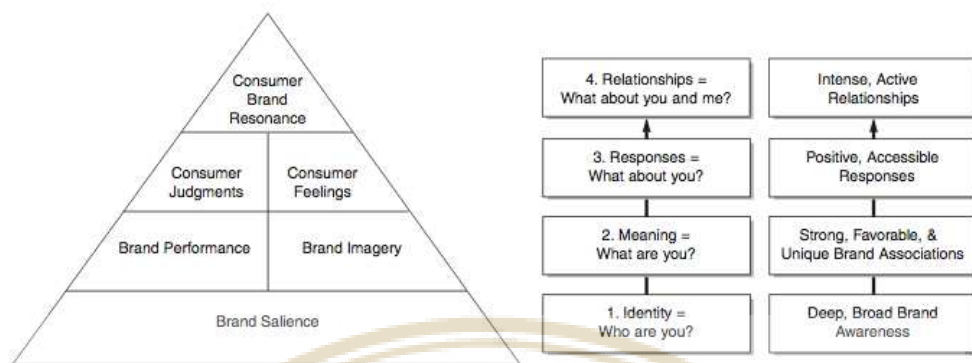


Figure 1 Customer based – brand equity Pyramid

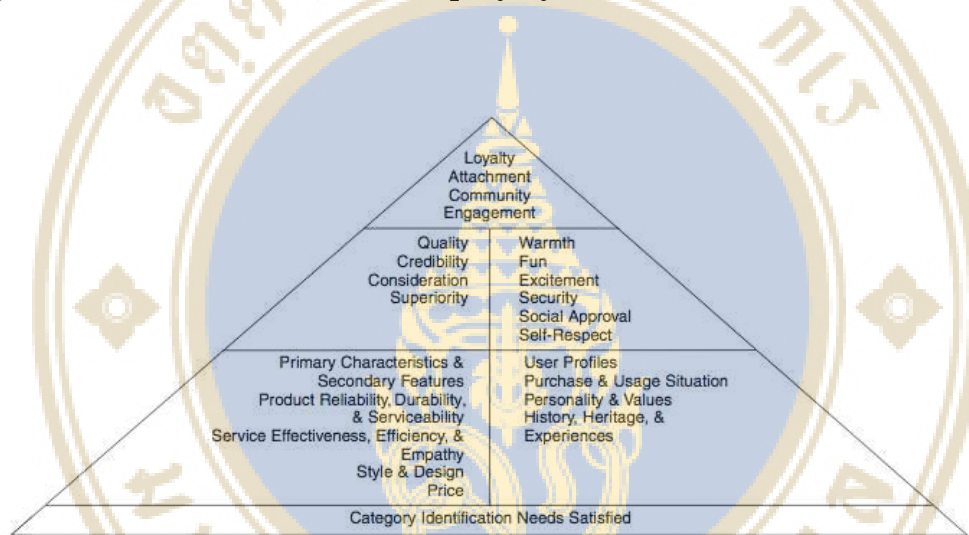


Figure 2 Sub dimensions of the brand building blocks

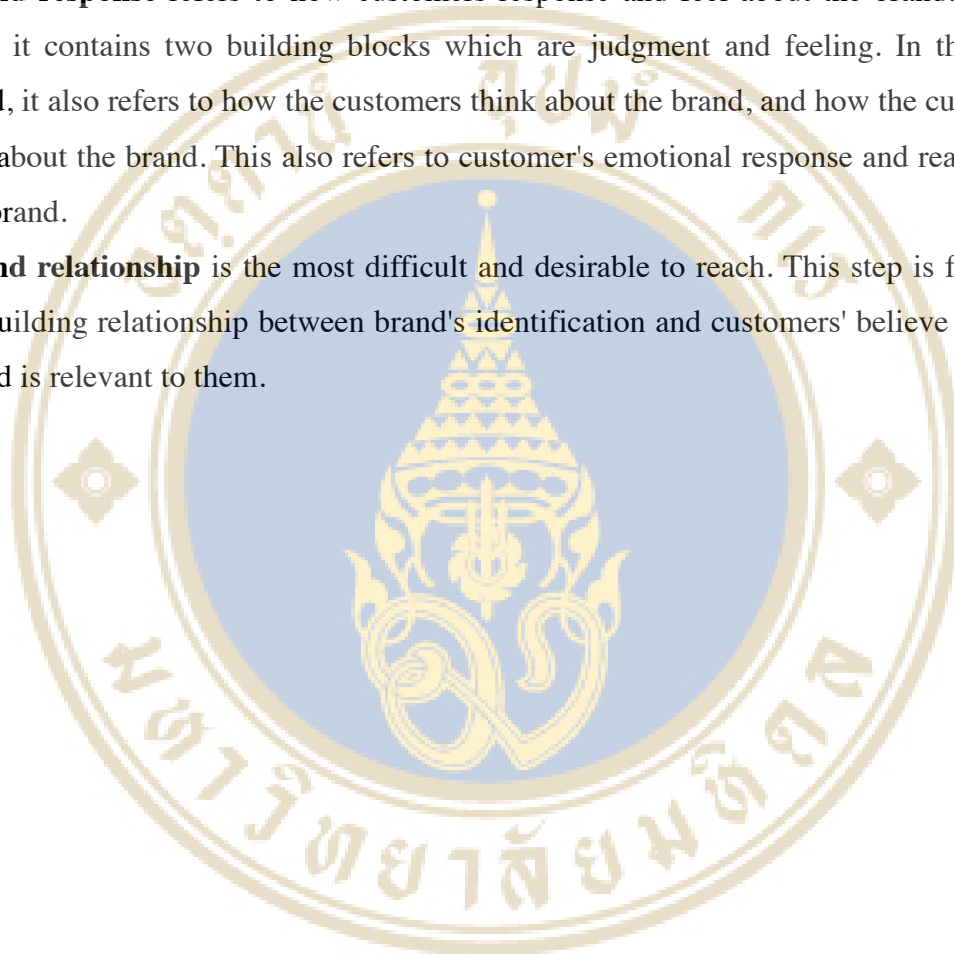
Brand identity requires creating brand salience or brand awareness with the customer. Brand awareness refers to ability of customer to recognize and recall about the brand. Brand awareness is more than customer's perception or acknowledgement of a brand name. It has to ensure that customer understand about products or services of the brand. It has to be clear linkages between other products or services that sold under the brand name. In other words, at this stage it has to ensure that the customer's perception of the brand is correctly. The brand is stand out of the line and the customers recognize and aware of the brand.

Brand meaning is to give meaning to brand, create brand image, and communicate to the customers. Referring second step in customer based-brand equity, it contains two building blocks which are brand performance and brand image.

Brand performance is how well the products and services of the brand satisfy the customers' needed. Brand image refers to how well of the brand meets needs of customers on social and psychological aspects.

Brand response refers to how customers response and feel about the brand. At this step, it contains two building blocks which are judgment and feeling. In the other word, it also refers to how the customers think about the brand, and how the customers feel about the brand. This also refers to customer's emotional response and reaction to the brand.

Brand relationship is the most difficult and desirable to reach. This step is focusing on building relationship between brand's identification and customers' believe that the brand is relevant to them.



CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of branding in fashion

A strong brand creates the competitive advantage to the brand and increase marketing advantage. A strong brand leading positive respond of the customer to marketing activities compare to those who does not have a brand.

A strong brand provides a great benefit to brand such as brand can gain more customers' brand loyalty and gain more margins. A strong brand leading less sensitive to competitive marketing or marketing crisis and customers respond to price increase and decrease more agreeable. A strong branding increase opportunity in licensing and brand extension and marketing communication are more effective.

In the fashion industry, the success is not only creating beautiful designs but also selling the products. Having a good brand creates the easiest way to sell products. Most of the luxury brands in fashion market are iconic brand that convey a message of quality and style of the product to their customers by having a good brand such as Prada, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci and etc.

The most famous brands are mix tradition and advance media to communicate logically and legitimately information beyond various channels in order to encourage customer attention and sustain brand value.

Before marketing the brand, it has to know significant design in details, features, and exact price or segmentation. Identifying specific customer, there are age, gender, interest and other related help to explain their preference and interest. In the article also focus on the 4P marketing frameworks which are product, price, place, promotion as a foundation framework to start.

Product When talking about the product in simple frameworks, definition of product is a thing or benefits to serve customer requirements and expectation. For product in the fashion, they mention, "We usually design product which customer do not know

what their desirable yet and using marketing mix to reach their expectation." As it shows that fashion is driven by design. It is not only the creative side but also include how to present the product which is affected to the brand meaning.

Price - in fashion is not only how much you pay for product. It also relates brand value in customer perception of. For the how much you pay for clothes, it refers to the benefits you will get which the consumer concerned to material quality and design.

Place - refers to selling with reasonable price at the right time and place. For the fashion brands, there are many sales channels to reach end consumer. The place to sell your product can influence to the target group of the customer that want to reach and also affect to the product perception. If the brand owns direct selling channel to customer, it can create advantage of managing the environment and skills, it is time for the brand to tell the story as it wants to. This could be the most powerful marketing vehicle. It is also important to having a website of on-line commerce to capture the traffic.

Promotion - there are many promotion techniques available to brand such as Advertising, CO-OP, Public relation and Social media. All of the promotion techniques are effective tools but it is necessary to use it wisely in order to gain the most benefit to the brand.

To be successful in term of entrepreneur, the marketing strategies is an important key makes company focus on specialist and maximize opportunities to enhance customer's awareness of the brand, to gain long-term customer loyalty, to increase of sales and market share, and to achieve an alternative product of the competitor.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Case studies

This paper emphasis on what did they do to become outstanding and successful SMEs as a Thai designer own brand in Thai apparel industry.

The selected brands are Greyhound and Kloset. The cases are selected from Thai fashion in CNN article that provided the list of the top player in Thai fashion. Both of them have long history especially Greyhound and both of them still maintain their brand to be as top designer brands in Thai fashion market.

The criteria for selecting these two brands (Greyhound and Kloset) are as follows. Both of them are the outstanding Thai designer brand that have influence to Thai fashion industry and they have stayed in the market for long time. They are SMEs businesses. They are also well known and recognized by the global as Thai designer brand. Moreover both of them have a strong personal identity that reflects to their brand name and collections. It can be said that Greyhound is the pioneer in men fashion and Kloset is the leader in women fashion.

This paper also uses secondary data to analyze for experiment. At both cases, they can be supplied sufficient data from an interview in magazines and newspapers, interview through TV programs, video clips of an interview, and they also provided information through their own websites which are reliable and useful for the paper. This paper will gather all necessary data, both primary and secondary data, of these two brands to be analyzed and examined.

In the first part, the paper will give an information about the company background and the second part will discuss about how both of them build up their brand and what the core value of their brand is. The last part of the paper will focus on the other factors that they use to maintain their brand to the summit of the market.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

5.1 Background

5.1.1 Greyhound

Greyhound was established by four friends to share their interest and experience in music, architecture and art. It started with a basic, good quality cotton t-shirt and shirting. Production made by treating, slashing, screening and sewing then come out as seasonal for thirty years. After that they become signature of Greyhound. Greyhound established the first menswear outlet at Siam Center in 1980. It was a famous trendy department store in Bangkok downtown at that time. The space was around 50 square meters. It was constructed with bare concrete and varied grey materials. It also used bleached teak wood and ram finish irons.

In 1990, Greyhound expanding to women wear, accessories and leather product. Thus, Playhound is launched by Greyhound in 2002. It presented trendy clothes for young people, in terms of contemporary, casual and street character.

Today, in Bangkok – Greyhound has 5 flagship stores, 7 restaurants and showrooms in several malls. It sell product through varieties brand outlet in many overseas destination such as Europe, Asia Pacific and ASEAN.

5.1.2 Kloset

Kloset was founded by Khun Mollika Ruangkritra. She is also a designer of the brand. The inspiration of the collection embraces with the culture's whimsy and playfulness. The main source of the inspiration for Kloset's creation came from her childlike-endeartment with crafting design especially classical embroidery and stitching.

After that, Kloset adds an authentic detail handcraft to collections for example ribbon tape, lace net, low gauge knits. Moreover, features of women shows in

accessories of Kloset. Their collections are beautiful and gently.

Then, Kloset emerge and continue its head quarter in Thailand. In 2001, Kloset opened the first store in Siam Square.

Today – Kloset has 5 flagship stores and also sell its products in more than 20 countries around the world such as Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Dubai, Australia, United States, France and Italy.

5.2 Analysis

The paper discuss about how Greyhound and Kloset build up their brand in detail, followed by the customer based-brand equity model along with the four steps and six building blocks in the model to be discussed step by step and brand by brand. The paper will start with brand Greyhound and followed by brand Kloset.

5.2.1 Greyhound

5.2.1.1 How Greyhound builds up its brand?

Greyhound started its history around thirty years ago. At that time, there were not many men's clothing stores on the market, so it created space for Greyhound to be a pioneer in men fashion.

In this case, interviewing Mr. Bhanu Inkawat in the Brandage magazine published on August 2011. As a creative director and founders of Greyhound, mentions that building brand image as identity is essential in fashion industry because customers are always seeking for a new lifestyle trend.

He stresses that image is meaningful to keeping a brand in customer's mind. Greyhound has been successful at keeping its current brand image in the men's fashion niche that appeals to the creative set.

Applying customer based brand equity model

Brand salience

As an interview of Mr. Bhana and the interviewer from CNN which took place in Courtesy Audi Fashion Festival in year 2011, published in travel.cnn.com. He

admitted that design is very creative and modern which may not suit for everyone and it might be hard for traditional customer to like his design. Thus, he specifies the brand's core audiences which tend to be young and up to date people in art-related field such as advertising, music, entertainment, and design.

To know customers and market segment to identify different need. In order to create unique selling proposal, it needs customer understanding in depth to sell product to reach customer requirement. This could be confirm that Greyhound know their target customers and compete first step in the customer based-brand equity.

Brand performance and imagery

Building up the brand, need to identify brand identity and attitude and stick with it. It is necessary to communicate with customer through all small tiny detail. For example, outlet design, employee uniform and packaging which reflect and remind customers about identity and meaning of the brand.

The picture of the earth tone color such as grey, black, and white which let us imagine on an idea about chic, contemporary, simple, new kind, and easy to mix and match. Last but not least, the interior design of the shop that makes it stay outstanding of the existing stores in the market at that time. It related to the brand performance and the brand image.

It could be said that in the past 30 years, Greyhound maintained their brand image and communicated their brand identity through everything that they could such as interior design of their stores and also their collections.

As a result, Greyhound has strong brand image of the brand will pop up in the customer' mind which is the logo of the dog and the unique interior design of their stores. Moreover, the design of the cloth which has reflects brand identity.

Consumer judgments and feelings

As you know that Greyhound is in fashion market for a decade, it could be told that the customers who buy its products select it by the reason of not only its design and quality but also its brand. When we ask for customer brand loyalty, they made people perceive that Greyhound was not just a fashion but its lifestyle. Their clothes are express designers' inspiration from experiences, knowledge and art.

Customer who wear their clothes are appreciated the uniqueness. Therefore, Greyhound succeeds in the third step of the customer based-brand equity.

Consumer brand resonance

Analyzing relationship between brand's identity and customer's believed. Greyhound's men fashion has strong identity and design which affect to customer perception. The most of their customer feel that Greyhound's style is represent their character. So it is not surprise why customer stick to this brand.

5.2.1.2 Failure of the Greyhound

One of the big mistakes that Greyhound did in the past was following the idea of Japanese fashion and lower brand identity. This made the customers who are loyal to the brand felt unsatisfied with that collection because when they buy product. Meaning that they want to buy an identity of the brand which different from the others.

While Greyhound follows the Japanese trend, the loyal customers did not feel connected with the brand and feel it is not the brand as they wish for. So they started to realize that brand identity was the most importance to make them success.

5.2.2 Kloset

5.2.2.1 How Kloset build up its brand?

Kloset started its history around 10 years ago, aims to create new woman fashion brand with international quality standard to Thai fashion market. At that time, there was not much feminine style in market, so Kloset seen an opportunity to be one choice of customer who seeking for feminine style with sweet and gentle touch.

According to an interviewing of Ms. Mollika Ruangkritra in Brandage magazine published on May 2011. As an owner and designer of Kloset, mentioned that Kloset is came from the word "closet" aims to create big closet for woman that different from others. She identifies her design as a London country chic with craftsman design that can easily mix and match and still look feminine.

Applying customer based-brand equity model

Brand salience

As an interview from ASTV between Ms. Mollika and interviewer which took place at Kloset outlet at Central Ladprao which published in Manager online on 20 October 2010. She admitted that she build up Kloset from mistakes and learning by doing. She never been given up and overcome any obstacles in doing her business.

Before knowing real target customer, she starts to sale her products to teenager age between 17 to 20 and her product price are between 3,000-17,000 baht. She realized teenagers have low purchasing power and not her target customer. She starts to do the market research to study her target customer.

After did market research, she found that her target customer is woman age between 20 to 35 with income more than 40,000 baht per month who love fashion, self confident, love independent and up to date.

Refer to data above, it can conclude that Kloset know and understand its customer in depth to identify customer needs and reach customer requirement to create unique selling proposal in market. This could be ensure that Kloset compete first step in the customer based-brand equity in knowing its target customer.

Brand performance and imagery

As an interview in TTIS Fashion Biz by Trade information for Thai Fashion Business between an interviewer and Ms. Mollika which published on 9 February 2007. She informs that she has a problem to create brand awareness to customers since she started the business. She decided give free look book to present her collection to customer. At that time, there was no one used look book as a channel to communicate with the customer because it was expensive compared to the others.

By using look book, it created unique communication in the market. She could gain much more brand awareness from customer. Not only the look book that make her to be recognized but the feminine design also attracted a lot of customers. In each collection she used print fabric and add lace net, bead and embroider in each collection that made her design very unique compare to others product in the market.

When talking about Kloset, not only feminine design and butterfly logo that pops up in customer's mind but also outlet design. She added brand identity through her Victoria design store. She uses white and gold color as a main color of the store and has a big chandelier on ceiling with the Victoria furniture. It creates the store's atmosphere as a big elegance walk-in closet that contains a lot of clothes and accessories.

As a result, it could be said that Kloset maintained its brand identity through its brand image and brand performance for example interior design of its stores and its collections.

Consumer judgments and feelings

As you know that Kloset is in fashion market for more than ten years, it could be told the customers are loyalty to the brand. They buy its product not only its design and quality but also its brand which meet their physical and social propose. Therefore, Kloset succeeds in the third step of customer based-brand equity.

Consumer brand resonance

Final, analyzing relationship between brand's identity and customer's believed. Kloset has strong identity and design which contributes to market to share owner's intention that aim to create Thai brand that have equal standard to international brand. So it has no doubt why customer sticks to this brand.

5.2.2.2 Failure of the Kloset

It started the first shop since 13 years ago by Ms. Mollika Ruangkritra. She started her first shop by her passion in fashion. She aimed to open the clothes shop that provides the quality of cloth at the same standard as the world famous international brands with affordable price in feminine style to the Thai fashion market.

She opened the first shop at Siam Square which is the big mistake that she made. At that time, Siam square is a shopping place for teenager and the meeting point. According to the intention to provide the quality cloth, the price of her product is set higher than the competitors in that area. It is difficult for her to sell her product

even though the customers who come to her shop are all making the compliment to her cloth and her design.

Eventually, she realized that people who go for shopping at Siam Square are not her target customer. Then she changed shop location to Siam Center, it is closer to target customer. At that place she expects to get the right customer who has the power of buying that the previous. However, the place strategy of marketing mix should be applied to her situation at that time.

5.2.3 Rebranding strategy of both brands.

The rebranding strategy is using to attach new target market to increase the opportunity of sales and market share from the competitors in the market. During maturity stage of Greyhound and Kloset, they use brand extension strategy to re-branding an existing brand. This strategy helps boost up their brand.

Greyhound extends product line into young generation segmentation by launched brand Playhound to market. This aims to serve teenager age between 20 to 28 who are in trend, enjoy shopping and love fashion. Playhound still maintain greyhound identity in its design but add more color and fun design into its collections.

Kloset see an opportunity to attach younger customer by launched Kloset Etcetera. This aims to attach younger people who have low purchasing power to has opportunity to has its product in possess. This stress in woman favorite item in daily use and must have items for college student with affordable price such as cosmetic bag, note book with Kloset signature print cover and scarf in Kloset signature print fabric.

Consequently, these two companies reach business objective in order to maximize profitability and stimulate brand awareness not only their existing brand but also new brands that just launched in the market. This could be stresses about the brand in customers' mind.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

After I have studied Greyhound, branding is one of the most important key success factors that made Greyhound and Kloset set themselves outstanding among competitors in the market. The core of brand building is brand identity which can help the brand to be distinguished from the competitors in the market. To build the strong brand, the brand must have its own strong identity to be communicated to the customers.

Branding is an essential key for SMEs to differentiate and to set positioning of the product and service from the competitors in the market which can represent product and service quality to customer's mind. When the customers perceive the brand, the brand can set the higher price to gain higher profit margin.

In marketing strategies, marketing mix is an important to communicate brand to market. The firm should be aware of the way to communicate their brand to public. Entrepreneur has to be concerned about how customers perception about brand which has a high impact to customer's mindset and decision.

In summary, marketing strategies has to use the right tools to build up the brand. Mixing methodologies is a company competitive advantage to reach customer needs and expectation for business sustainability.

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