

SUCCESSFUL BRANDS IN ROMANIA. CASE STUDY: KANDIA CHOCOLATE

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Abstract: *In an overcrowded market every brand faces the challenge of differentiating and positioning itself in the mind of the consumer. The chocolate field is no exception, it being a highly competitive market that requires brands to have well consolidated identities and promotion strategies. Taking into account this aspects, our paper aims to analyze the positioning strategies of a Romanian chocolate brand, Kandia, in order to find out what types of strategies helped it become a successful brand. Using case study as method of research, firstly we analyzed the way Kandia positions itself on the market, its target audience, product range. Then, a brief examination of Kandia's organizational culture: values, history, mission, vision, was done, followed by an analysis of its image, relationship with the customer, stakeholders and product strategy. Our findings reveal that Kandia, positions itself as a medium price elegant and smooth chocolate that targets its audience mainly through campaigns that associate the chocolate with love and affection, having bold promotion campaigns. Kandia has a well established visual identity, it focuses on promoting its dark chocolate and its relationship with the consumers is mainly based on honesty and trust. Therefore, because of its strong identity and personality, Kandia managed to differentiate itself from other similar brands and create positive associations among people and its brand strategy could be used as frame of reference by brands who want to improve and be more successful.*

Key words: *brand; branding; success; positioning; strategy.*

1. Introduction

In the context of an era defined by fast technological development and continuous changes in the needs and desires of people, brands are in the need of adopting creative and effective strategies in order to maintain their place on the market and create a positive image among people.

Thus, while companies “operate in dynamic, turbulent environments with increased competition”(Rodríguez-Pinto, Rodríguez-Escudero and Gutiérrez-Cillán, 2008: 154) the identity of a brand, its core values, promises, and promotion strategies are key elements that help the brand differentiate and position itself in people's minds. In this regard, one way through which companies may gain competitive advantage is by emphasizing the value and quality of the products or services that they offer (Ekmekçi, 2010: 17).

While referring to the chocolate industry, brands that operate within this industry, face many challenges when it comes to winning a place in the heart and mind of the customer. People today are harder to please and their decision to purchase and remain loyal to a certain chocolate brand is influenced by the price, quality, perceived value, but also by the feelings and emotions that the product creates, by those “minutes of delight” it offers (Morris, and KPMG, 2014: 6. However, most popular chocolate brands use global strategies in order to thrive in today's overcrowded market. Thus, a global strategy includes 5 essential dimensions that brands must pay attention to: market participation, products and services, location of the activities that add value to

the brand, marketing and competitive advantages actions (Yip and Coundouriotis, 1991: 6).

Chocolate consumption dates back to the Aztec and Mayan civilization, when people started harvesting cocoa beans, and its consumption increased in the 1800's when companies were mass producing it, thus the product beginning to be more affordable (Sumathi, Akshaya, Palaniappan, Silpa and Sowmya, 2008: 140). In today's society, the term chocolate is usually used to describe branded products made of a complex of ingredients from which cocoa is the predominant one (Neilson, Pritchard, Fold and Dwiartama, 2018: 408).

Today, there are multiple chocolate brands that people can choose from but not all brands manage to be successful and stand out from the crowd. An essential element that can influence people's choices is represented by the brand itself, with which people associate the taste and quality of the products. Even more, attributes like the package and the size of the product also shape the consumer decision. Thus, because in many cases we buy chocolate to offer it as a gift, the way the package looks is important (Del Prete and Samoggia, 2020: 14).

Among the most successful chocolate brands worldwide are Cadbury, Hershey, Ferrero Rocher, Toblerone, Lindt (Neilson et. al, 1991: 408) Each of this companies diversified the type of products it offers by integrating more brands "under the same ownership" (Ramli, 2017: 9) For example, Nutella, Kinder or Tic Tac belong to the Ferrero Rocher company.

In Romania, chocolate consumption increased in the last few years, Romanians eating on average 2.2 kilograms of chocolate annually. (RoAliment, 2018) Among the most popular chocolate brands in Romania are Milka, Poiana, which belong to the Mondelez company, and Kandia, Primola or Rom, brands that are part of the Kandia Dulce company (Nițu, 2020).

Taking into account the aspects previously mentioned the purpose of the paper was to analyze the positioning strategies used by one of the most successful chocolate brands in Romania, Kandia, in order to find out what type of strategies helped it become successful. Thus, after providing a brief literature review on the concept of brand, branding, identity and image of a brand, we focused our paper on analyzing the positioning and promotion, strategies, the culture, identity and image of Kandia, a brand currently part of the portfolio of Kandia Dulce company.

2. Literature review

2.1 Brand and branding

Over time, the concept of brand has been a subject of interest for many researchers. Multiple approaches describe what is and isn't a brand, but one of the most complex definitions, states that a brand is: "a name, logo, symbol, image, design or any other combination meant to identify and distinguish the product" (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen, 2009: 425). Even more, according to Aaker (1991) a brand shows to the customers the source of the products or services offered, and can serve as protection against other people that would want to commercialize a product similar to the original one.

A brand can also be represented by a collection of tangible and intangible attributes whose role is to make the brand known, to build its identity, and the reputation of the company, the products or its services (Sammot-Bonnici, 2014: 1). However the attributes of a brand can be created with the help of the marketing mix: promotion, placement, price and product, and they can be interpreted by people in

many ways. (Wood, 2000: 664). Thus, it can be inferred that in order to create positive associations in the minds of people, a brand should define very clearly its attributes and the elements that help him differentiate. The intangible attributes are those elements that people can not touch physically and they include the brand's associations, its history, the image people hold about it and the experiences had with that brand (Keller and Lehmann, 2006: 741).

In a broader way, the brand is the one that encompasses all assets of the company, (Durmaz and Vildan, 2016: 49), thus influencing the company's success on the market. Being a complex concept, a brand consists of by many elements, such as: culture, image, relationship with customers, employees, products, communication and reputation (Ropo, 2009: 11).

Similar to the concept of brand, there are diverse ways in which branding can be defined and understood. Firstly, branding is a process. Is the process of creating a unique brand experience that the customer can enjoy while coming in touch with the product, the services, their advertising or promotion (David, 2008: 278). The practice of banding can be traced back to the time when farmers used to mark their cows with a hot iron in order to differentiate and recognize them (Ropo, 2009:8).

Branding also has the role to raise brand awareness, to determine consumers to remain loyal to the brand, and it can be an efficient method to constantly remind people why they should chose the products or services of a certain brand (Wheeler, 2013:6).

Considering that brands create associations among people, branding can be seen as an essential process that helps the brand gain competitive advantage over other brands that operate in the same industry. (Nikolopoulou, Pollali, and Samanta, 2016:2)

While approaching the subject of brand and branding, important is the concept of brand equity. Brand equity is "a set of brand assets" that are connected to the name or the logo of a brand, thus adding value to it. In this regard, brand equity refers to: brand loyalty, name awareness, the quality of the products or services as perceived by people, the associations of the brand (Aaker,1991: 27). In other words, brand equity brings value to the brand through the image, perception and feelings that people have about the brand (Shariq, 2018: 316).

Customer loyalty is very important because loyalty influences the value of a brand and brands who do not have loyal customers may be vulnerable (Aaker, 1996: 21). Thus, a challenge that a certain brand must encounter when it comes to loyalty is: to gain more customers whose decision to buy is not mainly influenced by the price of the product, to bring the committed customers closer to the brand and improve its relationship with it and to increase the number of customers who are usually willing to pay more just to use the products or services that the brand provides (Aaker, 1996:22).

Another essential aspect that must be taken into account while referring to the concept of brand is brand relevance. Sometimes, brands fail to have success on the market not because the quality of their products decreased but because the brand simply becomes irrelevant. Thus, to maintain its relevance, a brand should always update and innovate its promotion, price, and distribution strategy (Fernandes, Chaudhuri and Vidyasagar, 2017: 178).

Moreover, when applying the process of branding and creating the brand strategy, there are four elements that we must not lose sight of: the brand's structure/architecture, its positioning statement, its personality and promise made to the customer (Creative Revolution, 2017).

The positioning statement is represented by a short phrase through which the brand describes in what category wants to be placed, who are the people it targets and what benefits offers to them. Personality refers to the idea of humanizing a brand, of

thinking about it in terms of feelings and attitudes that a person may have, and the brand's promise main role is to create a connection built on trust between the brand and its customers (Creative Revolution, 2017).

Similarly, Keller (2009) states that in order to create a strong and successful brand, certain aspects must be considered. The first one is salience, or how many times do customers think about the brand and about buying its products in different types of situations that involve consumption. Then brand performance refers to the extent to which the brand manages to fulfil the needs of its customers, imagery- which highlight the extrinsic benefits of the brand. Then, judgments are important too because they reveal peoples opinion about the brand, feelings are essential because they show the real emotions of people regarding the brand. After considering all these elements, of utmost importance is brand resonance which shows how strong is the relationship of the brand with its public (Keller, 2009:143).

2.2 Brand positioning

In order to achieve success in today's crowded market, brands, companies, organizations, must focus on the changing needs of the customers and on the reality as they perceive it (Olsson and Sandru, 2006: 4).

Due to its central role in the life of a brand, positioning has gained the attention of many researchers over time. Ries and Trout (2001) describe the issue of positioning in a detailed manner, by presenting how important it is for a brand to be able to reach the mind of the consumer.

According to the authors, positioning does not mean to constantly create new and different products, names, and meanings, but to manipulate and strengthen the connections that already are in people's minds. Even more, the authors argue that, due to the wide variety of products and companies, there is a need to reconsider the brand positioning strategies so as to create the desired associations among customers (Ries, and Trout, 2001:1).

Positioning helps the brand differentiate itself and to emphasize those distinctive attributes that people recognize it for and appreciate it for. (Kapferer, 2008:175) When establishing the positioning strategy a brand has to find the answer to five questions: what benefits does the brand offer?-with reference to its promise, for who is the brand? what type of people it targets, why?- question that refers to the elements that support the benefits provided, and against whom?- question that makes the brand define its competitors (Kapferer, 2008: 175).

However, according to Janiszewska and Insch (2012) at the basis of a positioning strategy stand three types of brand positioning: functional, symbolic and experiential. The first approach focuses on rational attributes that make the brand different, the symbolic approach is concentrated on the feelings of the customers and brands who choose this positioning try to improve their image and identity. In the third approach brands take into account the experiences that people have when they come in contact with the brand (Janiszewska and Insch, 2012: 13). Thus, two other elements that are vital for a positioning strategy are the benefits that the company or the brand offers, and the relationship it has with the customers (Penttinen and Palmer, 2007: 552)

In the process of positioning, there are two stages through which a brand goes. In the first stage brands try to link or associate themselves with the most popular brands that operate in their field, and in the second stage they try to find ways to differentiate themselves from the other brands on the market (Punj and Moon 2002: 275). However, since these stages are interdependent, the success of the positioning

depends on how well the brand manages to maintain a balance between the associations it makes and the way it expresses its distinctive characteristics.

While acknowledging that regardless of its domain of activity, any brand or company has a position on the market, positioning may refer to the "recognition and visibility of what products and services mean for the customers" (Fill, 2005:375). Thus, to succeed and develop favorable relationships with the target audience, when communicating with the public, a brand must clearly present its positioning and the advantages it offers over its competitors (de Paula and Chaves, 2017: 1249).

2.3 Brand image and brand identity

Identity and image are two concepts that play an important part in creating strong and successful brands.

Identity is something established by the brand, and it comprises elements such as culture, vision, values, mission, positioning strategies (Mindrut, Manolica and Roman, 2015: 395). Through identity brands can create awareness, become more visible and communicate to the public the attributes that make it different from other brands (Wheeler, 2013:42).

Image is said to be the overall impression or perception that individuals or groups have about an organization, or a brand (Hatch and Schultz, 1997: 359). In a similar way, brand image is given by the way people react to certain brand elements that they come in contact with and that may shape their perception about the brand (Puška, Stojanović and Berbić, 2018: 39).

While studying the relationships between image and identity, Gioia, Schultz and Corley, (2000) reveal that identity is in some cases fluid, subject to change and that image can influence the identity an organization or a brand has. Thus, when there is an incongruence between how the brand desires to be perceived and how it is perceived by the public, its identity can be changed. Giving as an example the case of Shell oil company, the authors showed that when the company's actions received negative feedback from its target audience, the company produced changes in its identity by rethinking who they were and what were the things that they stood for (Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000:67).

3. Present study

Taking into account the fact an analysis of successful brands and the way they managed to maintain their place on the market is important for understanding how brands thrive in today's competitive market, our paper focuses on analyzing one of the most popular chocolate brands in Romania, Kandia. Kandia chocolate brand is part of the company Kandia Dulce. The story of Kandia Dulce begins in the 1964 when Bucharest Sugar Company was established, that in 1991, became Excelent Bucharest. In 1890 the company started to become popular and to produce chocolate tablets with milk. Excellent Bucharest took over Kandia Timisoara in 2003 and merged in 2004 becoming Kandia-Excellent. After Kandia-Excelent was taken over by Cadbury Schweppes in 2007, Cadbury was bought by Kraft, which gave Kandia the chance to adopt the name Kandia Dulce in 2010. Thus, the main factory is located today in Bucharest (Kandia Dulce, 2020).

As for Kandia, its official story began in 2003 when the most daring chocolate campaign to date was launched, "Chocolate with love". This campaign had a positive impact that revealed a provocative side of chocolate but at the same time offered mystery and uniqueness, thus helping Kandia become a popular brand in Romania.

4. Methodology

The purpose of the paper was to analyze the positioning strategies of the popular Romanian chocolate brand Kandia, in order to find out what types of strategies helped it become a successful brand. Using case study as a method of research, firstly we analyzed its positioning strategies, its culture: mission, vision, values, as well as its identity and image. In order to conduct the research, the official website of Kandia, and other articles describing Kandia's campaigns were used in order to obtain the necessary information.

The objectives of the research include identifying the main positioning strategies of Kandia, identifying its shared values, identifying the brand's personality and the way it built its identity and projected image.

5. Results and discussions

Positioning strategy

Our research revealed that Kandia tries to position itself in the mind of the consumer as a chocolate brand that offers pleasure. Considering its price, Kandia is positioned on the market as a medium price elegant, bitter and smooth chocolate. Even though the niche in which the brand operates is very crowded and competitive, Kandia managed to stand out from the crowd. The brand differentiates itself through its high percentage of cocoa even for the milk chocolate (40%) and also by being the brand that associates chocolate with love in a sensual manner through its bold campaigns.

From the perspective of the brand strategy, Kandia is part of the house of brands Kandia Dulce, that also includes Roma, Laura, Măgura. Kandia's brand modifiers are represented by: Kandia Intesne dark chocolate and orange, Kandia intense chocolate and milk, Kandia intense milk chocolate and hazelnuts, Kandia intense dark chocolate 55%, Kandia intense dark chocolate 75%, Kandia intense dark chocolate and mint, Kandia with cranberries and amaretti biscuits, Kandia with biscuits and whipped cream. Its strategy focuses on people's emotions, the chocolate is promoted as a chocolate that offers pleasure and relaxing moments.

Comparing Kandia with other brands, such as: Primola, Laura or Rom, the distinctive features of Kandia are highlighted by the way it is promoted. While Primola is being promoted as a creamy chocolate and Rom is known as a traditional Romanian chocolate, Kandia is unique due to the large amount of cocoa that it offers but also because of its refinement, fine and slow melting, and through the small size of the chocolate pieces.

Kandia's target audience is mainly represented by women that seek moments of pleasure and that want to enjoy a fine and cocoa rich chocolate in a moment of privacy.

When it comes to in store positioning, Figure 1 shows that the chocolate is positioned at the level of the consumer's eyes, and Kandia is placed next to its main competitor Heidi. Thus, this positioning can bring benefits for Kandia not only because of its fair price, but also because of its quality and taste, it can determine people to buy Kandia instead of Heidi.

Figure 1: Kandia in store positioning

Source: own source

➤ **Culture**

Culture encompasses elements such as history, mission, vision, values. When it comes to the brand's mission, Kandia wants to be "the sweet choice of Romanians every day", sending the message that every day, when in the need of something sweet, people should choose Kandia.

Kandia also tries to offer consumers qualitative, fine products that pleasantly surprise them with a strong taste of cocoa.

Even though it is a very popular brand in Romania, Kandia's vision is to become the leader of the chocolate market in Romania. This shows that the brand has high goals and constantly seeks improvement. The brand also wants to continue to provide consumers with the chocolate they need in a more creative and bold way, thus establishing with them a relationship based on trust.

The values that Kandia stands by are represented by its pride to be a Romanian brand, its agility and ability to develop and grow fast, but since it is positioned as a bold chocolate brand that offers pleasure, Kandia is also characterized by elegance, sensuality, intimacy, finesse and trust. These values are embedded in every action or campaign developed by Kandia, and they give the brand consistency.

➤ **Identity and image**

Kandia is part of one of the biggest producers of chocolate in Romania, Kandia Dulce. Its name comes from the word Candia, which also comes from the ruling Venetian family after which it was named the capital of Crete, Crete being called the kingdom of Kandia.

It is a strong chocolate brand, with a well-defined positioning strategy that is based on the existence of a high percentage of cocoa in its products. It is based on bold campaigns designed to change something in the consumer's mind, to offer pleasure, comfort and privacy.

Kandia also has a consolidated visual identity. The logo consists of the name of the brand, written on a red background. The slogan, "Kandia, fine chocolate since 1890: Intense pleasure", was adopted in 2012 and through it the brand expresses its courage to promote chocolate in a bold, elegant way that intensifies the consumers senses and gives them pleasure. The colors most used by Kandia are red and brown. Red symbolizes love and intensity, while brown symbolizes the rich and original taste of Kandia that is given by the high percentage of cocoa found in the product.

As for the the strategic intention indicated by the brand identity, in 2012 Kandia decided to rebrand itself and improve product packaging to further highlight the product's intention to provide intense pleasure. Through its current identity Kandia tries to maintain a relationship based on trust with its target audience, and the packaging design is representative for every chocolate assortment.

In regards to the image of the brand, Kandia wants to be perceived by its target audience, as a chocolate that they can buy every time they need a moment of peace, of intimacy, but also when they long for something sweet, bitter and intense in the same time.

While approaching the subject of brand associations, Kandia wants people to associate it with creativity, bold campaigns, it desires to be considered a chocolate with a special taste, suggestive packaging, good quality and refinement.

➤ **Brand loyalty**

Why should people be loyal to our brand is a question to which every brand should find an answer. When it comes to loyalty, through its actions, Kandia tries to be honest with its customers. It fairly promotes the quality of their products, and with the help of its promotion campaigns, it highlights the fact that Kandia can be the special ingredient that helps customers satisfy certain needs such as the need, to pamper yourself with a bitter-sweet chocolate, the need for affection and the need for some time alone.

Brand loyalty is an important part of brand equity, and over time, Kandia managed to develop a positive brand equity. In 2003 when this brand was officially launched and ceased to be known only by associating with the chocolate factory of the same name in Timisoara, despite the very bold and creative campaign "Chocolate with love" consumers had a positive reaction. The campaign promoted chocolate consumption as an action of self love and appreciation and after this campaign, women even started to buy chocolate in order to enjoy it quietly in their private space. The "Silk" campaign had the same effect, emphasizing the finesse and intimacy that came with Kandia products.

➤ **Brand relevance**

Relevance is a very important aspect when it comes to the success of a brand. Kandia managed to be a relevant brand in the overcrowded market of chocolate in Romania because of the taste of its product, their quality and importance given to the high percentage of cocoa in creating a delicious chocolate. The relevance of the brand is also given by its promotion campaigns, through which Kandia promoted chocolate, not necessary as a product that could be offered as a gift or consumed with friends, but as a product people could consume in order to spoil themselves, in order to experience intense feelings. Even more, Kandia is a relevant brand because it was the first brand that emphasized the importance of introducing pure cocoa butter in the recipe, in order to give chocolate a refined taste, in its 2008 campaign: "City of Chocolate".

➤ **Brand relationship**

Our research shows that, the relationship between Kandia and consumers is based on honesty, the brand always trying to be fair to consumers. Kandia clearly expressed its values and managed to establish a relationship in which consumers trust the quality of the product, and can identify with it. The benefits that Kandia offers are represented by the bitter-sweet taste of chocolate combined with fruits or nuts, a taste that intensifies their senses and gives them pleasure. Even more, another benefit

offered is practicability, Kandia developing a smaller size package, a pocket chocolate that consumers can take with them everywhere.

Communication between Kandia and consumers mainly takes place online, through its official website, and Facebook page where people can express their opinion about products, and where from time to time, Kandia organizes contests. Thanks to this type of communication, consumers can know the brand much better; they can get closer to it and thus become attached and loyal to it.

Conclusions

In today's society is becoming harder and harder for brands to maintain their place on the market and be successful. This is also true in the case of chocolate brands. Every day new products or flavors are released, new packages are designed and new campaigns are developed.

In this context, in order to thrive, create brand loyalty, awareness and positive associations among customers, brands must adopt creative branding and positioning strategies. Thus, an overview of the strategies used by some of the brands that can be considered successful can provide a better understanding of how brands should act in order to survive in a highly competitive market.

In Romania, chocolate consumption increased in the past years, and with people being harder to please, not all brands manage to be successful.

While focusing our paper on analyzing the positioning and branding strategies of one of the most successful Romanian chocolate brands, Kandia, our findings revealed that the brand constantly keeps track of the environmental changes and tries to adapt to customer's needs. The brand differentiates itself from other similar brands by highlighting in creative ways the main element that makes it different, the high percentage of cocoa in its products.

Kandia's positioning strategy is concentrated around the concept of chocolate that intensifies people's senses by offering them intense pleasure. The brand kept its relevance by diversifying over time the product's flavors and by combining increased percentages of cocoa with fruits, nuts, biscuits and whipped cream.

The way a brand establishes its identity is very important and Kandia has a very well consolidated identity, with clear mission and values, high goals and vision. Its relationship with the target audience is based on trust, Kandia always trying to be fair with its public.

Even more, through the benefits it offers: quality for a medium price, smart packaging, intense pleasure, and the campaigns that it organizes, Kandia keeps its customers loyal and creates positive associations among them. The brand communicates with people mainly on online platforms where it promotes its latest products, and gives people the chance to express their opinion and provide feedback.

Therefore, Kandia is a popular, Romanian brand that achieved success by building a strong identity, by adopting ingenious positioning and communication strategies. Kandia has the courage to promote chocolate in a different, sensual way and to associate chocolate with the pleasure and privacy of consumers.

Facing various changes, this brand is an example of a brand with well-defined positioning, culture and identity, which appeals to the needs, senses and feelings of people.

While our research provides an overview of the elements that help a brand improve and be successful, it also has some limitations. These limitations are given by the fact that the paper focused only on Romanian brands and only one powerful brand

was analyzed. Thus, a future research should take into account assessing more brands and not only from Romania, but from other countries too.

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