**MK7040 Marketing in the Digital Age and CSR**

**Report on H&M**

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# 1.0 Introduction

This report discusses the digital marketing strategies of the Swedish fast-fashion company Hennes & Mauritz AB (H&M). It is one of the largest fast-fashion retailers in the global market and shares competitive performance with other brands such as Zara and Shein. H&M maintains a market position that is competitive when compared to Zara and Shein (Apparel Resources, 2022). H&M uses outsourcing extensively in comparison to Zara and Shein, both of which have their internal vertically integrated supply chain system allowing them to maintain control over the manufacturing process (Britt, 2020). By comparison, H&M relies on outsourcing essential value-chain activities such as dyeing and sewing to supply chain partners (Britt, 2020). The company's annual revenue is $22.25 billion as of 2022(Smith, 2022). The brand value of H&M is also positive, however, the emerging competitive practices of Shein have created a market disruption where its valuation exceeds Zara and H&M combined (Cao, 2022).

Therefore, an advertisement plan would be effective in creating new engagement across different consumer groups. H&M produces clothes of different varieties ranging from menswear to womenswear and kidswear. Therefore, H&M can capitalise on the market trends by promoting fashion products that are unique and attractive to fast-fashion consumers. For instance, H&M can produce clothing that reflects the fashion worn by actors in contemporary television and film. This will allow H&M to target the adjacent consumers who are watching the show or film and will be consequently interested in experiencing the pop culture element through H&M's participation. For instance, it can market 80s-inspired fashion for a limited production run to capitalise on the popularity of Netflix's Stranger Things or HBO's Euphoria. As it will be a limited-run production, marketing must maximise its outreach to ensure the potential consumer group is targeted effectively. This is achieved through digital social media marketing which allows for targeted marketing of the consumer segments whose tastes align with television and film culture and H&M apparel. The marketing can therefore be performed across social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which are commonly used for marketing apparel to young consumers.

# 2.0 Segmentation and Targeting

## 2.1 Segmentation and targeting process

The segmentation process of a brand involves finding the details related to customer segmentation, which ensures that a standardised approach is taken for identifying the brand's target consumer group. The segmentation approach, therefore, involves determining the target consumer group profile across the four segmentation dimensions demographic, psychographic, geographic and behavioural segmentation (Beane and Ennis, 1987). Demographic segmentation is used to determine the consumer group across parameters such as age, gender, income and level of education. This forms the basic understanding of the consumer group and allows for the brand's products to be targeted accordingly. For instance, consumers within a particular budget will be targeted through more affordable product segments, whereas more affluent consumer groups will be marketed to the premium range of apparel at H&M. Similarly, fast fashion consumption is largely driven by female consumers, and H&M would therefore focus on female consumers as a whole in segmentation across different parameters.

Psychographic segmentation groups the consumers across the parameters of personal values, political beliefs and psychological characteristics such as hobbies, personality and values. The subjectivity of these traits and beliefs makes psychographic segmentation comparatively more challenging, therefore it requires digital tools to perform thorough customer profile analysis based on their digital footprints such as social media posts and public reviews. Geographic segmentation segments this consumer group further across geographical parameters, such as city-wide, state-wide or country-wide segments. This ensures that the psychographic segmentation is also aligned, as geographic factors such as urban or rural segmentation will influence the consumer profile correspondingly. Urban segmentation will consider factors such as more progressive beliefs and brand awareness, thereby creating a more accurate consumer profile based on such information. Lastly, behavioural segmentation groups customers based on their behaviour in terms of interactions with the brand. For instance, H&M will segment across spending habits, browsing habits and brand loyalty while performing this segmentation. In the contemporary digital environment, this is made easier through data analytics that creates accurate insight into individual consumers' shopping habits, thereby making the collective group segmentation more detailed (Chen, Sain and Guo, 2012).

Targeting, therefore, involves deploying marketing strategies designed to elicit engagement with the segmented group across the various segmentation dimensions such as personal beliefs, political beliefs, age, income and location. This ensures the overall value proposition is customised to ensure maximum brand response and self-association with the marketing approach deployed to the different segments.

## 2.2 Segmentation of H&M target market

H&M's primary customer segment will be found among Generation Z and young Millennial-aged female consumers across the target age group of 18-30 (Feiam, 2019). The brand awareness of these consumers is positive in associating H&M as a fast fashion market leader among rivals like Zara. Their geographical qualities indicate they are urban consumers present across universities, student dorms and workplace environments. As H&M sells fast fashion apparel at low prices, it will target income-class low to middle-income groups. The consumers will be highly consumerist in their practices, as a large number of fast fashion consumers will be wearing their apparel items only once in their life cycle. Therefore, their desire for consumption is transient and hedonistic in its value with utilitarian qualities being secondary, as the retail consumer experience acquired through fast fashion consumption is the main source of satisfaction in this context (Miller, 2013).

## 2.3 Targeting Strategy for securing outreach

A differentiated or segmented targeting marketing strategy will be used to secure the engagement of consumers in the niche that intersects with pop culture consumption through television and film and H&M as a brand. Therefore, H&M will seek to identify with the consumers that have shopping habits related to fast fashion consumption, and who also enjoy watching aforementioned pop culture media and discussing it on social media platforms. Instagram and TikTok in particular are effective for delivering targeting marketing for apparel products.

# 3.0 Positioning and Branding

## 3.1 Positioning and branding process

The positioning and branding process sees the firm create a positive brand association with the target consumer group. Positioning is important to ensure consumers resonate with the brand identity and brand image promotion in any given context. Brands use emotional marketing to create a stronger brand image for themselves, through which consumers develop stronger self-association with brands that they are exposed. This increases their purchase intention towards the brand as an emotional response in marketing is a key determinant in buyer participation and retention (Kim and Sullivan, 2019). Positioning sees the brand being assessed in terms of price and quality, where the brand image is accordingly denoted as low quality - low price, high quality - high price and other possible classifications. For H&M, the brand positioning is affordably priced with contemporary quality, as it offers the latest fashion designs at cheap prices. In this marketing context, H&M's positioning of contemporary quality aligns with contemporary television and film media such as Stranger Things or Euphoria, thereby strengthening the brand association of consumers with H&M here. This is a positive brand association which would not be possible with certain other brands with a different brand identity, such as Abercrombie and Fitch for its upscale and preppy aesthetic that is in contrast to the context discussed in this case.

## 3.2 Brand image creation and Positioning

H&M will promote its brand across young consumers who watch the aforementioned television and film media, and its brand creation in this context will be driven by the pop culture relevance of the aforementioned shows. This is an instance where collaborative marketing of two different brands creates cross-industry value where the brand partner also benefits from the marketing endeavours.

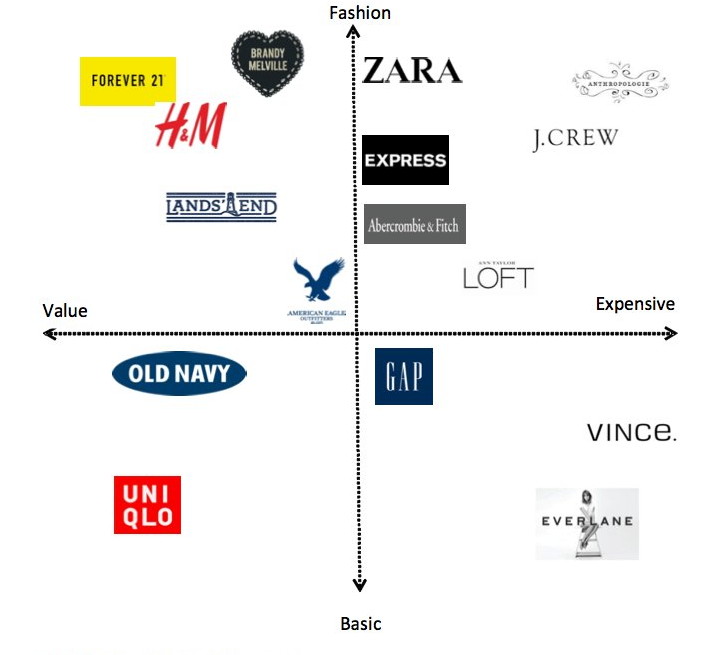
## 3.3 Needs and values satisfied by the buyers

In terms of meeting buyer needs and values through positioning, H&M secures a brand position driven by hedonistic values of consumer satisfaction that is sought through fast fashion consumption (Miller, 2013). This is multiplied by the association of the fast fashion brand H&M with the pop culture television and film media, thereby multiplying the consumer’s satisfaction as well. From a utilitarian position, the apparel items will satisfy the physiological needs of the buyers in owning comfortable and form-fitting apparel items at affordable prices. Therefore, this marketing idea will satisfy both the target segment as well as casual consumers outside of the brand segment, which ensures that sustainable consumer value is provided across all brand interactions in this position.

## 3.4 Differential positioning

A differential positioning targets different consumer groups based on this marketing idea. It targets the primary segment of consumers of H&M and contemporary television and film media. It also offers value to casual apparel consumers who may appreciate the new design and style released in association with pop culture media. Therefore, an effective differential positioning is secured by H&M here, where it maximises the consumer engagement potential through its brand.

## 3.5 Positioning map of H&M



**Figure 1: “Perceptual map of H&M”**

(Source: https://seekingalpha.com/article/4073164-should-you-buy-latest-gap-turnaround)

## 3.6 Creating brand awareness online

Firstly, social media marketing must be used to create brand awareness online. This involves marketing directly through H&M’s official page on mainstream social media platforms used by buyers from the targeted demographic. For instance, Instagram and TikTok offer the scope of influencer marketing as independent influencer marketers have established themselves owing to the relative maturity of these digital platforms. This provides ready-to-target niche segments through individual influencers, which maximises the potential of generating marketing leads and subsequent sales leads from brand awareness.

Secondly, brand awareness can be boosted through the promotion of the existing consumer base of H&M products. This strategy requires facilitating digital engagement with existing customers registered on H&M through their prior purchases or interactions with the brand. Such customers can be marketed through virtual channels such as email, which will ensure that brand promotion and awareness are performed across the brand's target consumers.

Thirdly, H&M can also approach the popular actors appearing on such television and film shows for promoting the new clothing line based on their professional work. This creates brand advocacy across several prominent avenues digitally, ranging from independent influencer marketers to the celebrities themselves.

# 4.0 Communication Strategy

## 4.1 Digital platforms used

The digital platform map shows that there are six distinct domains of digital platforms, such as payment and marketplace platforms communication and community platforms. For this marketing strategy, the digital platform of community is used, as social media platforms are characterised under this dimension (Meyer, 2019).

## 4.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the medium

**Advantages**

Firstly, the community platform of social media marketing offers the main advantage of gaining direct access to consumers across traditional barriers such as distance, time, location and context. Due to the seamless nature of the digital environment, consumers are not affronted when interacting with marketing messages and promotional campaigns. This provides the opportunity to potentially engage the entire global consumer consciousness through the single point of access represented by social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok. Therefore, economies of scale can be leveraged in digital marketing when performed through social media platforms, as it will maximise the marketing ROI.

Secondly, the advent of digital technologies allows for authentic data gathering on consumer behaviour, tastes and preferences online. This is also applicable to social media platforms such as Instagram, as it is known for collecting data on user behaviour that is shared with marketers for marketing promotional campaigns. Data analytics in this way creates a higher quality of customer segmentation which is made possible through digital marketing, and this ensures that the marketing presence will be concentrated across segmented categories of consumers for maximum engagement.

**Disadvantages**

Firstly, digital marketing through community platforms has the potential impact of participating in the consumer behaviour of younger consumers. Studies have shown that underage users on social media develop impulsive purchase habits and shorter attention spans, which makes them particularly vulnerable to effective and persuasive marketing campaigns that are accessible to everyone (Ra et al., 2018). This presents an ethical disadvantage as the marketing contents may interact with such consumers, although this can be addressed through disclaimers and the efficiency of targeted marketing that ensures only the segmented age groups are exposed to the marketing content.

Secondly, digital marketing through social media platforms must be coordinated to respect the GDPR principles of digital safety and privacy for online users (Ghosh, 2018). This is found in the UK under the 2018 Data Protection Act (Burgess, 2020), and requires the ethical performance of data gathering on consumer segmentation and other activities relevant to the marketing activities. This can be complied with through the self-regulatory principles shared across the GDPR and the Act (Ghosh, 2018).

## 4.3 Key Message Communication

Key messages create a quick association of the consumer with the value proposition of the brand's products through the use of this communication approach. For this context, H&M can design its key communication as "Become yourself" which is an actionable brand statement that speaks in a continuous tense to consumers. This promotes a visceral quality of marketing communication that is short and interesting while inspiring consumers to participate in self-expression by buying apparel items designed after their favourite fictional characters as depicted on television and film media.

## 4.4 Message appeal

A message appeal relates to the underlying content of emotional cues that engage with customers and influences their purchase intention (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996). Therefore this marketing context uses an emotional appeal that relies on a personal and social appeal to drive consumer engagement towards the brand. For instance, the personal appeal is derived from self-interest in the television and film media and H&M as a brand, whereas social appeal can be driven by showing off the new purchase on the consumer's personal social media platforms for peer approval.

## 4.5 Communication method used

The linear model of communication will be used here as it is optimal for brand promotion in this case. The marketing message will be promoted to the segmented group at large, and it suits the entertainment purpose of the marketing activities in engaging the customer. This method follows a straightforward approach to communication that is monodirectional with no scope for feedback generation.

## 4.6 Online value proposition

The online value proposition will see the collaboration of H&M with pop culture brand partners in promoting the new apparel line. This is attained by promoting the brand effectively through social media channels, which maintains a contemporary relevance of the brand identity with the target content. For the segmented consumer group, this provides them with the value of hedonistic satisfaction as the brand offers a unique lifestyle choice of wearing the same outfits as reflected in popular mainstream media. Therefore, the online value proposition unites the consumer with their favourite pop culture icons through H&M.

# 5.0 Ethical Issues

## 5.1 Triple bottom line analysis

The triple bottom framework assesses a firm’s ethical performance across the three dimensions of people, planet and profits. This relates broadly to consumers and the social community as a whole, as well as the environment and the profitability of the firm. For H&M in a broader context that includes real-world cases, the sustainability analysis can be performed across the individual dimensions of this framework.

**People**

H&M operates across emerging markets such as India as well as developed markets such as the US. Therefore its range of CSR activities across social communities is found in developing markets where such interventions are more necessary, owing to the lack of development and internal capabilities of public and private sector stakeholders. H&M actively focuses on promoting practices such as safe water drinking habits, along with hygienic and safe sanitation practices created through awareness. It also promotes education and the environment to create awareness of proper waste disposal approaches in the community, which ensures recycling practices are performed satisfactorily. Furthermore, it focuses on uplifting the community of women workers by empowering their livelihood thereby making them more independent and equal in social standing. In India, this is evidenced through H&M's participation with women's empowerment NGOs like MAMTA. In the UK, such CSR performance was found in promoting the Fair Living Wage Strategy that empowers workers to earn equitably. However, in practice, it is found that H&M has not paid equitable wages to workers in outsourced factories across places like Cambodia (Blomberg, 2018).

**Planet**

H&M has been active in reducing the footprint of non-sustainable materials from its production processes. This includes ensuring that 65% of the materials used in production are organically derived, and such measures are following the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. In the long-term H&M aims to become wholly sustainable by using recycled material only, which would position the firm in meeting the Net Zero 2050 agreement. While these are positive practices, the fact remains that H&M conveniently follows wasteful practices that harm the environment. This was identified in a Danish documentary titled Operation X which showed H&M burning 12 tonnes of usable clothes that were left unsold (Farmbrough, 2018).

**Profits**

In this dimension, H&M has been relatively consistent in earning profits for its shareholders. The first decline in quarterly sales occurred in 2017 after almost two decades of steady growth. Recent sales figures show that H&M has capitalised on the e-commerce shopping habits of fast fashion consumers to maximise its profit generation. The report also notes that such profit comes at the expense of supply chain participants such as outsourced factory workers in Cambodia, ultimately making the profitability unsustainable in the long term due to such practices (Blomberg, 2018).

## 5.2 Ethical issues of H&M

Firstly, the main ethical issue is found in the promotion of fast fashion consumption by H&M. However, this is not unique to H&M as this quality of consumerism is present across the fast fashion industry (Cerini, 2022). It relies on consumers making purchases to satisfy transient desires that are not grounded in utilitarian value-seeking perspectives. This sees brands like H&M also participate in creating limited-time offers and small batches of products, resulting in a fear-of-missing-out phenomenon that influences the purchase intention (MacAuley , 2022).

Secondly, the ethical issue of labour use is prominent across H&M's supply chain network. As a fast fashion industry company, H&M relies on keeping overheads and expenses low to maximise the profit acquired from the high volume of sales. Therefore it outsources production capabilities to partners in regions such as South East Asia where labour laws and employee unions are not as robust as in developed economies. This sees labour abuse develop across instances such as child labour, unpaid overtime work and modern slavery.

Thirdly, the unsustainability of H&M's practices is also found in its business model. By producing a large volume of new designs regularly, H&M floods the market with various apparel items along with its competitors. This leads to a vast usage of natural resources such as cotton and results in wastage when goods are unsold, or products are left unused after purchasing by the consumer. Therefore, ethical issues are found in how H&M does business and engages its customers.

## 5.3 Recommendations for addressing ethical issues

Firstly, H&M can practise slow fashion through a new focus on sustainability and durability in the long term. This will ensure that the brand image orients towards sustainable consumption practices while maintaining the current level of market performance. The unsustainable nature of the fast fashion industry makes this recommendation necessary, as H&M must become sustainable to meet the Net Zero 2050 target comfortably. A failure to do so may threaten the continuity of H&M's business past 2050, as it may be penalised for having a high level of carbon emissions across its value chain (Marteau, Chater and Garnett, 2021).

Secondly, H&M can use digital technology to mitigate supply chain labour abuse. This is found through technologies such as investing in smart factories, where better monitoring of workers can be performed to prevent on-site abuse by supervisors. H&M can also use digital technologies such as blockchain tracing, as this will allow it to gain a transparent and real-time insight into supply chain activities (Ahmed and MacCarthy, 2021). Any actions that violate H&M's supplier code of conduct can be immediately identified, thereby making outsourcing operations more sustainable as a preemptive measure.

Thirdly, H&M can invest towards collaborating with industry rivals to create a closed-loop supply chain for apparel manufacturing (Brydges, 2021). This will ensure that waste products are reused or recycled into the value-chain operations directly (Aus et al., 2021). For H&M, this will remove the carbon footprint from individual apparel items, and the compounded effect of this sustainable practice will increase H&M's ESG Risk Ratings performance in the industry.

# 6.0 Conclusion

The report has addressed the marketing and CSR performance of H&M, as a leading company in the global fast-fashion industry. The findings determined that H&M is an effective use of digital marketing strategies, as it has managed to maintain market relevance against emerging rivals such as Shein. The quality of brand association with consumers creates this resiliency for H&M against market disruption from new rivals, thereby securing the continuity of business operations at H&M. The marketing scenario is however more effective compared to CSR performance, as H&M's business model, practices and industry makes it unsustainable by default. The discussion noted how this is a widespread finding across different companies as the fast-fashion industry is inherently unsustainable. Therefore, the recommendations are aimed at aligning the business model and marketing practices with internal improvements through digital technology. For H&M, this will ensure it becomes a more ethical and effective brand that also respects various ethical standards such as the Data Protection Act in using digital marketing in its consumer segment.

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