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# The image transfer in franchise system — the conceptual approach

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## Zjawisko transferu wizerunku w systemie franchisingowym — ujęcie koncepcyjne

The aim of the paper is to present the issue of brand image transfer in relation to franchising system. In the paper, the meaning of brand knowledge and awareness by customers are described. These two factors are presented as significant tools which companies use to compete effectively in turbulent market. There is presented also a definition of brand and company image transfer as an introduction to the issue of franchising and its role in brand image transfer. The reason of conducting the study is a desire of verification of the mechanism of brand image transfer in franchising. In order to achieve the aim of the paper, the following objectives have been set: (1) to discuss the issue of brand image and customers' brand awareness and knowledge; (2) to describe the role of franchising in effective brand image transfer; (3) to show the possibilities of influence on brand image in franchising; (4) to point out the consequences (advantages and disadvantages) for both franchisor and franchisee, who decide to be a part of franchising agreement. The literature review and its analysis presented in the paper shows that the image of franchisor's brand can be transferred to a franchisee's brands and franchisee's brand image can be easily transferred to the franchisors' brand by the customers. These phenomena can be created in the awareness of customers intentionally and unintentionally. That is why the companies have to manage their brand image and cooperate if they decide to sign the franchising agreement.

**Keywords**

franchising, image, image transfer, brand image

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie zagadnienia transferu wizerunku marki w odniesieniu do systemu franchisingu. W artykule opisano znaczenie wiedzy i świadomości marki wśród klientów. Te dwa czynniki są przedstawiane jako istotne narzędzia, które firmy wykorzystują, aby skutecznie konkurować na turbulentnym rynku. Przedstawiono także definicję transferu marki i wizerunku firmy jako wstęp do zagadnienia franchisingu i jego roli w procesie transferu wizerunku marki. Celem badania było zweryfikowanie istoty mechanizmu transferu wizerunku marki w procesie franchisingu. Aby osiągnąć cel główny, sprecyzowano cele poboczne: (1) omówienie kwestii wizerunku i świadomości marki, a także wiedzy o niej wśród konsumentów; (2) zaprezentowanie roli franchisingu w skutecznym transferze wizerunku marki; (3) pokazanie możliwości wpływu na wizerunek marki poprzez franchising; (4) wskazanie konsekwencji (zalet i wad) dla franchisodawcy i franchisobiorcy, którzy decydują się na współpracę. Przegląd literatury i jej analiza pokazuje, że wizerunek marki franchisodawcy może zostać przeniesiony na markę franchisobiorcy, jak i wizerunek marki franchisobiorcy może mieć wpływ na postrzeganie marki franchisodawcy przez klientów. Zjawiska te mogą powstawać w świadomości klientów w sposób świadomy oraz niezamierzony. Dlatego firmy muszą zarządzać wizerunkiem swojej marki i stale ze sobą współpracować, jeśli decydują się kooperować w oparciu o umowę franchisingu.

**Słowa kluczowe**

franchising, wizerunek, transfer wizerunku, wizerunek marki

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## Brand image as a tool to compete on the market

The value of the brand competing on the market is based to a large extent on the knowledge about it. According to Keller, knowledge about the brand is associative, and the brand itself creates a unique association structure (Aaker & Keller, 1990, p. 27) as it is a combination of brand awareness and brand image, which was developed and coded in the consumer's perception (Keller, 1993, pp. 2–4). Brand awareness (understood as the ability of customers to identify it) refers to the strength of the brand's memory trace in the mind of the consumer and the ability to recognize it regardless of changing circumstances. An indicator of brand awareness is the frequency of its recognition and selection from among other brands. The second dimension of the brand is its image defined as a network of associations connected with the brand (Keller, 1993, p. 10; Keller & Lehmann, 2009, pp. 6–7). Associations related to the brand image were classified by Keller into three main categories (Keller, 1993, p. 7):

- (1) attributes — they refer to product features or marketing mix instruments, such as, for instance, packaging, price;
- (2) benefits — they describe the functional properties of the brand, but also refer to experience and symbolic values;
- (3) comprehensive brand evaluation — it is the result of convincing the consumer that it meets expectations and brings tangible benefits to the recipient; brand evaluation is also the result of all beliefs held about it.

The brand value is determined by the strength and number of associations connected with it. Due to the fact that man reacts not so much to the objective reality as to the set of thoughts and ideas about it (Zimbardo, 1999, p. 26), brand image is willingly used as an instrument of market influence. To put it in simple terms, this is an image in the minds of consumers, the image of identity, related to the associations kept in mind (Keller, 1993, p. 3; Hung, 2008, p. 239). Image is a kind of impression stimulated by associations connected with the brand name and its elements of visual identification, reception of advertising messages, but also consumption (Pars and Gulsel, 2011, p. 228). It is therefore a category that is subjective, abstract, synthesizing the consumer's experience with the brand, his feelings, values, beliefs and aspirations held towards it (Wiśniewska, 2012, p. 189; Kall, Kłeczek, & Sagan, 2006, p. 15; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, for: Cian, 2011, p. 165). In the literature one can also find an approach according to which brand image is a cognitive representation of the brand in the minds of the addressees of its communication (Wiśniewska,

2012; Capriotti, 1999, Da Silva & Syed Alwi, 2008, for: Hung, 2008, p. 239). Remaining with the issue of the components of the attitude, it should be emphasized that frequently the creation of the image is also based on affective elements (Wiśniewska, 2012, p. 189; Grzegorzczak, 2005, p. 150).

The image of the brand in the mind of a consumer is the result of the contact of his/her senses with the stimuli emitted as part of communication processes — primarily sound and visual (since communication media are primarily based on them), but also fragrance, sensory and taste. The perception processes when being initiated link the experiences with the meanings, schemas, and knowledge held in memory, and as a result of interpretation they create in the mind of the consumer the perception of the issues covered by messages (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006, p. 37; Keller, 1993, p. 2). It is worth recalling, however, that content reaching consumers can be both intentional and unintended from the perspective of the brand (Kozłowska, 2011, p. 314), controlled by the company or not. This means that the brand image, though it is influenced by the organization that manages it, is exposed to constant modification by factors and entities from the company's environment.

An image of an enterprise or brand often works as an effective tool for competing, and the appropriate management determines the competitive advantage obtained by enterprises. This is so because brand image is a kind of information medium for consumers, and the duration of the decision-making process is significantly shortened. Consumer attitudes towards the brand and their subsequent shopping behaviour shaped as a result of the brand's recognition and of the emotions experienced by them are undoubtedly influenced by the image. Hence, it is believed that brand image plays an important role as an instrument of competition and is increasingly used by organizations (Pars & Gulsel, 2011, pp. 227–239). The relationship between the favourable image of the brand and the consumer's loyalty to the brand is reflected in empirical research, where a high correlation between both phenomena was indicated (Hung, 2008, p. 243).

The importance of the image in the process of competing is also reflected by the fact that it is the guarantor of maintaining certain offer parameters expected by the consumer, where the subjective risk of purchasing is reduced. This phenomenon is of particular importance in areas where the product is characterized by complexity or intangible nature, as in case of the service sector (Pars & Gulsel, 2011, pp. 227–239). Moreover, the image is a reflection and symbol of certain values, and often displays

features that allow the consumer to identify with a specific social group. The consequence of this is the fact that a favourable image of the brand in a certain social group entails a positive reception of the unit possessing the product marked with this brand in an automatic way. This is so because the brand symbolizes the desired or praised values in a given social group, and thus indicates the integration of the individual with the group through assimilation. This translates into later purchase decisions, and their prediction is thus much easier.

Research conducted by Liczmańska (2008) proved that the features of brand image and the symbolic meaning that allows the consumer to express his belonging to the group largely determine the strength with which it affects consumers and their subsequent purchase decisions (Liczmańska, 2008, p. 94). Ultimately, the image enhances the experience of consumption. The consumption of products marked with a specific brand is related to the survival of specific experiences by the consumer. A positive image that is accepted and promoted in a particular group will entail expectations of experiencing positive emotions accompanying the purchase of a product and its subsequent use, provided it is marked with a brand valued by consumers. This phenomenon works in the same way in the case of an unfavourable image, where the purchase and use of a branded product with a negative image will be associated with the presence of negative emotions in consumers.

## The phenomenon of image transfer

The phenomenon of image transfer was defined in the second half of the twentieth century, after the phenomenon of transfer of meanings in marketing (McCracken, 1989, p. 310) or transfer of associations (Keller, 1993, pp. 11–12) grew in importance. In literature, the concept of image transfer is presented as a combination, and consequently the transfer of associations and symbols from one unit to another (Carrillat, Harris, & Lafferty, 2010, p. 110). This process takes place in the minds of consumers, because it is the environment of the functioning of images. Considering that brand image is a kind of brand assessment performed from the consumer's perspective, and the said assessment is closely related to the attitude towards it, image transfer takes place within the following three components: cognitive, affective and symbolic. The cognitive dimension consists of the sum of knowledge about the basic subject that includes: quality, reliability, usability, durability and uniqueness. The affective

area refers to emotions and feelings that refer to a given subject. The symbolic dimension refers to a personal attitude towards a brand or organization (Ganassali et al., 2008, p. 2). Image transfer therefore has an impact not only on the consumer's knowledge about a given brand or company, but also refers to the emotions expressed towards them (Matczyński, 2015, p. 12).

Intensity of image transfer is determined by a number of factors. The most important of them include previous experience of the consumer with a given brand/company, the type of entity in relation to which the image transfer process takes place, previous experience and emotions of customers that accompany contacts with the brand/organization (Gwinner, 2005, pp. 164–165). Many of the elements and mechanisms that appear when assigning image characteristics to one entity due to associating it with another refer to psychology issues. Therefore, brand image transfer can take the form of Pavlov's conditioned reflex. It is based on the connection of certain reactions with stimuli that were previously perceived by the individual in a neutral way, and thus did not cause any responses. The condition determining the acquisition of a new response by the individual is the systematic appearance of the stimulus under identical conditions (Speed & Thompson, 2000, pp. 226–227).

Image transfer is also accompanied by other phenomena, such as, for example, a mechanism based on schema congruity theory. According to the theory, cognitive schemas are created as a result of accumulated knowledge about particular brands or enterprises. These structures are used in the process of assessing the match between the organization and other entities related with them. If the relationship is strong and significant in the eyes of the client, the probability of transferring the image from one organization to another is also high. Yet another mechanism refers to the memory model developed by Collins and Loftus. On this basis, it is argued that the memory structure is defined as a network of constraints acting as links between different concepts. Relationships between two organizations created on the basis of associations of clients are strengthened in their awareness when relations between the two entities are noticeable. In the learning process, the consumer is able to attribute the individual features of one other organization that cooperates with it. This phenomenon is called 'spreading activation' and consists in associating simultaneously two organizations and binding them as a result of permanent and repeatable linking of one organization/brand with another company/brand (Matczyński, 2015, p. 13).

The phenomenon of combining and migrating associations may be revealed in the situation of

linking the brand with '(1) the company, (2) the country of origin, (3) the distribution channels, (4) a celebrity, or endorser of the product or service, or (5) an event' (Keller, 1993, p. 11).

For the image of product brands, the way of designing the architecture in the enterprise is of great importance, and then for the strength of transfer and the importance of the transferred features of the image. The most intense transfer can be observed in the branded house architecture, where the common name of the brand is the basic carrier of the entire message about the image for the entire offer (all products). This phenomenon, in turn, is minimized in the branded house architecture, where each product marked with a separate individual brand works for the benefit of its own image. The indirect situation is the architecture of endorsed brands, in which product brands, having their own images, are supported by the image of the main brand (producer's brands, umbrella brand, etc.) (compare: Kall & Hajdas, 2010, pp. 36–59).

The situation is similar in the case of 'the country of origin' effect. The image of the country is taken over by brands and products that are manufactured there (or whose marketing communication suggests this origin) (Figiel, 2004, p. 78; Liczmańska, 2010, p. 179). In turn, in the earlier phase, the image of the country is developed through the synthesis of knowledge and impressions concerning both geography and history, as well as economic, political and socio-cultural conditions, including stereotypes (Sikora, 2009, p. 99). Stereotypes are one of the basic communication codes in the processes of meaning transfer, facilitating the understanding of the content and evaluation of the subject of communication (Liczmańska & Wiśniewska, 2018, p. 71).

Linking a brand with a celebrity is another way in which brands adopt features of other entities. According to McCracken, supporting brands by celebrities may translate into a positive image of the brands they represent in the minds of customers (McCracken, 1989, p. 313). The model of transferring cultural meanings proposed by McCracken assumes the participation of celebrities in the brand's marketing communication process. Meanings that are transferred have their foundations in culture and are naturally attributed to various celebrities depending on their public activity. Then, through the phenomenon of 'celebrity endorsement', these meanings are transmitted in marketing communication (advertising, packaging, events, sponsoring athletes) to brands. The last phase included in the McCracken model assumes that the meanings taken over by product brands are in a way acquired and ultimately taken over by the consumer

(McCracken, 1989, p. 315) who seeks confirmation of his system of values, beliefs and aspirations in the purchased brands.

## Franchising and the phenomenon of image transfer

Franchising is one of the ways of doing business. The name (which in Polish is sometimes also spelt as 'franczyza') originates from a French word 'franche', which means 'to free', and then from the English words 'franchise, franchising' which denote a form of business cooperation in the area of distribution discussed in this article (Stec, 2017, p. 887). From the perspective of the franchisor, it is a strategy for market expansion, while from the franchisee's point of view it is a method of entering the market, gaining experience and know-how. Adams and Prichard Jones indicate that franchising can be understood in two ways. In a narrow sense, it is simply a distribution agreement extended by the possibility of the distributor using the trademark of the producer. In a broad sense, it is a contract based on which one company allows another organization to use its trade name and at the same time supports it by providing business consultancy. The franchisor supervises the activities of the other enterprise while maintaining the distinctness of both organizations (Adams & Prichard Jones, 1997, p. 463).

There can be distinguished three types of franchising on the European market. The first, referred to as production, describes the situation in which franchisees distribute products produced by the franchisor. Another type is distribution franchising, including those cases in which franchisees distribute products produced by external entities for the network. In turn, within service franchising franchisees provide services in accordance with the standards set by the franchisor (Stec, 2017, p. 887).

The major advantages of franchising from the perspective of the franchisor are revealed in the marketing and economic areas. Undoubtedly, the opportunity to use a franchisor brand that already has a certain position, a group of loyal customers and a good reputation significantly facilitates market entry and competition. The franchisee receives support in the field of running a business (know-how) in a system that has been proven and has been functioning for a long time, while maintaining economic and legal independence. Therefore, there is a possibility of saving money, because issues related to business creation, training, marketing, advertising and supplier selection are shared between the two cooperating

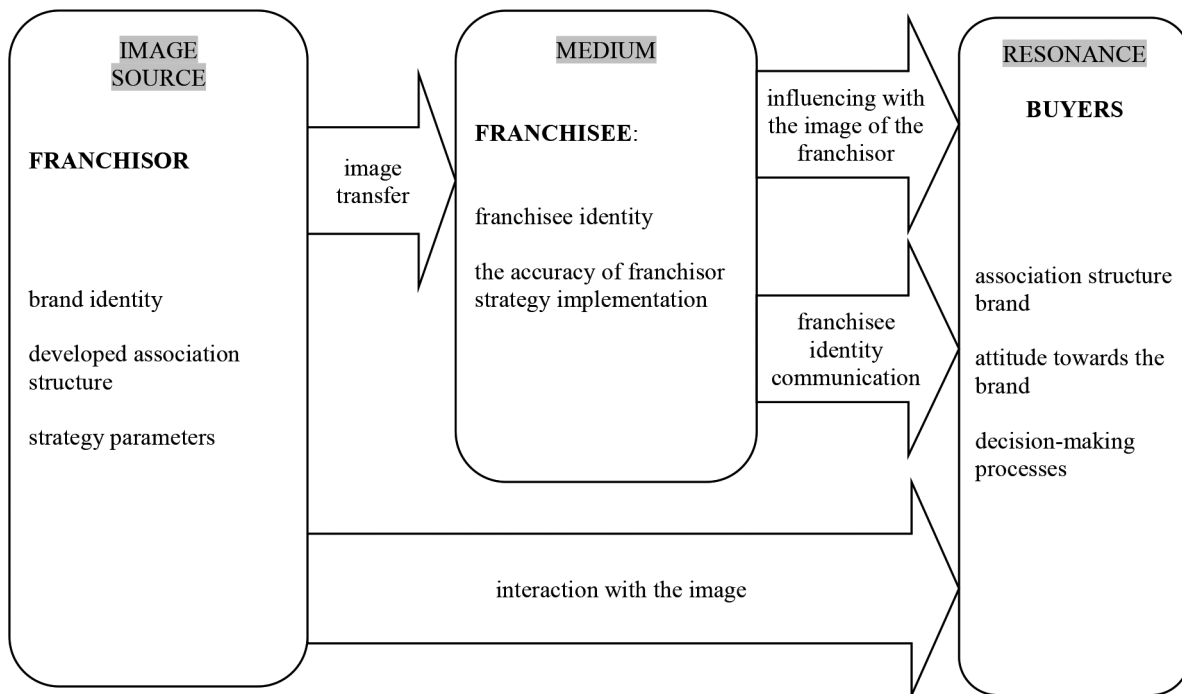
companies. Franchising seems to be a more certain way of running a business than starting one's own start-up, and the risk of bankruptcy is lower in this case (Kolesova, 2015, p. 478). In turn, the franchisor primarily develops his brand by winning the market both in geographical and marketing categories (image of a large network company, increase in brand awareness). Bolecki emphasizes, however, that the franchisor is exposed to the risk resulting from potential insubordination of partners that may affect his reputation (Bolecki, 2013, p. 11).

In the franchise system, the brand owner allows the brand name to be used by the cooperating parties under the terms of the franchise agreement. The brand's image (its standardization within the network) is one of the advantages of franchising (Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, López-Sánchez, & Minguela-Rata, 2014, pp. 831–832, Peterson & Dant, 1990, p. 47). Franchising is based on the so-called brand resonance phenomenon, which is strengthening the bonds with clients through the strength of the franchisor brand, including the clients' trust towards the franchisor brand

are extremely valuable because they allow one to minimize the cognitive effort that is related to the selection of the offer (Falkowski & Tyszka, 2006, p. 177). The association structure of the brand allows the buyer to systematize incoming information and minimize the risk related to making purchase decisions (Aaker & Keller, 1990, pp. 27–28).

The owner of the brand agrees that the franchisees will use the image created by him as a tool to compete for clients during the term of the contract. In addition to brand recognition, the transfer will be subject to such image features as market experience and level of credibility, but also the quality of the offer, the attitude towards the customer and the environment (including environmental issues), new technologies. Maintaining these brand image features in this situation depends not only on its owner, but also on franchisees with whom clients have direct contact and whose identity characteristics are communicated to customers in parallel with the image of the franchisor, as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Franchising and perception of the franchisor's brand image**



Source: author's own elaboration.

(Badrinarayanan, Suh, & Kim, 2016, p. 3943; Keller, 2012, pp. 186–187). Buyers prefer to buy products that they already know something about and which they trust. Knowledge and experience

In accordance with the considerations presented above, the value of the brand results from the consumer's knowledge about it that is held in the consumer's memory, from a certain assigned

association structure composed of the assessment of specific features. According to Keller's concept, the brand is an association structure stored in the human mind. As a result, associations related to the brand, image, and reputation are also transferred to other offers bearing the same brand. The image of the brand is built through constant communication between the brand and the environment and the acquisition of experience by customers (Kall, Kłeczek, & Sagan, 2006, pp. 32, 192). When communicating with the market, the franchisor creates his image. The marketing strategy parameters set by him result in the creation of a specific association structure for his brand. The effectiveness of transferring the franchisor's brand image to the franchisee results from the fact that (referring to the previously presented concepts of the transfer of meanings, associations and image) features of a well-known brand are more likely to be transferred to a less known brand. The image features acquired in the business context by the franchisor brand are then transferred to franchisees through the use of the same brand name. At the same time, the buyer is exposed to the franchisee's identity features and links them with the brand image that the franchisee uses. The image of the franchisor, going through the medium of the franchisee, is therefore modified. The image gap between the transferred image and the image affecting the market through the franchisee becomes smaller when the level of standardization and strategy control within the network keeps increasing. The franchisor's strong brand will be characterized by a strong resonance that will diminish the impact of the franchisee's identity traits, while the resonance of weaker brands may be in the shadow of the franchisee's identity traits, which in turn will modify the association structure, buyers' attitude and purchasing decisions.

In the service sectors and B2B sectors in which we deal with the direct contact of the company's employees with the client, the franchisor's brand image is affected by the standard of processes carried out by franchisees. Hence, to standardize the brand image, most franchisors put a lot of effort into educating franchisees about the value of their brand and good practices in providing these values (building customer relationships, quality assurance, stability, ethics — expert's note) with the guidelines for the use of the logo, marking and advertising (Pardo-del-Val et al., 2014, pp. 829–830). By maintaining uniformity, customers get a consistent picture about the company (network) and expect the same product or service, regardless of the branch. Standardization within the franchise network is used to ensure the uniformity of the

image, to attribute image features to each branch signed by the franchisor brand, assuming the role of the endorser brand and the master brand, which fulfils the franchisees' guarantee functions towards their customers (a guarantee of quality and service standards that are already known to clients) (compare: Kall & Hajdas, 2010, pp. 23–24).

It can also be assumed that the strength of the franchisor brand will be a key determinant of the perception of the brand image and its association structure. The customer reviews the current shopping experience. Depending on how strong the brand is and how long its image lasts in the consumer's awareness, the current experience will affect the image of the franchisee as one of the entities in the network or the entire brand. It can also be assumed that the longer a franchise agreement lasts, the more the features of the franchise association structure take over the characteristics created by the franchisee.

Keller's research has evidenced that the lower the quality of the product/services, the more negative associations with the brand are included in the association structure. Therefore, if the franchisee fails to meet the quality standards, he will need to bear the consequences of attributing to the franchisor's brand the features that make them dissatisfied. Such features may be related to timeliness, service quality, price-to-quality ratio, service level, professionalism, offer width, assistance and support, availability, depreciation of the customer's image.

Referring to scientific research carried out by Falkowski and Woźnica-Kowalewska, the association structure is disturbed when a factor generates negative associations related to a given brand or removes positive associations. An example of such a factor may be comparative advertising (Falkowski & Woźnica-Kowalewska, 2012, p. 203) or black PR. As was found by the research carried out by Falkowski and Woźnica-Kowalewska (2012) or by Keller and Aaker (Aaker & Keller, 1990, p. 28), if the franchisee offers services at a lower quality level, then he creates conditions for infringement of the association structure of the franchisee's brand. The consequence of violating the association structure is the change in reputation and image (Brown & Dacin, 1997, pp. 69–70). This means that under the franchise system image transfer should be considered bi-directionally, since the franchisees' actions under the franchisor's brand affect the association structure and image of that brand. A stronger brand, a higher level of strategy standardization and control procedures reduce the risk of modifying the image of the franchisee, while less known brands that leave franchisees

greater freedom in marketing activities should face the risk of changes in brand perception among their customers.

## Summary

The considerations on the essence of brand image transfer in the context of conducting franchise activities presented in the article clearly prove that there is a reciprocal dependence in the transfer of the brand image in the case of franchising, both from the franchisor and franchisee perspective. As the empirical studies referred to in the article show, depending on the strength of the brand image as seen by the customer, the image of the brand in his awareness will be equally intense. This has a direct impact in the perspective of transferring the image from one organization to another that represents the same brand. The failure to meet the standards by one of the business partners may result in attributing negative traits and associations to the brand in general (Kall, Kleczek, & Sagan, 2006, pp. 32, 192; Pardo-del-Val et al., 2014, pp. 829–830; Falkowski & Woźnica-Kowalewska, 2012, p. 203). The transfer of image features and brand resonance is therefore particularly desirable when the associations and emotions accompanying the customer in relation to

the brand are positive and evoke only pleasant feelings, as a result of which the probability of choosing the services and goods of the producer increases. This situation has positive consequences not only from the perspective of the franchisor but also from the perspective of the franchisee.

An important threat to the franchisor is the risk of modifying the image and association structure of the brand, mainly due to the existence of entities with a separate identity from the franchisor under the brand name. In this case, the attention is paid to the appropriate preparation and education of the franchisee regarding the image and positive perception of the brand by the clients. The power of the franchisor's brand thus impacts the degree of franchisee's influence on the brand, and the relationship between the two organizations is characterized by high intensity.

Managing the image of the brand and keeping it at an appropriate and positive level from the client's perspective depends not only on the franchisor, but also on the franchisee. Ensuring a competitive advantage using the brand image cannot be ensured if both sides do not make efforts to ensure an adequate, high level of customer satisfaction with the use of products bearing a particular brand. Only in this situation is it possible that the image can be used as a tool to compete in the fight for the client.

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## Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne poleca



Społeczność wokół marki wzbudza zainteresowanie podmiotów rynkowych. Geneza powstania tej formy społeczności sięga czasów, kiedy to lokalnie funkcjonujące społeczności inspirowały się wzajemnie do podejmowania decyzji zakupowych. Dziś członkowie grupy gromadzącej się wokół marki dzielą się między sobą informacjami o marce, inspirują się jej symboliką, przesłaniem, misją. Kreuje to w efekcie lojalność klientów do marki.

W prezentowanej książce została opisana społeczność wokół marki, mechanizm jej powstawania i korzyści, jakie z niej czerpią poszczególne podmioty rynkowe. Na podstawie badań przeprowadzonych wśród fanów Legii Warszawa pokazane zostały niuanse kreowania lojalności wobec marki w odniesieniu do rynku sportowego.

Adresatami publikacji są wszyscy czytelnicy zainteresowani tematyką marki, zwłaszcza menedżerowie oraz pracownicy uczestniczący w budowaniu strategii marki, osoby z agencji reklamowych, badawczych oraz studenci marketingu uczelni ekonomicznych.

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