

THE DEVELOPMENT AND POSITIONING OF THE ZARAZA BRAND

Călin Gurău

Marketing Department, Montpellier Business School, Montpellier, France

c.gurau@montpellier-bs.com

Abstract: *Using a case study approach, this paper investigates the advertising and promotion campaign applied to develop and position the brand of distilled wine Zaraza, on the Romanian market of alcoholic beverages. The literature review is centred on the concept of brand identification and on the process of consumer-brand relationship. The brand personality can facilitate the development and the manifestation of a social identity, helping individuals to identify as members of a group. This process is highly desirable especially when launching a new brand or re-branding an existing product, resulting in an instant segmentation of the market, as well as a clear positioning of the new brand. The methodology collected and analysed both secondary and primary data, which were combined using triangulation. Primary data was collected through a series of face-to-face semi-structured interviews, lasting between 16 and 20 minutes, with 25 consumers and 10 distribution personnel. The discussion themes were centred on the effect of the advertising campaign for the Zaraza brand in terms of brand awareness, purchase intention, and value perception. In addition, in the case of customers we also investigated the process of developing an in-group social identity of the targeted group of customers, and, in the case of distributors, on the specific challenges raised by the innovative promotion method used for selling the Zaraza products. The analysis outline the innovative approach of the promotional campaign, characterized by a direct, almost brutal definition of the brand social identity, and by the association of fiction books and alcoholic beverages during three periods of product promotion. The discussion of the main findings is complemented by a presentation and interpretation of several verbatim citations of the answers obtained during the interview, regarding the Zaraza brand name, the adverts used in the promotional campaign, and the organization of the promotion event. The paper makes an original contribution to the literature regarding brand personality, brand-customer relationship, and the process of social identification, providing an interesting illustration of how to creatively develop and implement a successful promotional campaign for launching a new brand in a competitive market.*

Keywords: Innovative advertising and promotion; distilled wine; Zaraza brand; Romanian market.

JEL classification: M37

1. Introduction

Alcoholic drinks represent a complex combination of tangible and intangible elements, in which symbolic elements play an essential role in the customers' perception of value. The increased turbulence of international markets, determined by globalization, aggressive new entrants, and a change in the patterns of consumption have created a need for continuous and effective innovation, in order to redefine the value proposition of the offered product, and thus, to increase its market attractiveness.

In this paper we present an innovative branding strategy realized for the Romanian distilled wine Zaraza, using a case study approach. This qualitative perspective is necessary considering the rich cultural connotations of the proposed brand name, as well as the complex brand positioning, using as communication platform a series of short adverts, that combine brand communication with a rather exotic form of commercial

promotion – the association of the marketed product with free gifts consisting in high-quality books from the universal literature.

The paper is structured as follows. After presenting a literature review focused on various categories of innovation in the alcoholic drinks' industry, and the importance of brand strategy for the value perception of the marketed product, we provide a more detailed analysis of the promotional tools used in brand development and repositioning campaigns. The methodology section provides a clear description of the methods applied to collect and analyse secondary and primary data, and to combine various information - using triangulation, into a coherent case study regarding the original advertising campaign of the Zaraza brand. The case study is then presented, centring on three advertising clips that present an innovative approach in communicating the values associated with, and promoting, the Zaraza brand. The following section of discussion provides an analysis of the main elements of this campaign, in the specific context of the Romanian market. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings, with a presentation of the main research limitations, and with propositions for further research.

2. Literature review

The personality of brands represents an important success factor for the commercialized product. However, the relationship between customers' personality and the personality of brands differs in relation to various types of products or services (Lannon, 1993). For example, "self-expressive categories such as alcoholic drinks, perfumes, cigarettes, certain clothing and some toiletries are 'badges' for displaying an aspect of personality (e.g., "I choose this under these circumstances to say this about myself or how I wish you to see me" or "I choose this because it expresses the way I feel even though others may not know") (Lannon, 1993: 146). On the other hand, Fournier (1998) defines the brand as a relational partner highlighting that consumer-brand relationships are a source of self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-identity for consumers, triggered by brand identification.

According to Lin and Sung (2014), brand identification is a social construction that involves the integration of perceived brand identity (or brand image) into self-identity. This phenomenon occurs when a consumer has a consistently positive experience with a brand and finds a similarity in their personality and the brand's image (Sutikno, 2011). Once this brand identification takes place, the brand becomes a representation of the consumer's self-concept, which leads to a strong attachment to the symbolic brand, as well as its associated products (Jones and Runyan, 2013).

The brand personality can also facilitate the development and the manifestation of a social identity – helping individuals to identify as members of a group (McLeod, 2008). As individuals, we are usually attracted to people that have similar socio-demographic and behavioural profile. The brand personality can thus have a coagulating effect at social level, creating an in-group culture – when members of a group use the brand as a symbol of their social identity, but also a separating effect, as the created group will use brand symbols to differentiate themselves from other people, who do not share the same values. Once a person defines himself/herself as a part of a group, he or she tends to discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image (McLeod, 2008). The modern social structure facilitates the coexistence of multiple social roles and a greater fluidity of self-identity, making brands attractive as sources of identity stability (Jones and Runyan, 2013).

The development, positioning and maintenance of a brand in the alcoholic beverage market, represents, as for any other consumer goods, a large investment of time, effort, knowledge and financial resources. The market it is highly competitive, requiring the participating companies to develop and launch effective communication campaigns in order to increase the brand awareness and attractiveness among the targeted customers

(ICAP, 2002). Because of the direct link made by some academic studies between alcohol advertising and the consumption of beverages by young customers, many countries in European Union have imposed various restrictions on alcohol advertising – for example, in Romania, which represents the national context in which the Zaraza brand was developed and promoted, there are specific advertising restrictions in terms of location, time and media channel (Anderson, 2007).

3. Research methodology

This section provides a clear explanation of the process of collecting and analysing secondary and primary data, in order to achieve a relevant and valid description and interpretation of the defined research topic. Considering the unicity of the phenomenon under investigation – a specific advertising campaign launched in order to develop and position a new brand on the Romanian market of alcoholic beverages, we decided to apply a case study methodology which involves the following stages

a. secondary data collection regarding the specific context of the Romanian market, the producer of the Zaraza distilled wine and its strategic approach, as well as the specificities of the advertising campaign launched. The analysis and interpretation of this data allowed a good understanding of the campaign context, and helped us to identify the gaps that had to be filled through primary data collection;

b. the specific characteristics of the advertising campaign of the Zaraza brand have been identified and interpreted by analysing three video adverts;

c. finally, to understand the effect of the advertising campaign on the market, we also realized a series of face-to-face semi-structured interviews, lasting between 16 and 20 minutes, with 25 consumers and 10 distribution personnel. The discussion themes were centred on the effect of the advertising campaign for the Zaraza brand in terms of brand awareness, purchase intention, and value perception. In addition, in the case of customers we also investigated the process of developing an in-group social identity of the targeted group of customers, and, in the case of distributors, on the specific challenges raised by the innovative promotion method used for selling the Zaraza products. The interviews have been recorded with the permission of the respondents, and then transcribed and coded using axial coding techniques. The first level of coding involved the specific profile of the respondents (customers versus distributors; but also active consumers of the Zaraza brand versus non-consumers of the Zaraza brand), while the second level of coding developed the main themes of the advertising campaign: the depiction of the product and of the brand, the connotation of the brand name, the narrative of the three adverts, the targeted market segment and its characteristics, social identity formation, promotional techniques and logistic problems.

These various sources of data have been analysed and combined using a triangulation approach, which provides a complex perspective of the events under study.

4. Case study

Murfatlar is one of the oldest and best known Romanian wine producers. Traditionally, its product portfolio included several varieties of wine, but also distilled wine products, which are called in Romanian “vinars”. However, the differentiation between these two categories of products was not fully realized at brand level until the end of 2005, as before both were sold under the generic name of the producer: Murfatlar. The product – an amber-coloured liquid containing 18% of alcohol – is presented in bottles of 0.7 litres, being declined in several alternatives depending on the age of the distilled wine: 3, 5 or 7 years aged in oak barrels, age which is represented symbolically by the number of stars on the product label.

The first element of differentiation was the name. The new brand Zaraza, on the one

hand, differentiated the distilled wine products from the other products of the company, and, on the other hand, was carefully chosen to convey a specific image of nostalgia, exoticism, attraction and quality.

The design of the bottle represented another visual element of the brand. The producers chose a transparent bottle – to enhance the aesthetic value of the amber-coloured alcohol drink, with a beautiful curved shape, that reminds customers the legend of the beautiful gypsy girl Zaraza.

Romania represents an important market for alcoholic beverages, with an annual equivalent of pure alcohol consumption of 14.4 litres – representing the fifth highest consumption per capita in the world (Chitu, 2014). Because of the low spending power of many Romanian consumers, the market is highly competitive on the cheap/low quality beverages segment, leaving some available spots for the new brands at the middle and high end of the quality scale. Murfatlar decided to position the brand Zaraza at the middle-high end of the market in terms of quality and price – in direct competition to the existing brands of distilled wine already present on the Romanian Market: Brancoveanu, Alexandrion, Miorita, Jidvei.

The analysis of secondary and primary data allowed the effective decryption of all the symbols and meanings used in the Zaraza branding campaign. Already, the name Zaraza has specific connotation for the Romanian people. Zaraza was the name of a beautiful gypsy girl – meaning “the wonderful” in the roma language, who charmed many important rich men and artists during the Second World War period in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. There is, however, controversy regarding the existence of a real woman with this name, or if it is only a legend created by artists. This exotic denomination suggests seduction and exotic beauty, but also a nostalgic longing after past times.

The adverts are constructed around a direct statement, in which the presenter of the wine – personified by a deep, grave voice suggesting good taste and seriousness – declares that his message is addressed to the cultural/intellectual elite of the Romanian market, who knows how to appreciate equally a quality wine and a good book. The relation developed with the customer is based on respect and consideration, ‘respect’ being a word repeated several times during the promotional message, and which connects the target audience, the wine, and the gift proposed by the producer: “If you pronounce the word ‘respect’ you should also show respect” outlined Raluca Feher, from Cap Advertising agency.

The campaign presented an innovative promotional offer, the acquisition of a package of two bottles of Zaraza distilled wine being associated with a free book from the classical universal literature. The selection of the titles was made on the basis of two criteria – to be considered ‘a good book’ and ‘to be easy to read’ – which avoids dry intellectualism but suggests sensitivity and accessibility (Manea, 2007). Thus, the promotion included three different books, during three specific promotion periods - *The Big Gatsby* by Scott Fitzgerald, *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, and *Three in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome, each of these books being introduced by a specific advertising video. In addition to these three videos, the campaign included a fourth video which explicitly presented and described the product portfolio commercialized under the Zaraza brand.

This campaign has to be evaluated from the point of view of its main goal, which, in our opinion, was to successfully launch and position the new Zaraza brand on the Romanian wine distilled market. It can also be considered a re-branding campaign.

The combination of clear brand positioning and social identity, high quality products, advertising creativity and innovative promotion resulted in the social and commercial success of the product. Many consumers declared their positive appreciation of the adverts, the advertising agencies responsible to creating and implementing the campaign - Cap and Next Advertising - won a Effie Silver Award in 2007 for this campaign, and the sales of the products have significantly increased year by year: 3.1 million euros in 2006, 4.2 million euros in 2007, and 5.8 million euros in 2008 (Fixup, 2010).

5. Discussion

The analysis of various perspectives presented in this study outlines not only the innovativeness of this approach but also its effectiveness – many customers loved the advert, however, the main condition for this positive connection to the brand was their socio-demographic and cultural characteristics, as they were members of the market segment specifically-targeted by the promotional campaign. Its effectiveness is, in our opinion, the result of a combination of factors that have been synthesized in an appealing brand identity associated with the promoted product.

The main element contributing to the success of the brand, was the focus of the advertising campaign on the “true gentlemen from Romania”, characterized by a high level of culture, refined tastes, and ethical principles. The message diffused in the adverts outlines that the brand is not for people attracted by cheap promotions, who aggressively display their social status of ‘nouveau riches’, but lack culture and sensibility. The promotion advertised for the Zaraza brand included free book offerings, for acquiring a package of two bottles of the Zaraza distilled wine.

As Raluca Feher from the advertising agency Cap declares: "Zaraza is the first brand which had the courage to upset a certain category of population, criticizing imposture, stupidity and kitsch, by publicly declaring that it shares nothing with the false Romanian gentlemen". Although the statements expressed in the adverts had potentially a negative impact on a certain category of population – the ignorant ‘nouveau riches’, it made no damage for the promoted product, since the choice of these customers was not primarily for the type of drinks sold under the Zaraza brand, which were either too sophisticated or too unknown to be selected – as these people preferred strong or highly-expensive foreign alcohol beverages, to display their social success and spending power. On the other hand the message targeted a relatively large category of population – old-style gentlemen who are equally capable to enjoy a good book and a good, refined drink, but who do not enjoy a privileged social position in the present-day Romania, but precisely because their value system prevents them to compromise their taste and behaviour.

The message served as a strong base for developing from the very beginning a strong social identity of the brand – as it presented both the characteristics of the in-group, as well as criticizing the out-groups. In addition, the name Zaraza made a strong association with a ‘golden’ past, nostalgia and love intrigues, but also with high-quality and reliability.

The association of culture (i.e. books) and alcoholic beverages is unexpected in a promotional campaign, but a close examination of the selected books show a good fit between their style and a good distilled wine, especially when associated as favourite past times of ‘real gentlemen’. Finally, the touch of irony included in the adverts regarding the lack of taste for the ‘nouveau riches’ reinforced the veracity of the message, as this type of persons is easily identifiable in the present-day Romanian society.

6. Verbatim citations and their interpretation

To provide a first-hand proof of customers’ and distributors’ opinions regarding the attractiveness of the Zaraza brand and the fit of the promotional campaign, we present in this section several verbatim collected from the face-to-face interviews, followed by a brief interpretation. The verbatim are presented categorized in relation to the main issues investigated in this study.

6.1. The name Zaraza

“In my opinion, the name is well-chosen, because has exotic connotations linked to Romanian’s past. In addition, it is said that Zaraza was a real woman of great beauty, and there is also a famous song about her, which provides many different opportunities for the producer to associate this name with various concepts and develop a rich narrative with symbolic references” (Customer, male, 37 years old).

“The name is important because it represents the distinctive feature of the brand helping with product identification. I like this name, but it is a shame that the producer did not find a way to include also the traditional name Murfatlar – which represents a recognized symbol of traditional quality” (Customer, male, 55 years old).

“Zaraza has the advantage of being both original and rich in historical references. After the adverts were broadcast on TV, customers had not difficulty to find the brand on the shop’s shelves” (Distributor, female, 29 years old).

Most of the interviewed people had a positive feeling about the name Zaraza, although a several customers did not know what Zaraza means, considering that it is only the name of the producer, or the locality/cave in which the drink is processed.

6.2. The adverts

“I appreciated the message of the advertising videos – they were at the same time ironic and respectful. But most importantly, I felt that I can empathize with the presenter – as I am equally annoyed and embarrassed by ignorant, rude people; and, at the same time, I try to keep my self-respect through a civilized behaviour and cultural choices” (Customer, female, 44 years old).

“I don’t like the voice of the person in the adverts – I found it superior and offensive. It is like he’s saying – it is only me who can decide who’s stupid and who’s intelligent. But appreciating a good alcoholic drink is not necessarily linked to the level of culture of the customer. So, personally, I was shocked and disappointed by their insinuations – I think that the message is wrong, as it alienates an important number of customers” (Customer, male, 26 years old).

“The adverts are so true – there is no respect left in today’s society. Maybe because of this so many people appreciate it – they feel the need to be told that they count, even if they do not have a lot of money, that they are sensitive human beings that have a value in the society” (Customer, male, 63 years old).

“I like the adverts because they are so different, but I do not intend to buy the product. I do not consumer distilled wine, but, who knows, in the future ... In any case, I will remember the Zaraza brand name” (Customer, male, 31 years old).

The vast majority of the interviewed people liked the advert and they were either amused and/or reassured by the message. Most importantly, many of them felt a strong connection with the values presented in the advert, specific for the true “Romanian” gentlemen, which is a sign that the message touch a sensitive topic in the Romanian society and in the minds of many customers.

6.3. The promotion

“It is rather weird to associate these kind of books with distilled wine – I would better understand if the book was about cocktail recipes, or about food that match the drink, but fiction books ... However, it might work, if people see the adverts, because the message provides meaning to this strange combination. I can imagine people who buy the beverages for the book, and then taste the distilled wine and they like it ...” (Customer, male, 46 years old).

“I like this association, it reminds me of the communist period, when the libraries made packs in which they combined one or two good books, with one or two others that nobody wanted to buy really... However, it is not the same situation, because the Zaraza drink seems to be of good quality, although a little expensive... Even if you buy the drinks for

the book, you can than give the bottles as a gift to somebody else...” (Customer, male, 48 years old).

“In the shop we had a few hours of panic, because after the adverts were broadcast, many customers came and asked specifically for this promotion. And we did not know how to organize the distribution of the books... But somebody had the idea to put a small stack near each cashier, and, from that moment on, everything went smoothly” (Distributor, female, 34 years old).

The interviewed people outlined that a promotion combining fiction books and alcoholic drinks was strange and unexpected, but that the message diffused during the advertising clarified this association, linking it with the type of activities enjoyed by the targeted customer group. After the first moment of surprise, the customers accepted the proposed narrative, and the originality of the promotion acted as a powerful reminder of the brand name. On the other hand, distributors confessed that they experienced some minor problems with the logistic organization of the promotion, but these problems were solved by founding solutions adapted to each retail outlet. The fact that the offered books were not large in volume or number of pages significantly helped to limit these problems, facilitating their manipulation.

The capacity of each retail shop to organize the logistics of the promotion also made a big difference between various outlets. However, as the instructions were clear, and the whole operation was simplified to the maximum, even the retailers that encountered initial difficulties were able to learn quickly from their mistakes and eliminate the existing errors. Overall the feeling of the interviewed people regarding this promotion campaign was positive.

7. Concluding remarks

Using a case study methodology, this paper explores and interprets the development and positioning of a new brand of alcoholic beverages in Romania, which is characterized by an innovative approach. The direct, almost brutal definition of the brand social identity and the association of fiction books with alcoholic beverages were unexpected, but proved to be successful, as it resulted in instantaneous brand awareness and attractiveness.

This research has a limited application, since any advertising campaign is highly dependent on the market context, type of product and characteristics of the market segment that is targeted. However, the important lesson is that a creative method of communication that can organically link these three elements can provide quick and lasting success to the promoted brand.

This research can be further developed by making a comparison between the advertising and promotional techniques used by other concurrent brands on the Romanian distilled market, and by analysing their positioning in relation to the market success. On the other hand, this comparison can also be extended to other similar alcoholic beverages, in other countries, in order to evidence the impact of the market context and culture on the design and implementation of advertising campaigns.

References

- Anderson, P. (2007) *The impact of Alcohol Advertising. ELSA project report on the evidence to strengthen regulation to protect young people*, Utrecht, The Netherlands: National Foundation for Alcohol Prevention.
- Carah, N., Brodmerkel, S. and Hernandez, L. (2014) “Brands and sociality. Alcohol branding, drinking culture and Facebook”, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 259-275.
- Chitu, M. (2014) “România, în top 5 mondial la consumul de alcool. Cine se află pe primul loc”, *Gandul*, May 13, [Online] Available: [http://www.gandul.info/magazin/romania-in-top-](http://www.gandul.info/magazin/romania-in-top-5)

- 5-mondial-la-consumul-de-alcool-cine-se-afla-pe-primul-loc-12622982 [23 November 2014].
- Fixup (2010) "O Zaraza, doua zaraze !", *Fixup*, May 2, [Online], Available: <http://www.fixup.ro/2010/05/02/o-zaraza-doua-zaraze/> [22 November 2014].
- Fournier, S. (1998) "Consumers and their brands. Developing relationship theory in consumer research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 343-373.
- ICAP (2002) "Industry views on beverage alcohol advertising and marketing, with special reference to young people", Paper prepared for the World Health Organization by the International Center for Alcohol Policies on behalf of its sponsors, [Online] Available: http://www.icap.org/portals/0/download/all_pdfs/Other_Publications/WHO_paper_annexed.pdf [17 November 2014].
- Jones, R.P. and Runyan, R.C. (2013) "Brand experience and brand implications in a multi-channel setting", *The International Review Of Retail, Distribution And Consumer Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 265-290.
- Lannon, J. (1993) Asking the right questions: What do people do with advertising?, in Aaker, D. A. and Biel, L.A. (Eds.), *Equity and Advertising: Advertising's Role in Building Strong Brands* (pp. 143-162) Hillsdale, N.J., Lawrence Erlbaum,.
- Lin, J.-S. and Sung, Y. (2014) "Nothing can tear us apart: The effect of brand identity fusion in consumer-brand relationships", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 54-69.
- Manea, M. (2007) "Next Advertising si Cap ii invita pe adevaratii domni la lectura", *IQAds*, July 27, [Online] Available: <http://www.iqads.ro/articol/7269/next-advertising-si-cap-ii-invita-pe-adevaratii-domni-la-lectura> [11 November 2014].
- McLeod, S. (2008) Social identity theory, [Online] Available: <http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html> [11 April 2014].
- Sutikno, B. (2011) "Does consumers' brand identification matter: The mediating roles of brand loyalty", *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 319-331.