

Perception of apparel quality in the aspect of young women' buying behaviors. Part 1

Key words: quality, apparel, apparel brand, consumer, quality differentiators.
Słowa kluczowe: jakość, odzież, marka odzieży, konsument, wyróżniki jakości.

1. Introduction

To determine the quality of apparel products it is necessary to establish a set of product features and define the requirements for assessing these features. This approach is consistent with the definition specified in PN-EN ISO 9000:2015, according to it the adjective of quality refers to “the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics of an object fulfills a set of requirements” [1]. However, it should be noted that this definition specifies neither types nor sources of requirements or essential characteristics for product quality assessment. It allows such characteristics to be defined arbitrarily so that they are adequate to the type and use of products, and meet expectations of a subject interested in possession of a product. When taking into account that apparel products are manufactured mainly to meet the needs and expectation of individual consumers, from a pragmatic point of view it is justified to understanding the requirements and characteristics significant to consumers. A number of subject studies can be found in the literature. They indicate that there is no a single model of quality assessment by consumers [2, 3]. Perceived quality depends on many factors. Consumers

often put various requirements for a product itself due to cultural differences and economic, demographic and psychosocial factors.

It should be emphasized that the subjective dimension of quality assessment by consumers is linked not only to the perception of physical features of a product. Very often a consumer purchasing decision is decided also on other factors, including the method of apparel presentation, display arrangement, product lighting and loyalty programs [2]. There are also different motivations of purchasing a product that meets consumer expectations.

The studies showed [4, 5, 6] that product brand is also an important differentiator taken into account when a purchasing decision is made. It is perceived in the context of permanent product quality guarantee and is important, in particular for consumers who make a repeat purchase and expect to get the same level of satisfaction from a branded product [7]. A product brand has also a symbolic dimension as a nonverbal communication tool. Already in 1899, Veblen in his theory related to a leisure class paid attention to the need of human beings to underline their individualism, prestige and belongingness to a social group. This need can be met by consumption of specified goods allowing their social status to be adequately expressed [8]. Branded apparel is just one of such goods. It perform a key role in this process, as can be observed in the buying behavior of young consumers.

The identification of factors determining consumer buying behaviors, knowledge of target consumers, their quality preferences give business entities a chance to adjust to changing consumer needs and are of utmost importance in the process of developing and implementing a marketing strategy [9]. An appropriate managing of these factors translates to an increase in consumer loyalty. This builds a good and lasting impression and fosters a strong company's market position [10].

In this paper an attempt to answer what is the role of apparel quality in the processes of making apparel purchase decisions, as well as what factors affect the perception of product quality by young consumers. Narrowing studies to this customer group was dictated by specificity of such purchasers who monitor actively and endeavor to follow changing fashion trends. They repeatedly make purchases on emotion, to boost their mood or to emphasize their own ego [11, 12]. An important component of consumer buying behaviors are their habits and attitudes often resulting from their previous experience or experience of people being their idols or advisors.

Due to large volume of the topic the results of study are presented in two parts. The first part is focused on the perception of apparel quality through the prism of product features and brand mark. The second part deals with an analysis of factors indirectly related to a product itself, but rather to the method of product presentation in the context of a trademark building strategy and gaining consumer loyalty by apparel networks.

2. Materials and methods

The perception of apparel quality by consumers was assessed based on an analysis of data gathered in survey research. The sample was chosen randomly to reveal discrepancies in the perception of quality by young consumers. The survey was carried out in the period from October 2014 to December 2015. The first part consisted of contingency questions to collect personal information enabling respondents to be classified according to their ability to make apparel purchasing decisions and frequency of such decisions. The second part of the survey contained questions aimed at understanding factors determining both the purchase itself and perception of apparel product quality by young consumers.

The survey was carried out by using the direct method and a questionnaire posted on a dedicated website. In all 237 respondents participated in the survey. The survey was anonymous and contained primarily closed-end, matrix and ranking questions. The respondent group included 206 females and 31 males. After rejecting invalid questionnaires, incompletely or unreliably filled, the respondent group was narrowed to a group of 198 women. The results were processed by using a Microsoft Excel worksheet and Statistica, and to analyze gathered data such statistical characteristics as arithmetic mean, standard deviation and correlation were used to determine interdependences between quality differentiators taken into account when making buying decisions. The k-means clustering method allowing the respondent group homogeneity to be tested was also used.

3. Results and discussion

The survey comprised a sample of 198 women in the four age groups: 15–18, 19–25, 26–34, and 35+. To make an analysis enabling young women's behavior to be recognized the respondents were divided into the two main age groups, i.e. 15–25 (young consumers) and 26+. The profile of respondents is presented in Table 1.

An analysis of respondent answers on the significance of product quality when making apparel purchasing decision (Fig. 1) revealed that this factor is of great importance. The vast majority of respondents, i.e. 91% ticked the answer indicating that product quality plays a significant role when doing shopping, while only 1% of the respondents chose "none", i.e. not important.

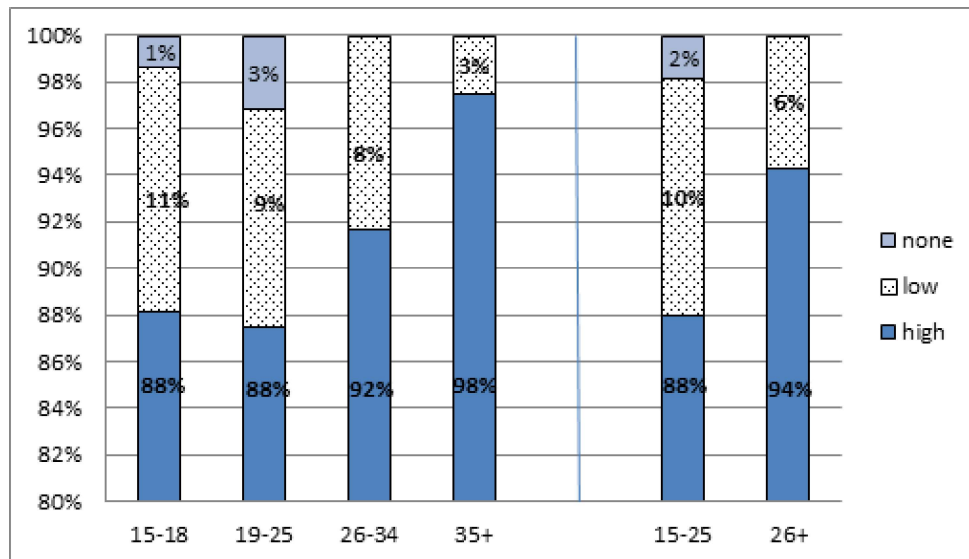
Table 1. Demographic information about respondents

Tabela 1. Demograficzna charakterystyka respondentów

		Women sample N = 198	
		N	Percent (%)
Age	15–18	76	38.4
	19–25	32	16.2
	26–34	48	24.2
	35+	41	20.7
Education	Primary	60	30.3
	Secondary	61	30.8
	Graduated from university	72	36.4
Operating status	Pupil/student	92	46.5
	Working student	9	4.5
	Unemployed	7	3.5
	Full-time employment	76	38.4
	Part-time employment	7	3.5
	Temporary work	6	3.0

Source: own research.

Źródło: badania własne.

**Fig. 1. Significance of apparel product quality in the context of buying decisions according to age groups**

Source: own research.

Rys. 1. Znaczenie jakości wyrobów odzieżowych w kontekście decyzji zakupowych w poszczególnych grupach wiekowych

Źródło: badania własne.

When considering the group of young women the quality is essential at the time of purchasing a product, for 10% of the respondents this factor has low position, while for 2% – it is not vital at all. The consumers of 26+ seem to be more demanding with respect to the apparel quality, as 94% of them consider its role as important, 6% as of low importance. None of respondents belonging to the 26+ group indicated that the quality has no influence on apparel product selection.

When analyzing the role of various factors on apparel product selection (Fig. 2) a relatively large assessment differentiation for individual factors was observed. The average values of ranking for individual factors ranged from 1.58 to 4.43 differed slightly among respondents between 15 and 25 years of age and 26+. It should be noted that product quality

was the most important factor taken into account by respondents when shopping, and this is consistent with answers to the previous question. This factor was given a score between 4.33 and 4.43 in a 5-point Likert scale, depending on the age group under consideration. Another significant differentiator affecting buying decisions is also size availability ($\bar{x} = 4.32$) and the price ($\bar{x} = 4.17$). It should be added that similar scores of these differentiators were obtained by P. Bartkowiak and B. Sojkin [13], who analyzed buying behaviors among inhabitants of the region of Wielkopolska in Poland. The results of our own research indicate also that experience gained by respondents play an important role ($\bar{x} = 3.96$) as well as the product return option ($\bar{x} = 3.71$), manufacturer's warranty ($\bar{x} = 3.36$) and fashion ($\bar{x} = 3.37$). Both advertisement ($\bar{x} = 1.78$) and opinions of others ($\bar{x} = 2.63$) seem to have a slight effect on product selection.

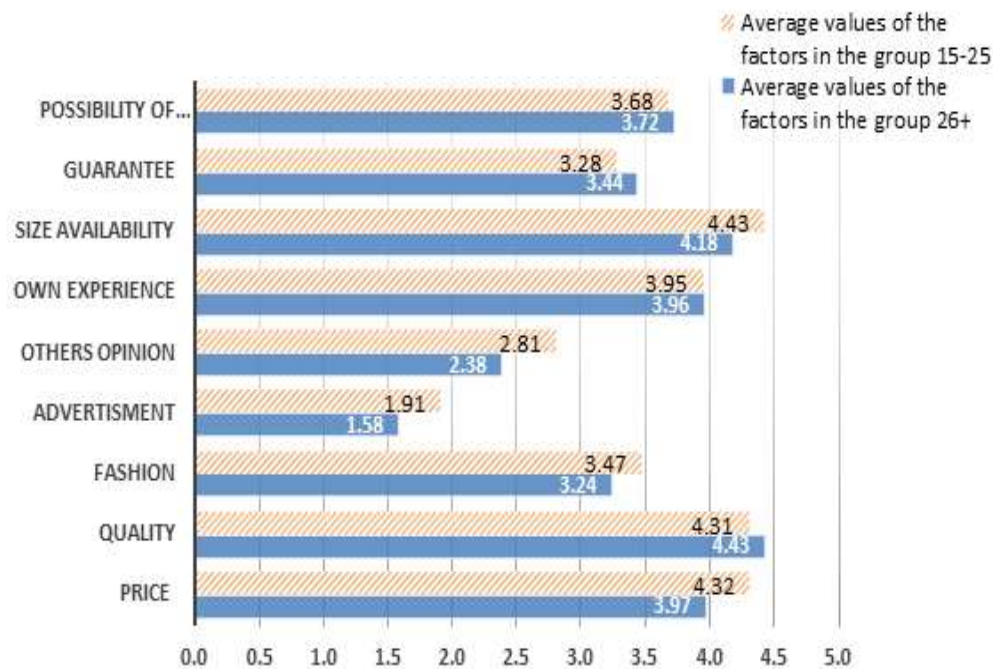


Fig. 2. Average scores of factors affecting apparel product buying decisions in two age categories

Source: own research.

Rys. 2. Średnie wartości czynników wpływających na decyzje zakupowe w odniesieniu do wyrobów odzieżowych

Źródło: badania własne.

The use of the clustering method as a tool for testing homogeneity of respondent groups in terms of factors considered when making buying decisions revealed that in general the respondents form a homogeneous group (Fig. 3).

An attempt to separate two clusters provided information about similar profile of averaged response in both groups. For the three factors under consideration, namely quality, price and advertisement a similar trend and slight differences between averaged responses were observed. Similar tendency occurs for such factors as own experience, size availability and guarantee of returning a product, while in this case the differences between averaged responses in separated groups are significantly larger. Only for fashion as a factor affecting apparel purchasing it can be assumed that it has a slightly different dimension in both groups.

The aim of the next survey question was to learn a role the respondents assign to quality differentiators characteristic of apparel products. The results of analysis are presented in Fig. 4.

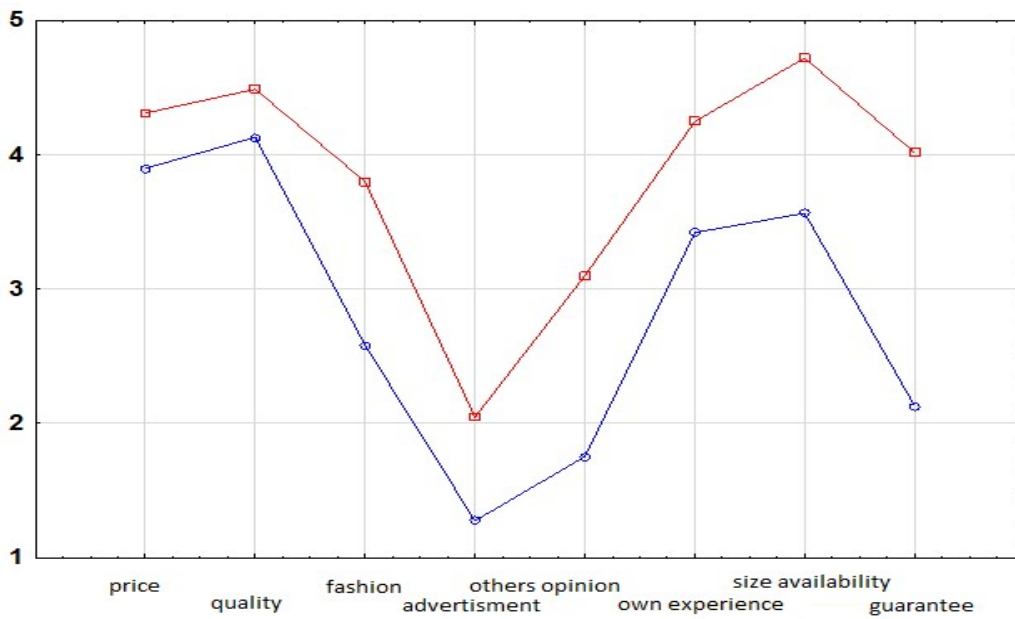


Fig. 3. Analysis of respondent group homogeneity by using the k-mean clustering method

Source: own research.

Rys. 3. Analiza jednorodności respondentów za pomocą analizy skupień metodą k-średnich

Źródło: badania własne.

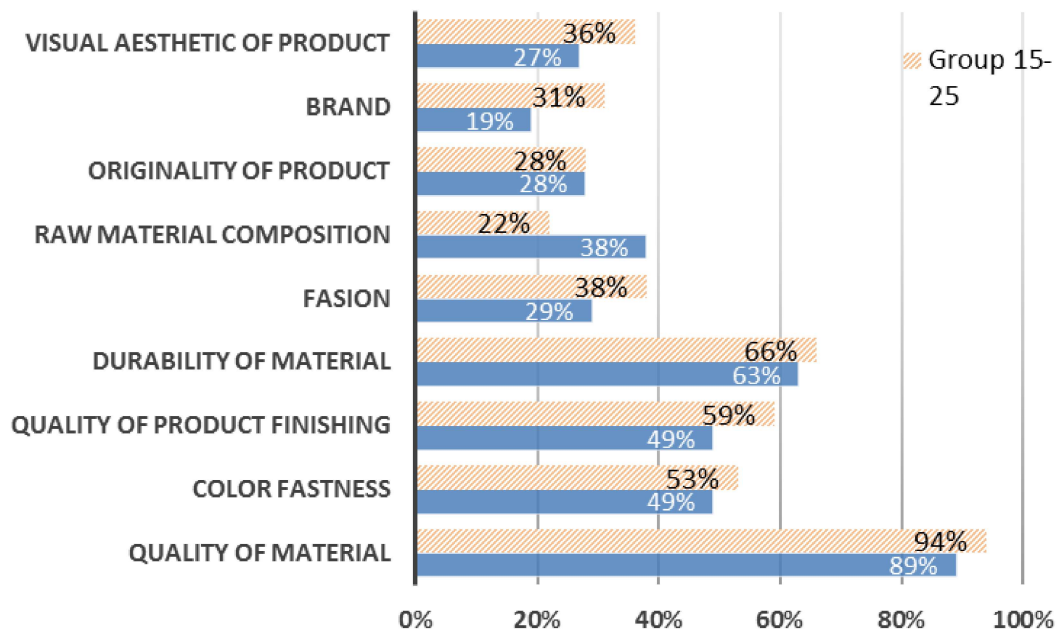


Fig. 4. Differentiators affecting the perception of apparel quality in two age categories

Source: own research.

Rys. 4. Wyróżniki wpływające na postrzeganie jakości ubrań z uwzględnieniem dwóch kategorii wiekowych

Źródło: badania własne.

Research indicated that the most important factor deciding on how apparel product quality is perceived by young women is the overall quality of the material from which clothing is made. This differentiator was pointed out by 92% respondents on average, including a slightly larger number of younger women than those of 26+. It is interesting that this factor is not evaluated in terms of the type of fabric from which the material is made, as the raw material composition was indicated by 30% of all respondents belonging primarily to the group 26+ (38% of participants), thus contrary to material quality. Also differentiators related to consumer's expectations with respect to manufacturing quality and duration of product usability, i.e.: aesthetic manufacture ($\bar{x} = 55.0\%$), material durability ($\bar{x} = 64.6\%$) and color fastness ($\bar{x} = 51.5\%$). The differentiators related to visual appearance, style ($\bar{x} = 34.3\%$), product aesthetics ($\bar{x} = 32.3\%$) and raw material composition ($\bar{x} = 29.8\%$) mentioned above play a secondary role. The least important differentiators for the perception of apparel quality are: originality ($\bar{x} = 27.8\%$) and product brand ($\bar{x} = 25.8\%$), while the latter has a significantly greater significance for younger respondents.

As results from the analysis presented above, product brand is a less essential to the perception of apparel quality, which is inconsistent with a theory presented by K. Semprusch-Krzemińska [5]. According to the author the significance of apparel brand is indisputable and the most important in the context of consumer product selection. The brand is a support for users, and determines not only their own image, but also belongingness to a specified social group. The communicative value of a brand is a basis for integration of its users. A significant role of apparel brand is presented also by others [4, 6, 10], although the different stance on this issue could be found, as well [9, 13]. To deepen the study of the perception of apparel quality differentiators by respondents, a cluster analysis was carried out and the results are presented in Fig. 5.

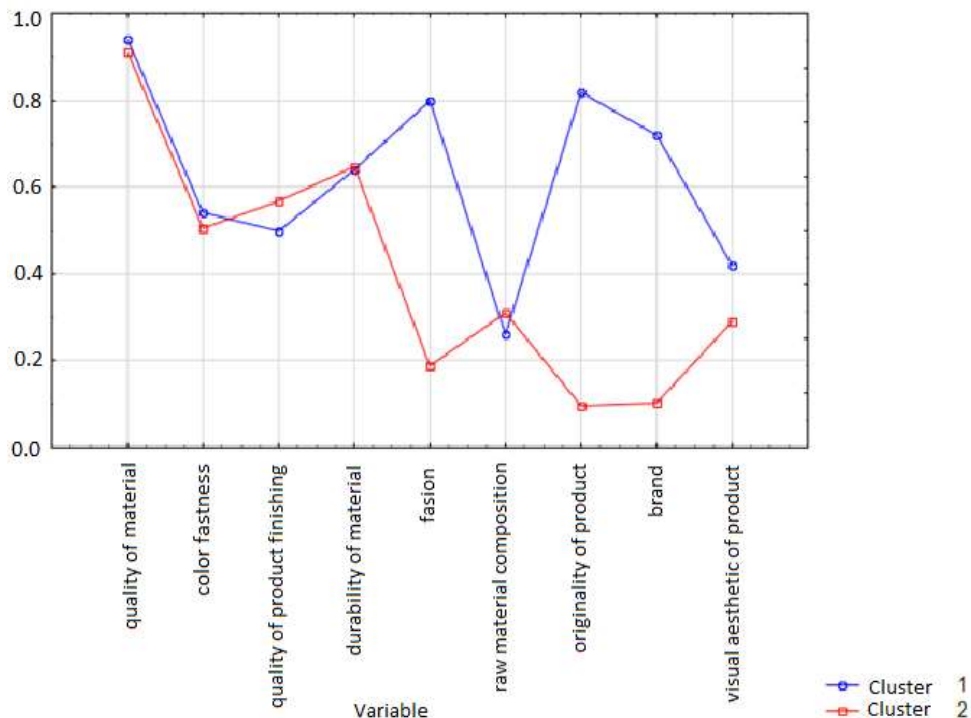


Fig. 5. Analysis of respondent group homogeneity by using the k-means clustering method

Source: own research.

Rys. 5. Analiza jednorodności respondentów za pomocą analizy skupień metodą k-średnich

Źródło: badania własne.

Cluster analysis indicated heterogeneity of the tested group. A distinct difference in the perception of the three differentiators, namely style (fashion), product originality and product brand occurred in a group of about 50 women forming cluster 1. In assessing differentiators related to consumer's expectations towards a product (material quality, material durability, color fastness, raw material composition) the attitude of all respondents are almost the same. Thus, the results of this analysis support the mentioned studies and Veblen theory that the brand has a considerable effect of consumer buying preferences, although in the light of this study, such statement is true only for a group of young women. Heterogeneity of the group with respect to evaluation of differentiators leads to a conclusion that for a part of respondents the factors under consideration are important for making purchasing decisions.

4. Conclusions

Apparel market belongs to dynamically growing business areas and its development is highly correlated with the demand and consumer buying preferences. There are quite different consumer's attitudes to this issue. Undoubtedly, young consumers are an important group of apparel product purchasers. The vast majority of apparel networks is oriented towards this consumer group, and therefore it is important to understand their buying behaviors in terms of factors determining selection of a product among a wide trade offer.

The analysis and results of presented research enable to learn how apparel product quality is perceived by a group of young women through the prism of rational and emotional factors, and to establish the key quality differentiators that guide this buyer group when making buying decisions.

The research revealed that buying decisions made by young consumers (women) are neither highly linked to advertising campaigns performed by apparel companies nor result from the desire to follow current fashion trends. The analysis indicated however that product quality is the most important criterion for product assessment by consumers. The significance of apparel product quality for young women (15–25) is close to the opinion expressed by consumers in the group 26+, also within this latter group a slightly higher rank of this factor is noticeable. The product brand plays a secondary role in the perception of apparel product quality by young women, but this does not apply to the whole group of respondents. The employed cluster analysis indicated a group of purchasers for whom the brand is an important qualitative differentiator.

Summarizing, one can conclude that consumers expect at first place quality products, i.e. products made from good materials and of durable usability. For a part of these young women the brand is also an important qualitative differentiator, but not deciding of apparel product selection. When selecting a product young women are governed, besides quality, by such differentiators as price and size availability.

5. Acknowledgments

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6. References

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Summary

In this paper an attempt to answer what is the role of apparel quality in the processes of making apparel purchase decisions, as well as what factors affect the perception of product quality by young women. This part of the article is focused on the perception of apparel quality through the prism of product features and brand mark. The second part deals with an analysis of factors indirectly related to a product itself, but rather to the method of product presentation in the context of a trademark building strategy and gaining consumer loyalty by apparel networks.

The research demonstrated that product quality is the most important criterion for product assessment by young consumers (women). The consumers expect good quality products, i.e. products made from good materials and of durable usability. Buying decisions made by them are however neither highly linked to advertising campaigns performed by apparel companies nor result from the desire to follow current fashion trends. The significance of apparel product quality for young women (15–25) is close to the opinion expressed by consumers in the group 26+, also within this latter group a slightly higher rank of this factor is noticeable. The product brand plays a secondary role in the perception of apparel product quality by young women, but this does not apply to the whole group of respondents. The employed cluster analysis indicated a group of purchasers for whom the brand is an important qualitative differentiator.

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POSTRZEGANIE JAKOŚCI WYROBÓW ODZIEŻOWYCH W ASPEKTCIE ZACHOWAŃ ZAKUPOWYCH MŁODYCH KONSUMENTEK. CZ. 1

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule podjęto próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, jaką rolę odgrywa jakość wyrobu odzieżowego w procesach podejmowania decyzji zakupowych odzieży, a także jakie czynniki wpływają na postrzeganie jakości wyrobów przez młode konsumentki. W niniejszej części artykułu skoncentrowano się na postrzeganiu jakości odzieży poprzez pryzmat właściwości wyrobu oraz marki handlowej. W drugiej części artykułu analizie zostaną poddane czynniki niezwiązane bezpośrednio z produktem, a sposobem jego prezentacji w kontekście strategii budowania marki handlowej i pozyskania lojalności konsumentów przez sieci odzieżowe.

Przeprowadzone badania wykazały, że najważniejszym kryterium konsumenckiej oceny wyrobów odzieżowych jest ich jakość. Młode konsumentki oczekują produktów dobrej jakości, tzn. takich, które wykonane są z dobrych materiałów i charakteryzują się trwałością w procesie użytkowania. Decyzje zakupowe podejmowane przez młode konsumentki nie są natomiast silnie powiązane z prowadzonymi kampaniami reklamowymi przez firmy odzieżowe ani też nie wynikają z chęci podążania za obowiązującymi trendami mody. Znaczenie jakości wyrobów odzieżowych dla młodych konsumentek (15–25) jest zbliżone do opinii wyrażanych przez konsumentki 26+, choć w odniesieniu do tych drugich zauważalna jest nieznacznie wyższa ranga tego czynnika. Marka wyrobu odgrywa drugorzędne znaczenie w kontekście postrzegania jakości wyrobów odzieżowych przez młode konsumentki, przy czym stwierdzenie to nie odnosi się do całej badanej grupy. Zastosowana analiza skupień wykazała, że istnieje grupa nabywców, dla których marka jest ważnym wyróżnikiem jakościowym.

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