

# Abercrombie and fitch popularity among youths



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The study will use consumer behaviour theories and marketing models to explain and analyse why Abercrombie and Fitch (A&F) is popular among young generation despite the impact of negative events. Abercrombie and Fitch Co, an American retailer of fashion and casual clothes targets at young people, has already expanded to some European countries and Japan before 2010. A&F has become a controversial brand from the last decade, despite it caters to cool, attractive, fashion-conscious consumers by offering product to meet their needs through different life stages ( Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, 2009) and is high-achievement in sales performance, it was chosen the 9th the most hated companies in America in 2009 (RankingTheBrand, 2009). The company was criticized during 2002 by issuing t-shirt with words “ Wong Brothers Laundry Service — Two Wongs Can Make It White” and pictures with stereotype of Chinese people (Appendix 1) which was deemed to disregard Asian people; In June 2003, several Hispanic, black and Asian plaintiffs complained that when they applied for jobs, they were steered not to sales positions out front, but to low-visibility, back-of-the-store jobs, stocking and cleaning up (Greenhouse, 2004). Moreover, A&F overemphasizes appearance of its employees, sexual hint in commercial and strong perfume also intrigue the serious social concern.

Based on these critical issues mentioned above, the brand still gain profit from the sales of trendy outfits.” Brand identity serves to provide direction, purpose, and meaning for the brand” (Aaker, 2002, p68), and branding is often used by manufabtures as a means of adding symbolic value to a item(Banister, Hogg, 2002, p193). Besides, clothing is also deemed as a highly symbolic product category and its high visibility which means that

people will often make assumptions about others purely on the basis of their clothes (Banister, Hogg, 2002, p191). Therefore, many people wear specific styles of clothes and brands in order to express their personality and social status. The brand personality is according to people's personality and characteristics to create its value and image, which can be recognised by or is attractive to the average public of one will not necessarily be recognized or found attractive to the average public of another culture (Mooij, 2004); relating to Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions, Mooji(2004) also mentions that the different characteristics between individualist cultures and collectivistic cultures; the former consider the brand should unique and distinct but the latter mention that people tend to define a brand as being part of brand world. As A&F is origin from the individualistic culture, which define itself as an exclusive American casual clothing brand which has been specially designed for college students of 18 to 22 years old and implies that you are young, beautiful, smart, and chic. Their clothes are worn with confidence and carefree insouciance (Abecrombie4sale, 2010). With these personalities that A&F emphasises and expresses by store decoration, commercials and appealing sexy salespeople(Appendix 2). Customers who wear the clothes can express their differentiation, lifestyle and show their good shapes; even more, to pursuit what kind of lifestyle or status they would like to be. Humanizing a brand empowers it to play a more central role in the consumer's life, potentially enabling the consumer to project an aspect of his or her self that might be desirable for relationships he or she seeks (Aaker 1997; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). It is important for brands to position their identity clearly because the symbolism that consumers attach to these brands would become confused if contradictory messages

<https://assignbuster.com/abercrombie-and-fitch-popularity-among-youths/>

were communicated (Hines, Bruce, 2002). A&F clarify its target marketing segment and identify its products as the best casual wears and outfits that combine style and elegance with comfort and relaxation (Abercrombie4sale, 2010).

Brand names are symbolic entities that can help consumers in signaling important attributes to others (Belk 1988; Levy 1959; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Brands also had many benefits for a company. For example, brands can add product value as well as create customer loyalty. In fact, one of the important reasons for successful branding is to exhibit itself heterogeneous from others. A&F, a fashion brand which is popular among its target consumer ages of 18 through 22, is always a trend leader these years. Fashion innovation is an ongoing process because consumer wants and needs are unending and constantly changing (Mueller & Smiley, 1995, p5); therefore, keeping creative and attractive is the consistent mission for fashion marketing because the product life cycle is short. Fads are an extreme form of fashion product, accentuating the rapid sales increase followed by the rapid decline (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006), but for a prominent brand which brings and leads market trend rather than be a follower. Although the frequent use of celebrities as spokespersons stems from a belief that pairing a product with a well-regarded celebrity would improve consumers' perceptions of the brand (Kamins & Gupta, 1994), A&F only hires models to display its products and images that are close to customers. The interior design and ambient are similar to the night club with dynamic music and every salesperson in stores are waggling with music that creates a completely different shopping experience for customers. As music provides a

vehicle through which young people could express themselves according to their music taste with the appropriate forms of dress and fashion (Miles, 2000). Hence, exposure to exciting brands influences self-perceptions of hedonism, and exposure to competent brands induces higher self-ratings of sophistication (Fennis & Pruyn, 2006). “ We are what we wear” (Belk, 1988) to make their personality stand out with pride and confidence. A&F represents an identity which combines the top fashion style and relaxing atmosphere that match and attract teens to conduct their purchasing activities. Following the writer will analyse the identity issues related to the recent coverage and use Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 1997) to explain the internalization and externalization factors of A&F.

## **Identity issues important in press coverage**

### **2-1: Cases for these issues**

In fact, there are many controversial issues about the brand including its look policy which is argued by relating to racial discrimination and sexual hint for customers that there are some examples listed below. However, people queue outside the A&F stores in London and Tokyo for shopping; still more, it is common for Taiwanese teenagers to order A&F products online. These situations involve the teenagers' self-identity.

(1). A US clothing company has been forced to pull a line of T-shirts from its shops after they triggered protests from Asians who complained they perpetuated racist caricatures.”(BBCNEWS, 2002).

(2). Clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch hires a disproportionately white sales force, puts minorities in less-visible jobs and cultivates a virtually all-

white image in its catalogs and elsewhere, a lawsuit charges(USA TODAY, 2003).

(3). Abercrombie “ failed to accommodate her religious beliefs by making an exception to the Look Policy. These actions constitute discrimination against Ms. Elauf on the basis of religion.” (Gregory, 2009).

(4). Disabled worker wins case for wrongful dismissal against Abercrombie & Fitch(Guardian, 2009).

## **2-2 The influence of Brand Identity of A&F**

Brand identity should help establish a relationship between the brand and customer (Aaker, 1996, p68), while brand identity means what the brand wishes to create or preserve and deliver to people depth and fullness

(Aperia, Back, 2004) . Thus, when the controversial events occurred, we can examine and relate the brand by “ Brand Identity Trap” (Aaker, 1996) (Appendix 3); there are four parts: brand image trap, brand position trap, predict attribute trap and external prospect trap.

The Brand Image Trap: Which means customer perceive the brand from the brand image rather than the identity the brand want to convey. As the discrimination scandal exploded, young, confident, smart, American casual and fashion impression was covered by discriminating people who are not Caucasian or disabled.

The Brand Position Trap: How strategists want the brand to be perceived(Aaker, 1996) is misled to brand position which is a part of brand identity; therefore, the information couldn't be transferred completely. The <https://assignbuster.com/abercrombie-and-fitch-popularity-among-youths/>

tendency to focus on product attribute is intensified that the goal becomes an advertising tag line but no room for brand personality, organizational associations and so on those are crucial to the brand- building(Aaker, 1996). To A&F, the focus and perception might come from the advertising with young people with good figure and most of them are half-naked with intimate body language which critics complained that its explicit images bordered on pornography (Dunlap, 2007). Hence, if the incomplete information adds to negative issues from public media, it is more difficult to expand new market.

Therefore, despite the fact that A&F still have many loyal customers, these scandals may make customer re-examine the brand. While A&F continually makes effort to manage its identity and use public relation policy to remain good relationship with customers.

The Product-Attribute Fixation Trap: The part indicates a brand emphasizes on the product attributes and ignore other parts. According to Aaker (1996), a brand is more than a product, it includes much more characteristics or it may lose its competitive advantage. For A&F, it not only emphasizes its product, but also includes other factors and spirit in the brand:

-Brand users: young generation (18-22)

-Country of origin: America

-Organizational associations: Casual, Trendy, Caucasian

-Brand personality: Young, Beautiful, Smart, and Chic. Sexy

-Symbols: Moose

-Brand-customer relationships: Using social media to communicate with customers, Discrimination

-Emotional benefits Self-expressive benefits: modernity, style, slenderness and easy carrying,

Based from the above, the Italics are the negative impression perceived by some people from controversial news which impact on how people think of the brand. However, because of 2004 class-action settlement, Abercrombie & Fitch agreed to add more blacks, Hispanics and Asians to its marketing materials (Steven, 2004).

The External Prospect Trap: The trap means the firm fails to realise how important to communicate to customers what is the brand about. From this aspect, A&F successful use social media such as official website, blog and facebook (its fans has over one million on facebook) to communicate with customers, explain the idea and differentiation from other brands. The policy can make the brand more close to the public and can deal with crisis more quickly and directly (Sherman, 2009).

### **2-3. Why A&F is so popular-In-group & Out-group**

Self-identity which” consists of whatever individuals consider to be theirs, including their body, family, possessions moods, emotions, conscience, attitudes, values, traits, and social position.”(Mooji, 2004, p98); in other word, self-identity is an individual who thinks who he/she is or would like to be. Self, can divide into four part: actual self, ideal self, social self and social



ideal self (Mittal, 2008). At least four different approach can be identified in self-identity studies that deal directly with product image: (1) product image as it relates to the stereotypic image of the generalized product user; (2) product image in direct the generalized product user; (3) sex-typed product image association with the self-concept(identity); (4) differentiated images(Sirgy, 1982). To A&F, the image is party-loving jocks and bare-naked ladies living fantasy lives (Leung, 2004), with sexy model and sales people. The clothes are designed to show perfect body curve for each gender; besides, the decoration, music, perfume and the style are well-recognized from others. Once the image matches to an individual's ideal self, the consumer behaviour of an individual will be directed toward enhancing self-concept through the consumption of goods as symbol (Grubb, Grathwohl, 1976).

Group members and different cultures also can influence consumer behaviour. Consumers have stronger self brand connections to brands consistent with an in-group than brands inconsistent with an in-group and weaker self-brand connections to brands consistent with an out-group than brands inconsistent with out-group (Escalas, Bettman, 2005) . In- groups are usually characterized by similarities among members. Individuals have a sense of " common fate" with members of the in-group; out-groups are groups with which one has something to divide, groups that disagree on valued attributes(Mooji, 2004. p160). Nevertheless, in collectivistic cultures in-groups influence members mutually more than individualistic culture because of more frequent and deep interaction. Mooji(2004) points out in-group relationships in collectivistic cultures are usually limited to three

groups: family, company and University in-group; members of individualistic cultures have to invest time in friendship, and they belong to many specific in-groups that may change over time. To who from collectivistic cultures, choosing a brand or lifestyle are usually influenced by other in-group members to demonstrate they are belong to the groups, which would decrease the power for the external image damage of the brand. For people from individualistic cultures, individuals are intend to self-oriented, serving and guarding their personal interests and even may oppose to sacrificing for the group or society (Mittal, 2008, p230), individuals choose what they want and express rather than change their mind easily by the public media. Due to the brand image, and identity are exactly position for young people, those could be the factors why A&F can still possess numerous supporters both in collectivistic and individualistic cultures.

### **Brand identity-Prism**

The essence of a strong brand is that it is sufficiently differentiated to the extent that it cannot be easily replicated by its competitors (Fill, 2005, p356). Kapferer(1992) indicated that brand identity is the centre concept for building a brand and should be identified and managed by the brand owner. The brand identity prism(Kapferer, 2004) is a tool to analyse a brand, which is consisted of six intrinsic and extrinsic facets: Personality, Culture, Self-image, Physique, Relationship, Reflection. The brand owner can use this model to be able to study the brand in depth, and find its strengths and weaknesses; moreover, it gives the full picture of how the brand owner wants the target group to perceive the brand's identity(Aperia, Back, 2004).

### **3-1. Brand Identity Prism and A&F**

#### **Internal facets**

##### **(1). Personality- Human characteristics bestow on a brand:**

A&F displays the personality young, beautiful, smart, and chic. Their clothes are worn with confidence and carefree insouciance (Abecrombie4sale, 2010).

In addition, it includes relaxed and sociable personality inside the brand as well as expresses modernity, style, slenderness and easy carrying those have been the most prominent features (Abecrombie4sale, 2010).

##### **(2). Culture-Values of a brand:**

A&F mainly represents people between 18 to 22 year-old American middle- to middle-upper class young Caucasian, with casual fashion style and encourage customer to show their body by wearing the A&F clothes. It emphasizes the origin of New York City and America leisure culture; even some consider it also belong to the white gay men culture (Mcbride, 2005).

##### **(3). Self-image-A individual's internal mirror related to a brand:**

When people are wearing A&F clothes they might feel themselves belonging to middle- to middle-upper class, urban life as well as educated due to the targets are university students with confident, fashion, passionate, popular and enjoy party life.

#### **External facets**

##### **(1). Physique- The sum of a brand's basic characteristics:**

Decoration: The decoration of each store is similar. The exterior of the modern canoe store is designed features white molding and black louvers,

<https://assignbuster.com/abercrombie-and-fitch-popularity-among-youths/>

and interior is lit with dim ceiling lights and spot lighting (Wikipedia). In entrance, customers can take picture with shirtless male models in artfully unbuttoned jeans and big poster on the wall.

As for the dim light which may influence customers to choose and judge clothes.

Ambience: With fierce male fragrance, which is one of the most popular products for the brand for many years, spread around the store. Electronic dance music also permeate the store that make shopping as clubbing(Lane, 2009). However, the negative side reveal that some people protest the loud music which may harmful for hearing ability and the perfume is too strong as well as could include some unknowing toxic components.

Employees: Employees in A&F are chosen according A&F's look policy :” employees should represent A&F with natural, classic American style consistent with the company's brand” and “ look great while exhibiting individuality”(Coraline, 2009). They wear A&F clothes to show their figure as well as dance with music. But the staff look could influence teenagers' esthetic conception

; Thus, there are many controversial issues about hiring employees with discrimination standards those would attack A&F's reputation.

Product Range: Jackets, underwear, swim shorts, t-shirts, and just about any other article of clothing that can be thought of are found among the many Abercrombie Fitch products for males, females even kids, besides the perfumes are also included(Abecrombie4sale, 2010).

Logo: The famous brand has a well-recognized logo-gray moose. The logo has been heavily printed on A&F products including cap, fleece, and logo t-shirts, underwear and others to further promote it (AlaDream, 2007-2008)

## **(2). Relationship-The relationship between a brand and its customers:**

A&F try to remain friendly relationship with customers. Employees are train to have good interaction with customers and enjoy their shopping experience. Customer can use many channels for customer service and share their opinons via phones, websites and social media. Those are useful tool to examine the relationship and satisfaction with customers.

## **(3). Reflection-What customers see a brand?**

What the customer see the brand are middle-to-middle-upper class, young, fashion and good shape; furthermore, valuing leisure activities and enjoy life as well as popular casual American East Coast and Caucasian styles. The negative reflection, racial discrimination or the brand for gay men may also display on customers reflection.

Brand personality, culture and customer's self-image are the invisible facets. These cannot be gotten at unless analysis methods focus on penetrating the consumer's subconscious mind. Other three concepts, on the other hand, are explicit and fairly easy to pinpoint in conventional studies (Aperia, Back, 2005). Though the tool is practical for analyses of brands, there are still some limitations. The dimensions may overlap and the factors inside the facets are different according to different perception for each customer. However, it is still an essential tool and worth to be utilized by brand owners

to consider how to build a successful brand, attract the target segment and enhance the image as well as its reputation.

## **Conclusion:**

The essay is to analyse why the famous American fashion brand- Abercrombie and Fitch is so popular among young people. With its insist of quality, consistent branding personality and identity, the stock trend are growing overall during the decade except 2008, the period of globally economical recession, the stock price drop dramatically; however, the stock price increases afterward (msnmoney, 2010). From the analysis of its personality and identity, it successful builds a kingdom for people hope to fulfill his/her ideal self or even social ideal self. A man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes (Belk, 1988). A&F aims the third stage of the extended self" possessions help adolescents and adults manage their identities" (Belk, 1988) and using marketing strategy to make the brand become the index for young people in terms of fashion and lifestyle. Hence, the in-group members follow the trend who contributes to the market share. Because the brand origin is from a low power distance country- America(Appendix4) that the society are relatively equal as well as encourage more people to fulfill what that want. Brand identity Prism, a model to analyse six facets of A&F, is a practical tool for understand a brand.

## **limitations:**

Due to the limited time and word limitation, the writer cannot acquire more models to analyse the brand; besides, lacking of enough information also confine the research which needs database about the influence of A&F's <https://assignbuster.com/abercrombie-and-fitch-popularity-among-youths/>

negative events and opinions for the brand. Through sufficient source, the writer could apply more accurate and penetrating way to discuss those issues in depth.

### **Recommendation:**

For future analysis, the writer should attribute sufficient time to implement and adopt more marketing and consumer behaviour models as well as theories, which could understand A&F thoroughly. Though it is still a popular brand nowadays, some out-group members or segments suffered from unequal treatment from the brand are unwilling to purchase its product or decrease their desire. Such dissociative reference groups have for consumers' self-brand connections, evaluations, and choices (Dahl, White, 2007) that can influence others' consumer behaviour. Therefore, it is proper to strengthen its CSR and communication with customers.