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The Influence of Pop-up stores on the Brand Equity of Online Retailers

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The Influence of Pop-up Stores on the Brand Equity of Online Retailers

Julia Ausserdorfer, Jella Hauptmann, Gracja Kantorska

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence of pop-up stores on brand equity of online retailers from the consumer's point of view. The theoretical approach aims at highlighting the most crucial parameters when measuring brand equity regarding the use of pop-up stores. This will be further analysed in the empirical part. Furthermore, the objective is to develop a theoretical framework that illustrates the correlation between those influencing factors based on the findings of the practical part.

Methodology: The topic was investigated by analysing the case example of Westwing Home & Living, a German online-retailer for furniture and decoration, which has recently opened pop-up stores in Munich, Hamburg and Milan. The main focus of the methodology, however, was the conduction of qualitative interviews with five customers, who have visited the pop-up store in Munich.

Findings: This research has proven that pop-up stores are a crucial means of influencing customer-based brand equity for online retailers. Furthermore, the findings show that out of the five parameters used to measure brand equity (brand awareness, trial, quality perception, brand trust and consideration to purchase in the future), quality perception and brand trust are influenced the most by the experiences at the pop-up store. These two parameters also have the highest impact on brand loyalty expressed in the consideration to purchase in the future. Moreover, it was found that these five elements are interrelated in the process of establishing customer-based brand equity for online retailers using pop-up stores. Finally, this correlation is illustrated in a newly developed framework.

Original/value: This paper is the first of its kind to combine the concept of pop-up stores with brand equity and to investigate the correlation between these two concepts for online retail brands.

Keywords: pop-up stores, brand equity, quality perception, brand trust, online retail, home and living industry

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Although retail branding is a highly important and well discussed topic, previous literature strongly focuses on retailer's private label brands as well as manufacturer brands, revealing a lack of information regarding brand equity of the retail brand itself (Swoboda & Foscht, 2016). However, since retailers are closer to the consumer than manufacturers (Kapferer, 2012), it is important for retailers to build strong brands (Swoboda & Foscht, 2016). Hence, it is significant to investigate what factors are required for retailers to develop a strong brand.

In contrast, due to the increasing relevance of e-Commerce in the retailing industry (Zentes, Morschett & Schramm-Klein, 2017), it is important to point out that Internet brands still lack closeness to their customers (Kapferer, 2012).

Especially for online retailers, pop-up stores offer a unique opportunity to overcome this lack of closeness towards their customers (Warnaby & Shi, 2018). This retail format represents a possibility to bring the brand personality to life and hence connect with customers in a more exciting way by creating experiences and engaging customers more tangibly (Tesserias, 2014; Warnaby & Shi, 2018). Therefore, pop-up stores are a popular tool to strengthen customer loyalty as well as to

increase brand awareness (Warnaby & Shi, 2018). Since the concept of pop-up stores became popular in 2004 when Comme de Garçon introduced its label's first temporary retail space in Berlin, the number of pop-up stores has been increasing (Picot-Coupey, 2012; Lisanti, 2014). In contrast to this trend, the number of retail stores has dropped (Lisanti, 2014). Even though pop-up stores are highly relevant in practice, the topic has received little coverage in literature so far (Picot-Coupey, 2012).

Taking this information into consideration, the goal of this paper is to analyse if pop-up stores can be used as a tool to influence brand equity of online retailers.

Firstly, literature research was conducted, followed by the presentation of the case study of Westwing Home & Living. Since present literature regarding retail brand equity strongly concentrates on the grocery and fashion industry (Swoboda & Foscht, 2016), this paper focuses on the home and living industry to fill this research gap. Based on the insights of the literature review and the case study, interviews were conducted and analysed. The final chapter will draw conclusions, give managerial recommendations and demonstrate limitations of the research.

Literature Review

The theoretical approach deals with the challenges that online retailers face and how pop-up stores can be a solution to overcome them. Furthermore, brand equity as well as the parameters of brand equity will be described. The literature review will be the base for the practical part.

Pop-up Stores as a new form of Retailing

Retailing, one of the largest industries in the world, has experienced radical developments at an increasing pace over the past decade. The dynamic change in modern retail management has been caused by a number of different factors. First of all, the power of retailers is increasing as they are the final stage in the marketing chain, with the task to purchase

goods from other organizations and to sell those to private households. They are therefore closer to consumers than manufacturers (Zentes, Morschett & Schramm-Klein, 2017) and hence, the importance of the view of retailers as brands has increased (Swoboda & Foscht, 2016). Furthermore, one of the most influential developments has been the shift to e-commerce. As a result, the retail industry today is dominated by pure Internet players, such as Amazon, Ebay or Zalando (Zentes, Morschett & Schramm-Klein, 2017).

E-commerce has been defined as the following: „In online retailing or electronic retailing (or e-retailing, electronic commerce, e-commerce, Internet retailing, etc.), retailers offer their products and services over the Internet.” (Zentes, Morschett & Schramm-Klein, 2017, p.71). With an average penetration rate of 47% in Europe, it is suggested that the Internet has developed to be a significantly important shopping channel (Zentes, Morschett & Schramm-Klein, 2017) and a considerable competitor of brick and mortar retail, catalogue retail, teleshopping and ambulant retail (Heinemann & Schwarzl, 2010).

However, Kapferer (2012) points out that studies show that many pure Internet brands still lack closeness to the consumer and thus customer loyalty mainly due to missing tangible brand elements.

Laroche et al. (2001) emphasize that this intangibility strongly influences the ease or difficulty a consumer experiences in the pre-purchase evaluation of goods or services. They also found that “intangible channels may be perceived riskier than retailers with physical evidence.” (Laroche et al., 2005, p.263). However, besides intangibility, the risk that consumers perceive in online retail, is also influenced by other elements such as privacy and security concerns (Laroche et al., 2005).

One way of engaging customers with the brand in a more tangible way, especially for online retailers, is using pop-up stores (Warnaby & Shi, 2018). This very specific new store format creates a special retail atmosphere as the stores are only open for a limited amount of time e.g.

for a few weeks or months. Another characteristic of pop-up stores is the limited assortment usually consisting of seasonal products. This results in urgent purchases with a higher willingness to pay and increased desirability as consumers consider the goods as scarce due to the limited opening period and limited assortment as well as limited options for price comparisons (Zentes, Morschett & Schramm-Klein, 2017).

Pop-up stores can be used for both traditional and online retailers in addition to their more mainstream business activities as well as to test an initial brand concept for start-ups (Warnaby & Shi, 2018). Moreover, they serve to convey brand emotions in a highly experiential event atmosphere, advertise special offers, launch product innovations or conduct market research (Zentes, Morschett & Schramm-Klein, 2017). Furthermore, as described by Laroche et al. (2005), shopping in person offers the opportunity to personally inspect and test the products and thus reduces uncertainty.

They also point out that when making a decision, consumers who are acquainted with the product and have a clear imagination of it rely more on their prior knowledge when there is no opportunity to experience the product physically. This available prior knowledge facilitates the evaluation process and consumers feel more confident in making the correct purchase. (Laroche et al., 2005)

This appears to be a relevant fact that might indicate that once consumers have experienced the products in a pop-up store, they will be more likely to have increased confidence in their future online purchases.

In order to investigate if pop-up stores actually influence an online retailer's brand equity, it is vital to first define brand equity and select the parameters that will be used for the measurement.

Brand Equity

One of the main functions of brands is to act as a risk reducer since established and well-known brands reduce the uncertainty experienced by the consumer (Melin, 2002). This finding

indicates the importance of brand equity for online retailers considering the prior described challenges that they face.

This paper aims to analyse consumers' perceptions and experiences in pop-up stores and how these affect brand equity. Therefore, it is important to approach brand equity from the perspective of the consumer. It is pointed out that:

“the power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen and heard about the brand as a result of their experiences over time (...) customer-based brand equity [is defined] as the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand” (Keller, 2013, p. 69).

From this definition, three crucial aspects arise. Firstly, different consumer responses to product choices result in brand equity and prevent price competition. In further consequence, the consumer's knowledge about the brand (what they have heard, felt, seen and learned about the brand as a result of their experiences over time) triggers these differences in response. Finally, perceptions, preferences and behaviour related to all aspects of brand marketing are results of those differences in responses (Keller, 2013). This concept is graphically portrayed in Figure 1.

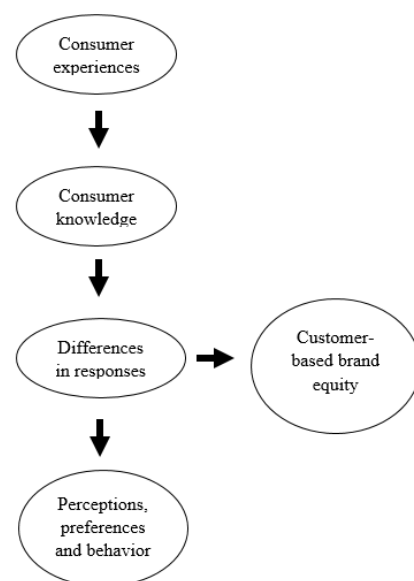


Figure 1 - Customer-based brand equity (own figure based on Keller, 2013)

Furthermore, the brand manager's task is to link the desired thoughts, feeling, images, beliefs, perceptions, opinions and experiences to the brand. A brand with positive customer-based brand equity results in having less price-sensitive and more loyal customers. A high level of awareness and familiarity with the brand as well as strong, favourable and unique brand associations held in the consumer's memory represent the premises of customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2013).

There are numerous ways to measure brand equity and little consensus exists among researchers. The company TNS uses brand awareness, purchase intention, perceived quality, trial and an item measuring the strength of the brand's imagery as parameters in its study Megabrand System (Kapferer, 2012). Kapferer (2012), on the other hand, suggests a minimum of four indicators: Aided brand awareness, spontaneous brand awareness, evoked set and whether the brand has already been consumed or not. Moreover, Yoo and Donthu (2001) use the following components to measure retail brand equity: brand loyalty, perceived quality and awareness/associations.

These are just three examples of how to measure brand equity. However, there is no standard approach that can be relied on. Thus, the characteristics of the industry will be the decisive factor for choosing the parameters used for the practical analysis in this research.

The theoretical outline of "Pop-up Stores as a new form of Retailing" has shown that online retailers face challenges regarding intangibility as a barrier for pre-purchase evaluation and that consumers perceive other risks such as privacy and security concerns. In addition to that, consumers who have a clear representation of the product are more confident in making the correct purchase (Laroche et al., 2005). The theory has also outlined that pop-up stores are a way for online retailers to overcome these challenges (Warnaby & Shi, 2018). This is why quality perception, brand trust, considering the purchase in the future and trial are regarded crucial elements for an online retailer's brand equity.

Finally, due to the fact that brand awareness is mostly correlated with elements such as high quality, trust or closeness to people (Kapferer, 2012), this parameter will also be taken into consideration.

To sum up, the influence of pop-up stores on an online retailer's brand equity will be measured according to the following parameters:

- Brand awareness
- Quality perception
- Brand trust
- Trial
- Consider purchase in the future

Before moving on to the methodology part, a short description of the selected parameters will follow.

Brand awareness

Brand awareness consists of the consumers' ability to confirm prior encounters with the brand by showing the brand as a cue (brand recognition) as well as their ability to remember the brand from memory e.g. aided by naming the product category (brand recall). The more consumers experience a brand, the stronger the brand is anchored in their memory and thus the higher the brand awareness. (Keller, 2013). Moreover, high brand awareness is positively correlated with high quality (Melin, 2002).

Quality perception

One advantage of a strong brand is that different types of brand associations can increase the perception of quality (Keller, 2013). This can be influenced by different factors such as the brand's name, the packaging or the form and scale of advertising, as the consumer may assume that a brand that is marketed massively must be of good quality (Melin, 2002).

Brand trust

A reputable brand brings trust and reduces the perceived risk. Consumers can only assess the inner qualities of some products once bought or consumed. In order to decrease the number of consumers who are reluctant to buy and try out the product in the first place, a reputable brand

is needed as an external sign highlighting internal qualities (Kapferer, 2012).

Trial

Trial (whether the interviewee has already tried the brand) (Kapferer, 2012) is also considered to be an important indicator when assessing the impact of pop-up stores on brand equity. This parameter is not influenced by the pop-up store itself but is a crucial indicator for customer loyalty and brand familiarity and hence brand awareness.

Consider purchase in the future

Whether consumers are considering the purchase in the future can be an indicator of brand trust and customer loyalty, which is especially challenging to build for Internet brands due to missing tangible elements (Kapferer, 2012). It is therefore intended to find out if pop-up stores as a means of tangible experience can build up brand trust, customer loyalty and sequentially brand equity.

Methodology

The primary objective of this paper is to measure if pop-up stores have an influence on brand equity from the viewpoint of the consumer. Since the literature about the correlation between those two aspects is limited, an exploratory approach was applied. In order to gain an understanding in the issue addressed above, the research methods undertaken in this paper consisted of three steps: literature review, single case study and in depth interviews.

The literature review explains the change in the retail environment caused by the shift to e-Commerce and furthermore, how that shift influences the brand connection with customers. Moreover, the literature suggests pop-up stores as a solution for conquering the emerged challenges of online retailers.

Numerous academic papers and books regarding brand equity were found and analysed to select the most adequate and measurable parameters that could be used as a basis for the practical part. However, the

essential parameters of brand equity have been defined based on the literature review as well as industry-specific characteristics.

Secondly, the case study of Westwing Home & Living was analysed due to importance of an empirical examination of the new phenomenon of pop-up stores within its real-life context (Robson, 2002). Thus, an analysis of secondary sources such as the company's social media pages, websites and news articles was undertaken, to gain a deeper understanding about the brand, its activity and how the pop-up stores are used in order to engage with customers.

In the practical part, the connection between pop-up stores and brand equity is investigated based on the example of the case study Westwing Home & Living by interviewing their customers, who have visited their pop-up store in Munich. Since an exploratory research was conducted, qualitative interviews were undertaken in order to gather consumers' opinions. Qualitative studies are less structured methods allowing more flexibility, while quantitative methods are highly structured, and questions asked are close-ended, resulting in quantifiable answers (Cresswell, 2013).

Five semi-structured interviews were conducted, through telephone conversations with four females between the age of 23 and 51 and one man at the age of 28, who have visited the pop-up store in Munich. Mainly women were chosen as they make up 90% of Westwing Home & Living's customers (Ohr, 2018). The interviews were carried out in German and subsequently translated into English. The questions used in the interviews contained questions regarding the prior determined parameters brand awareness, trial, brand trust, quality perception and consideration of future purchase after visiting the Westwing Home & Living pop-up store in Munich. The full interview guidelines in English and German can be found in the appendix. Finally, the interviews were analysed to find significant information in affiliation to the research questions. Based on this analysis, conclusions were drawn and illustrated in a framework.

Case Example: Westwing Home & Living

Westwing Home & Living is a German online home furnishing retailer founded in 2011 with its headquarters based in Munich. The company is operating in eleven countries (Westwing GmbH, 2018a). They offer home and living products ranging from kitchenware and lightning to home decor products, textiles and furniture (Westwing Group AG, 2018). In less than seven years on the market, the company managed to reach approximately 20 million Euros revenue (Westwing Group GmbH, 2017). Westwing Home & Living is executing an e-commerce business model based on three components: “Westwing”, “WestwingNow” and private label brands (Westwing Group AG, 2018). Figure 2 visualizes their model.

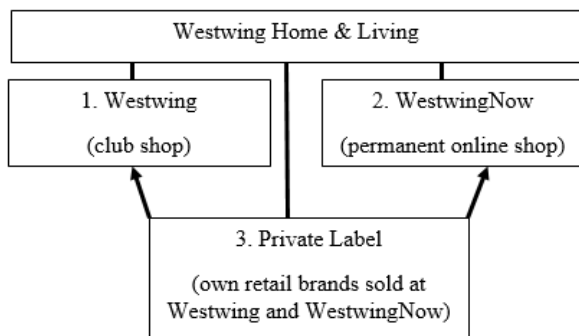


Figure 2 - Components of the Westwing Home & Living business model (own figure based on Westwing Group AG, 2018)

First of all, Westwing is a club shop based on a flash sales method which offers customers 30-70% price reduction on renowned brands (Nothlichs, 2017). The flash sales method is a promotion or discount offered by online stores for a limited period of time and with limited quantity of the products (BigCommerce, 2018). Westwing requires customers to register before making purchases at the club shop in order to have access to discounted products, limited offers, inspiring designs and interior advice newsletters (Westwing Group AG, 2018). The main purpose of club shopping is exclusivity, with the main focus on the offers of brands and frequent promotions (Heinemann & Schwarzl, 2010).

In contrast to Westwing, WestwingNow offers a permanent assortment sold at regular prices (Westwing Group AG, 2018).

Thirdly, the company also offers high-quality private label products at affordable prices on their permanent assortment shop WestwingNow and regularly sells them on Westwing as well (Westwing Group AG, 2018).

Westwing Home & Living puts much emphasis on their product selection and product presentation, which is why its creative team consisting of over 100 journalists, creative directors and photographers focuses on continuously creating engaging and inspiring content for consumers. The company is described as a “shoppable magazine” and manages to seamlessly integrate inspirational content and e-Commerce into integrated platforms, with the mission to inspire and make every home a beautiful home (Ohr, 2018).

The company’s vision is to “be the European leader in home and living e-commerce, by creating the most inspiring customer experience and the most loved brand” (Westwing Group AG, 2018, n.p.). In order to fulfil their mission, which is “to inspire and make every home a beautiful home” (Westwing Group AG, 2018, n.p.), Westwing Home & Living created their first pop-up store in Munich, which aimed to give customers the opportunity to test Westwing Home & Living’s products in a real life context and bring the brand to life also in the offline world (Möbel Kultur, 2017).

Westwing Home & Living’s first pop-up store was opened in Munich from November 2017 to March 2018 (Westwing GmbH, 2018b). The pop-up store was designed on 500 square meters (Briener Hof Pop Up, 2018). It was located in the city centre of Munich, in a modernly designed area where many luxurious brands are positioned (Präkelt, 2017). Figure 3 shows Westwing Home & Living’s pop-up store in Munich.



Figure 3 - Westwing Home & Living's pop-up store in Munich (Briener Hof Pop Up, 2018)

Westwing Home & Living focuses on an influencer marketing strategy and has collaborated with German bloggers and influencers such as Lena Gercke and Mandy Grace Capristo for the events that took place at the pop-up store (Ohr, 2018). They shared their experience on their social media platforms with the hashtag #WestwingPopUpStore, raising awareness of the pop-up store's existence. Additionally, one of the events in the pop-up store was created together with the famous German photographer Simon Lohmeyer, where an exclusive selection of his artwork was displayed and sold (Westwing GmbH, 2018c). An additional event called spring shopping took place where a cosmetician offered free eyebrow treatments to Westwing Home & Living customers and an in-shop florist station was created to give customers the opportunity to buy fresh flowers along with the decoration offered (Instagram, 2018a).

The same model of pop-up stores was extended in two other locations across Germany in Hamburg (Westwing GmbH, 2018d) and Milan in Italy (Minero, 2018). In addition to hosting events in collaboration with influencers, a coffee shop where people could get a coffee and relax after shopping, was created in the recently launched pop-up store in Hamburg. Moreover, one event hosted a beauty salon where women could get a free manicure or a free eyebrow treatment and were offered prosecco (Instagram, 2018b).

Due to the fact that buying furniture online is associated with a high risk in consumers perception (Ponder, 2013), the possibility to see

and touch the furniture was an opportunity for Westwing Home & Living to convince their customers not only of their high-quality products, but to also create memorable customer experiences (You dressed, 2017).

Analysis of Consumer Interviews

According to the literature review, there are five different parameters relevant to measure brand equity in this specific case. This chapter will analyse the insights gained through in-depth interviews to investigate how pop-up stores can influence those parameters. The interview guidelines and transcripts can be found in Appendix 1.

Brand awareness

Aided brand awareness is high among all the people who were interviewed, meaning everyone knew Westwing Home & Living. Unaided brand awareness, on the other hand, is lower. Only person 2 and 5 have the brand name top of mind, whereas it is part of the evoked set of interviewee 4. Person 1 and 3 could not think of the brand without any cues. It is interesting, however, that person 3 mentions later in the interview that Westwing Home & Living is her favourite shop to buy home and living products from.

When asking about the first points of contact with the brand, most interviewees state that they know Westwing Home & Living from word of mouth. There is only one person (interviewee 1) without knowledge of Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store, who therefore (consciously) got in touch with the brand at the store itself for the first time.

Overall, the pop-up store has a positive impact on the brand awareness as person 3 states:

"I think more about the brand after I visited the store".

Moreover, the interviews reveal a direct impact of brand awareness on the consideration to buy in the future, as person 1 mentions:

"I (...) don't notice a lot of their advertisement, that's why I don't think about Westwing so

much when I need furniture. But I would feel good buying there.”

Furthermore, according to interviewee 1, low brand awareness can also create a consumption barrier:

“[I didn’t buy anything from Westwing before] because I didn’t know Westwing very well.”

Additionally, the level of brand awareness is reflected in the motives why people visited the store. People who visited the store with the intention to try out the products are the ones with a higher level of brand awareness whereas for people with low brand awareness the critical factor to visit the store was rather external as interviewee 1 states:

“It looked very interesting from the street, my friends wanted to go in...”

The same person also states that she has never bought from Westwing Home & Living and never visited their website before because she never needed anything. Even though she did not need anything during her visit at the pop-up store, she still entered the store. Thus, we assume that a pop-up store may invite people to enter even though they are not actively looking for anything whereas the online shop is only visited when consumers experience demand.

Purchase Activity

To gain better understanding about the connection of the single parameters measuring purchase activities, three different types of purchases will be taken into consideration based on when the purchase took place: trial before visiting the pop-up store, trial during/after visiting the pop-up store and the consideration to purchase in the future. This structure makes it possible to distinguish the influence of previous purchase experiences from experiences gained at the pop-up store in our further analysis.

Trial before visiting the pop-up store:

Only person 3 had already made a purchase through the brand’s online shop before visiting the pop-up store.

Some of the interviewees state that the reason for not ordering from Westwing Home &

Living before is that they did not know the brand well enough. Moreover, they did not have the need to purchase new furniture or interior products and hence were not actively looking for anything specific.

Another reason mentioned preventing purchases is the broad product range and the high amount of time needed to look through the assortment of the online shop, which is an additional burden in the purchasing process. Person 4 states:

“It is easier for me to just go to IKEA and buy what I need there(...) Westwing has a too big variety to choose from (...) and I didn’t have time to look through their online store”.

Trial during or after visiting the pop-up store

Person 3 and 2 purchased products during their visit at the pop-up store. Whereas person 3 has already bought from Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store, person 2 did not buy anything before but was convinced by the special offers at the pop-up store.

Moreover, according to person 4, there is an overall appeal to buy something while visiting the pop-up store:

“Unfortunately [I didn’t buy anything]. I didn’t need anything at that time but I would have liked to buy something”.

It is crucial to consider that the same person mentions earlier on that one reason to prevent her from buying from Westwing Home & Living before is the high price level compared to IKEA. This indicates that the pop-up store can reduce the level of price sensitivity and increase customer-based equity as mentioned in theory.

Person 3 and 5 acquired products after visiting the pop-up store through Westwing Home & Living’s online shop. The critical reason for making a purchase for both customers is the good price-quality ratio that the brand offers. Moreover, person 5 states:

“I wouldn’t have thought about [buying from Westwing] before going to the pop-up store.”

This statement indicates a clear connection between the visit at the pop-up store and an

increase of brand awareness resulting in a positive buying behaviour, strengthening the assumption of a connection between brand awareness and purchases.

According to person 4, the decisive reason preventing her from any purchases after the visit are the same reasons that were considered in purchases before visiting the pop-up store:

“I didn’t have the time to look through their assortment online”

Hence, the associated time to look through the assortment online appears to be a consumption barrier which can’t be solved by the pop-up store, if the online shop covers a broad product range.

Consideration to purchase in the future

After visiting the pop-up store, all of the interviewees state that they would consider a purchase in the future which is an indicator for brand loyalty. The main reasons are the high quality of products as well as the nice assortment offered by Westwing Home & Living.

Interviewee 4 describes her experience as following:

“Yes, [I would consider to buy in the future] because I like the assortment and it convinced me.”

Moreover, the visit at the pop-up store could aid in getting a better understanding of the Westwing Home & Living business model. Person 2 describes her experience as following:

“I didn’t understand their concept. (...)When I looked it up, I have just seen the club and I thought that’s weird (...) but now that I went to the store, I understood what they do and I feel better about it.”

Consequently, the visit at the pop-up store has a positive impact on improving the trust towards the brand as well as the consideration to purchase in the future.

According to person 1, a critical factor influencing future purchases is a lack of visibility and brand awareness:

“[I would consider buying from Westwing] if I think of it and see it more often. (...) Now I know that the quality is good and it’s something extraordinary that not everybody has, so I would buy from there.”

Furthermore, person 5 who does not like the style of the products that are offered and would not consider to make purchases for himself but would consider buying there for the women in his life who like design.

Quality perception

There was an overall high-quality perception before visiting the pop-up store among all the interviewees. The main indicators for this assumption are the high prices as well as the fact that Westwing offers well-known brands.

Person 1 states:

“I didn’t have any expectations. I just knew that it is priced quite high and that’s why I thought the quality must also be high.”

After visiting the pop-up store, person 4 mentions that even though her quality perception was already high before, it improved further while visiting the store:

“(...) you could try out things, you could sit on things and you could see that the quality is good. Whereas when you visit other [retail chains] like Möbelix this is not the case”

This statement highlights that the opportunity to test the products does not necessarily result in a higher quality perception as we can see in the example of Möbelix. However, it has a positive impact on the quality perception in the case of Westwing Home & Living, because the quality of the products displayed was convincing.

Moreover, according to person 4, the presentation of the products in the pop-up store has an impact on the quality perception:

“(...) also you could see in the pop-up store that the quality is quite high for sure. Also because of the presentation [of the products]. It looked like high-quality.”

For all of the interviewees the possibility to touch and feel the products is a critical reason

to strengthen their overall high-quality perception. Person 1 expressed the importance of assessing the product quality in real life as following:

“From looking at it and feeling it - even from only looking at it you can see that it’s no junk.”

An interesting fact is, that there was no radical change in quality perception but that the real-life experience is rather important to ensure the customers of the high-quality and to furthermore offer different indicators to assess the quality.

Brand Trust

It can be observed that the experiences at the pop-up store have a positive impact on the brand trust of the interviewees. Assessing the interviews, it was further discovered that there are different factors influencing the level of trust towards the brand.

According to person 5, one reason influencing his trust towards the brand is that the pop-up store was a possibility to get to know the brand better:

“(…) they brought the topic closer to me, I can refer better to the topic and I trust them and their products. (…) the pop-up store was helping me to get to know the brand.”

Moreover, for person 3, the experiences at the pop-up store, especially the possibility to physically experience the products and the solutions Westwing Home & Living presented, are critical factors influencing the trust towards the brand.

“[I feel] really comfortable [buying from Westwing] because they offer all kind of solutions. (…) The pop-up store was a way to deliver their decoration ideas. (…) I couldn’t only see it virtually, but I could experience it physically and this increased my trust.”

Moreover, she describes that the pop-up store reduces the risk to buy online:

“(…) I feel more comfortable buying it [after visiting the store] since there is more risk buying things that I only see online”

As already discussed, referring to person 2, the pop-up store can serve as a tool to lower mistrust because it offers a better understanding of the business concept.

“Before visiting the store, I didn’t really understand their concept. So I was a little sceptical but when I went to the store I actually saw that their stuff is cool and that’s why I now have a better feeling towards Westwing.”

Further, it is important to point out that the increase of trust towards the brand results in a positive purchasing behaviour since the interviewee bought something during her visit and would also consider purchases in the future.

The tangibility the pop-up store offers influences the perceived level of trust in different ways but has a positive impact in all examples discussed.

The fact that a high level of trust and an overall high-quality perception also influences the perception of services offered by the brand in a positive way is of special significance. Although person 4 and 5 did not have previous experiences with the brand, they both have a high level of trust towards Westwing Home & Living’s delivery service. Person 5 states:

“(…) I would trust that the delivery will be like it is supposed to be, [from visiting the pop-up store I could see that] they are really professional.”

Person 4 mentions:

“(…) [I would feel comfortable buying from Westwing because] I would know that everything would be okay including delivery and that the products would arrive in flawless condition.”

On the other hand, according to person 4, one factor constricting the increase of trust towards the brand is the limited assortment displayed in the store:

“Because the pop-up store is only small. So it wouldn’t give me a more trustworthy feeling about Westwing”.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to demonstrate if pop-up stores can influence brand equity of online retailers. Reflecting on the research, it can be clearly emphasized that pop-up stores are an important tool for online retailers to influence brand equity. Furthermore, the elements quality perception and brand trust have turned out to be of special interest, as all the interviewees emphasize the importance of these topics. As already described in theory, our research could confirm that customers in fact feel the need of tangible elements in order to assess the quality but also to trust the brand.

However, the impact of pop-up stores on unaided brand awareness is relatively low. This might be due to the fact that the interviewees did not visit the pop-up store recently, but already many months ago. It is therefore suggested that the effect on unaided brand awareness is rather short-term. Taking aided brand awareness into account, it is suggested that pop-up stores might be a means of influence since all the interviewees knew Westwing Home & Living. Since Keller (2013) suggests that a high level of awareness results in strong customer-based brand equity, it is observed that Westwing Home & Living's customer-based brand equity is high.

Furthermore, it was found that quality perception was already high before visiting the pop-up store. This is mainly due to the fact that the interviewees associated Westwing Home & Living's high prices with high quality. However, the opportunity to touch and experience the products in the pop-up store confirmed and even strengthened this hypothesis. As all of the interviewees would consider purchasing in the future, our research confirms the information stated in the literature review that the possibility to inspect the products personally reduces uncertainty as consumers can rely on prior experiences in case of lack of physical information (Laroche et al., 2005).

In addition to that, it was observed that pop-up stores can also be used to decrease the

perceived risk regarding privacy and security issues (Laroche et al., 2005) as one person states that his visit in the pop-up store has proved that Westwing Home & Living is a professional company.

Surprisingly, it was discovered that the experiences at the pop-up store increase brand trust up to a level where interviewees who do not have any prior purchase experiences even believe that the company will be reliable in terms of delivery.

Another outcome of the research was that online retailers might struggle with a too broad online assortment that might overwhelm consumers and thus prevent them from buying. Hence, pop-up stores can be a method of showing consumers only a selected range of products and overcome this obstacle.

Finally, the fact that all the interviewees would consider buying from Westwing Home & Living in the future is an indicator of brand loyalty, which Kapferer (2012) stresses is difficult to build up for Internet brands. Thus, it has been demonstrated that pop-up stores can indeed increase quality perception and brand trust for online retailers which further increases brand loyalty.

It is also important to point out that the measured parameters are interrelated. Brand awareness affects trial as well as considering the purchase in the future. Moreover, quality perception influences brand trust. Additionally, brand trust and quality perception have an impact on the consideration to purchase in the future.

As a result, it is suggested that pop-up stores can considerably increase brand equity of online retailers. The findings of this analysis are illustrated in a framework (Figure 4) which uses Keller's (2013) insights on customer-based equity and illustrates how the parameters used in this analysis are interrelated.

First of all, consumers must know about the brand before ordering online (trial) or visiting the pop-up store. The visit at the pop-up store can be viewed as a consumer experience which further influences consumer knowledge. In the

case of online retailers, quality perception and brand trust are considered the most important factors of consumer knowledge and as already mentioned, one influences the other. As a consequence of this, differences in responses occur which further results in customer-based brand equity. The outcome of the whole process is brand loyalty which is expressed in the consideration to purchase in the future.

This framework can be used to analyse the process to sequentially build customer-based brand equity by making use of pop-up stores.

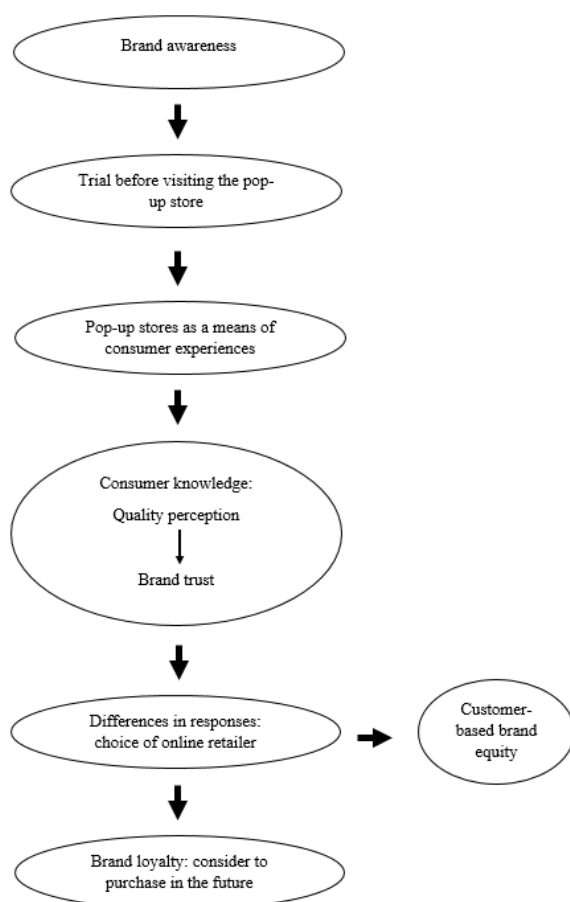


Figure 4 – Framework: Building customer-based brand equity with pop-up stores (own figure based on Keller, 2013)

Managerial Recommendations

This research highlights that pop-up stores are a crucial means to influence brand equity for online retailers. Moreover, it was found that quality perception and brand trust were the

parameters of brand equity that were influenced most.

When applying the concept of pop-up stores in practice, it is therefore important that only high-quality products are displayed in the store and that a high-quality product presentation is guaranteed as this was found to be the basis for quality perception and sequentially for brand trust of the consumers. Since the online assortment may be perceived as too overwhelming, it is important that the selected range of products displayed in the pop-up store should be a representative reflection of the online assortment.

As pop-up stores are a means to experience the brand, it is important that the shop design is not just of high quality, but also mirrors the brand's character. Additionally, the design of the shop window is of high importance, since an appealing design from the outside might attract walk-in customers with a lower level of brand awareness. Thus, it is crucial for managers to plan the shop design intensively.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that targeting customers does not stop at the pop-up store. Marketing communications should be conducted continuously after the consumers' visit at the pop-up store through various channels. This assures that the level of brand awareness does not sequentially drop after some time since it forms a barrier for the consideration to purchase in the future as experienced in our research.

Limitation and Further Research

The influence of pop-up stores on customer-based brand equity of online retailers has been investigated in this paper and has been visualized in a new framework. However, it is crucial to note that the research is based merely on a case example of one online retailer operating in the home and living sector in Germany. It would be interesting to find out if the results are stable among other industries and countries in online retail.

Moreover, the fact that it is difficult to distinguish the results from pop-up stores and

other permanent brick and mortar stores should also be taken into consideration. Hence, one could stress that these results could be applicable not only for pop-up stores but also for permanent brick and mortar retailers. However, pop-up stores are a way for online retailers to stick to their image as a real online brand since it is less commitment than permanent brick and mortar stores and to express modernity as the concept of pop-up stores is not as mainstream.

Moreover, the findings might be restricted due to a small sample size as the interviews had to be carried out in a short period of time. Additionally, distance issues forced us to rely on people who we knew had visited the pop-up store.

Another fact to consider is that there have been differences in the responses between younger and older interviewees. This might be due to different levels of income and different living situations. As more young consumers have been interviewed in this research, it would be intriguing to see how the results change if less price-sensitive consumers were interviewed.

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Appendix I

Interview guidelines English

Brand Awareness:

- Which online interior retailers do you know?

- Do you know Westwing Home & Living?
- Where do you know Westwing Home & Living from?
- Have you visited their pop-up store in Munich and/or Hamburg?
- Have you known Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?

Trial:

- What were your motives for visiting the pop up store?
- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?
- If no, were there specific reasons why you have not decided to buy?
- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living during/or after visiting the pop-up store? Why?

Quality perception:

- How would you describe the quality of the products?
- Has your quality perception changed during or after visiting the pop-up store? How has it changed?

Brand trust:

- How comfortable do you feel buying from Westwing Home & Living after visiting the store?
- Would you say that you feel more connected to Westwing Home & Living after visiting the pop up store?

Consider purchase in the future:

- Would you consider buying from them in the future?

Interview guidelines German

Brand Awareness:

- Welche Onlinehändler für Interior kennst Du?
- Kennst du Westwing Home & Living?

- Woher kennst du Westwing Home & Living?
- Hast du den Pop-up store von Westwing Home & Living in München besucht?
- Kanntest du Westwing Home & Living vor dem Besuch des Pop-up Stores?

Trial:

- Warum hast du den pop-up store besucht?
- Hast du vor deinem Besuch schon einmal etwas bei Westwing Home & Living gekauft?
- Falls nein, gab es dafür gewisse Gründe?
- Hast du während oder nach deines Besuchs bei Westwing Home & Living gekauft? Warum?

Quality perception:

- Wie würdest du die Qualität der Produkte beschreiben?
- Hat sich die Wahrnehmung bezüglich Qualität nach oder während des Besuchs verändert? Warum?

Brand trust:

- Wie wohl fühlst du dich dabei bei Westwing Home & Living einzukaufen?
- Würdest du sagen, dass du dich nach deinem Besuch vertrauter mit Westwing Home & Living fühlst?

Consider purchase in the future:

- Würdest du es in Erwägung ziehen von Westwing Home & Living in Zukunft zu kaufen? Warum?

Person 1: Katharina, 23

Brand Awareness:

- Which online interior retailers do you know?
Ikea...ähm...

- Do you know Westwing Home & Living?
Yes ... I just couldn't think of that name
- Where do you know Westwing Home & Living from?
I went to Munich with a friend and visited their shop.
- Have you visited their pop-up store in Munich?
Yes exactly
- Have you known Westwing before visiting the pop-up store?
Only from word of mouth. My friends have always been talking about it. But I never visited their website.

Trial:

- What were your motives for visiting the pop up store?
It looked very interesting from the street, my friends wanted to go in, we went to the shop and looked at the stuff and it was quite nice. Cool furniture.
- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?
No
- If no, were there specific reasons why you have not decided to buy?
I didn't know Westwing very well.
- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living during/or after visiting the pop-up store? Why?
No. There was no specific reason, I just didn't need anything.

Quality perception:

- How would you describe the quality of the products?
From looking at it and feeling it I would say the quality is very good.
- Has your quality perception changed during or after visiting the pop-up store? How has it changed?
I didn't have any expectations, I just knew that it's priced quite high and

that's why I thought the quality must also be high. But my visit convinced me that that's correct. Because also if you just look at it, you can see if it's junk or not.

Brand trust:

- How comfortable do you feel buying from Westwing Home & Living after visiting the store?
No... I feel comfortable but where I live there is no shop close by and I also don't notice a lot of their advertisements that's why I don't think of Westwing Home & Living so much when I need furniture. But I would feel good buying there.
- Would you say that you feel more connected to Westwing Home & Living after visiting the pop up store?
Hm... maybe not more connected but now that I've seen the store ... I felt comfortable in there.

Consider purchase in the future:

- Would you consider buying from them in the future? Why?
Yes for sure. If I think of it and see it more often. Because maybe now I need something and now I know that the quality is good and it's something extraordinary that not everybody has so I would buy from there.

Person 2: Lena, 24

Brand Awareness:

- Which online interior retailers do you know?
Westwing, H&M Home, oh god I can't remember ... what was the name of the other thing? ... Ikea
- Do you know Westwing Home & Living?
Yes
- Where do you know Westwing Home & Living from?
Word of Mouth, a friend once worked there

- Have you visited their pop-up store in Munich?
Yes, I have.
- Have you known Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?
Yes

Trial:

- What were your motives for visiting the pop up store?
There was a sale event
- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?
No.
- If no, were there specific reasons why you have not decided to buy?
Hmmm... I didn't need anything before moving in to the new house.
- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living during/or after visiting the pop-up store? Why?
Yes. Because it was discounted. It suited well in my new room.

Quality perception:

- How would you describe the quality of the products?
Very good. I just bought some decoration stuff so I can't really judge but my overall perception was that the products are of high quality. I really like the cushion I have bought - it's my favourite piece in the room and doesn't pull any threads
- Has your quality perception changed during or after visiting the pop-up store? How has it changed?
Hmmm. I don't think so. Also because I didn't buy that much and it was just little things. I didn't really look at the other things (bigger furniture) because I couldn't buy that anyways.

Brand trust:

- How comfortable do you feel buying from Westwing Home & Living after

visiting the store?

I would have a good feeling.

- Would you say that you feel more connected to Westwing Home & Living after visiting the pop up store?
Yes - before visiting the store I didn't really understand their concept. So I was a little sceptical but when I went to their store I actually saw that their stuff is cool and that's why I now have a better feeling towards Westwing.

Consider purchase in the future:

- Would you consider buying from them in the future?
Yes, for sure. Like I said, I didn't understand their concept. Did they always have Westwing Now? When I looked it up, I have just seen the club and I thought that's weird. So I thought no... I shouldn't buy from there but now that I went to the store I understood what they do and I feel better. And I liked their products.

Person 3: Ingrid, 51

Brand Awareness:

- Which online interior retailers do you know?
None
- Do you know Westwing Home & Living?
Yes. From relatives, advertisement, word of mouth, magazines like home&living, Wohnideen
- Have you visited their pop-up store in Munich and/or Hamburg?
Yes
- Have you known Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?
Yes

Trial:

- What were your motives for visiting the pop up store?

To touch and see the furniture

- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?

Yes, online

- If no, were there specific reasons why you have not decided to buy?

Why did you buy before: Through friends I knew from Westwing

- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living during/or after visiting the pop-up store? Why?

Yes, after visiting and while visiting because the quality was nice, quality was good, price-quality was good

Quality perception:

- How would you describe the quality of the products?

Really good, price-quality ratio is good

- Has your quality perception changed during or after visiting the pop-up store? How has it changed?

It improved because then I could see it in kind, I could touch it

Brand trust:

- How comfortable do you feel buying from Westwing Home & Living after visiting the store?

Really comfortable because it offers all kinds of solutions (small rooms, big rooms), they have a solution for everything, the presentation was nice and the inspiration through marketing I feel comfortable to buy there, the pop-up store was one thing to deliver those decoration ideas

I think more about the brand after I visited the store and I feel more comfortable buying it since there is

more risk buying things that I only see online

- Would you say that you feel more connected to Westwing Home & Living after visiting the pop up store?

Yes, because I couldn't only see it virtually but I could experience it physically and this increased my trust

Consider purchase in the future:

- Would you consider buying from them in the future?

Yes of course because I like it and I really like to change the design in my house

It is now one of my favourite stores. Before I go to Kika I would go to Westwing.

Person 4: Stefanie, 23

Brand Awareness:

- Which online interior retailers do you know?

So ... There is IKEA very big in my mind, I can also recall Home24, then all the other retailers that are in my town e.g. XXXLutz, Leiner, Kika, but also Westwing

- Do you know Westwing Home & Living?
yes

- Where do you know Westwing Home & Living from?

I first got in touch with Westwing at Zalando Lounge, but I am not entirely sure... and I also know 2 of their employees. I am not sure though about Zalando Lounge. But I am familiar with the logo.

- Have you visited their pop-up store in Munich?

Yes

- Have you known Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up

store?

Yes

Trial:

- What were your motives for visiting the pop up store?
I was coincidentally in Munich to visit a friend and we thought it's a good idea to go there. And also to see the interior live. It seems better in kind than just online, so it was good for me to see it because I like to touch it.
- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?
No
- If no, were there specific reasons why you have not decided to buy?
It's easier for me to just go to IKEA and buy what I need there because I don't like to shop online in general. Westwing has a too big variety to choose from. I am a student and Westwing is usually priced a little bit higher that's why I appeal more to IKEA
- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living during/or after visiting the pop-up store? Why?
Unfortunately not, I didn't need something at that time but I would have liked to buy something. I didn't have the time to look through their assortment online.

Quality perception:

- How would you describe the quality of the products?
I didn't buy anything yet so I don't really know. But they offer a lot of branded products and also you could see in the pop-up store that the quality is quite high for sure. Also because of the presentation. It looked like high quality.
- Has your quality perception changed during or after visiting the pop-up store? How has it changed?

Hm... yes... I would say no but also yes because you could try out the things, you could sit on things and you could see that the quality is good. Whereas if you visit other stores like Möbelix, this is not the case. No it didn't change but if, then it changed positively.

Brand trust:

- How comfortable do you feel buying from Westwing Home & Living after visiting the store?
Very comfortable. If I would buy something, I would know that everything would be okay including delivery and that the products would arrive in flawless condition. So I would feel very comfortable.
- Would you say that you feel more connected to Westwing Home & Living after visiting the pop up store?
Hm... hm... hm... No I wouldn't say that. Because the pop-up store is only small. So it wouldn't give me a more trustworthy feeling about Westwing and I don't trust Westwing more just because of visiting the pop-up store.

Consider purchase in the future:

- Would you consider buying from them in the future?
Yes. Because I like the assortment and it convinced me.

Person 5: Christian, 28

Brand Awareness:

- Which online interior retailers do you know?
Westwing
- Do you know Westwing Home & Living?
Yes
- Where do you know Westwing Home & Living from?
Through my girlfriend and friends of my girlfriend... So word of mouth

- Have you visited their pop-up store in Munich?

Yes

- Have you known Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?

Yes but only from word of mouth

Trial:

- What were your motives for visiting the pop up store?

Because my girlfriend wanted to go there with me and to see what kind of products they have

- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living before visiting the pop-up store?

No

- If no, were there specific reasons why you have not decided to buy?

Because I didn't like their things and some things are too expensive

- Have you bought from Westwing Home & Living during/or after visiting the pop-up store? Why?

Yes, after. Because I liked a beach towel they had and this was good quality-price ratio

But I wouldn't have thought about looking there before going to the pop up store

Quality perception:

- How would you describe the quality of the products?

Really nice quality, also the beach towel is still really nice

- Has your quality perception changed during or after visiting the pop-up store? How has it changed?

I think of Westwing more as special, not mainstream like IKEA

Brand trust:

- How comfortable do you feel buying from Westwing Home & Living after visiting the store?

Not so comfortable because it is not my style, the most of their products I don't really like

- Would you say that you feel more connected to Westwing Home & Living after visiting the pop up store?

Yes, they brought the topic closer to me, I can refer better to the topic, I trust them and their products

Consider purchase in the future:

- Would you consider buying from them in the future?

Not for myself because I don't like the assortment but more for my girlfriend or my mother or sister, trust that the delivery will be like it is supposed to be, they are really professional but I don't like the time the delivery takes, the pop-up store was helping to get to know the brand