

## SURVEY ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE SERVICES QUALITY ON THE FASHION STORES CUSTOMERS' SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY

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### Abstract

*This paper is a short outline of the concept of fashion branding and the way that it affects the fashion world, both in the segments of luxury fashion and the affordable fashion that targets the groups of people with an average income. This study contains a theoretical part, based on a research of the fashion branding concept; but also a practical part that consists in a survey among a target group in Romania. The theoretical part being more delicate, because of the nature of the studied subject, as it hasn't been so easy to research in traditional branding books or articles, it was rather a study in the history of fashion that has its routes in a prior work experience in the field. Another important chapter that completes this study, consists in a mapping of the most important fashion competitors worldwide, these also being separated in two main groups: luxury fashion brands and affordable fashion brand. For this subchapter I have done a detailed part with the most relevant and important names in the industry, also divided in national and international competitors. The practical part of the study has materialized in a questionnaire that had references about the perceived quality and services offered by the main competitors in Romania. This questionnaire was applied on a number of 149 people, with ages between 18-35 mainly, but also a smaller group with ages between 36-45. The type of study used will also be explained to understand the structure and the meaning of the questions.*

**Key words:** Services quality; fashion retail; satisfaction; loyalty

The concept of fashion branding tends to be a widely discussed subject, but few of us realize which are the costs involved in this industry and how relevant marketing really is in this field.

According to the marketing research led by Mintel<sup>1</sup>, approximately 1 trillion American dollars is spent on a yearly basis on luxury products like clothes and footwear, out of which a stunning 42% on clothing and leather products, a quite high percentage of 37% on cosmetics and perfumes and the rest of the percentage on jewelry and watches.

Relying on those figures, we may realize, to a certain extent, which are the costs involved in a marketing campaign of such type, both in the case of a common fashion retailer as well as in the case of a luxury brand. Implicitly, what comes out of this is the importance of the rigorous studying of the connection between the services quality of such a retail entity and its clients' satisfaction and loyalty.

## The Concept of fashion branding

A brand may be defined as a "complex entirety composed, on one hand, of the formalized elements which may be visually perceived or represented graphically, which may be legally protected and which have the role of identifying the provenance source of the offers and to differentiate them and, on the other hand, of the aggregate of the links of cognitive and emotional nature existing between the brand and the consumers who compose the target market segments of it"<sup>2</sup>.

In most of the cases, in fashion branding we focus our attention on the emotional links created between the consumers and the brand, but, the most interesting is the spending power of this link. Even if, normally, we speak about the sale of normal products (like clothes, shoes, bags, watches), such objects come together with a brand which gives them the advantage of being sold to a certain price level, higher than that of a similar "unmarked" product.

The greatest confrontation which the marketers of this world of fashion have is the fact that we do not talk anymore about the traditional variant of the marketing, where we have a product which satisfies an existing need of the consumers. In the field of fashion we deal with products for which, through the fashion of times or due to the name of the brand, we talk about the invention of a need which we induce to consumers by promotion campaigns.

From a marketing perspective, any brand and, implicitly, a trade mark from the field of fashion, includes in its range at least four fundamental dimensions: notoriety, the perceived quality, the brand's associations and, respectively, the consumers' degree of loyalty<sup>3</sup>. Thus, it is obvious that the assessment of the connections between the quality of the services rendered by a fashion retail entity and, respectively, the consumers' satisfaction and degree of loyalty represents an extremely important step for the administration of a fashion trade brand.

## The Competition present situation on the fashion market at the international and national level

The **Chanel**<sup>4,5</sup> company was founded in 1904 in Paris, France, by Coco Chanel herself (her original name being Gabrielle Chanel). The company is private to this day and has its central headquarters in Paris and an impressive number of 310 stores in all the capitals of the world. The brand has two figures as representative characters: Coco Chanel, founder of the brand and Karl Lagerfeld, the designer who reinvented it. The fashion company is known as one of the oldest luxury fashion houses in the world, being known also as the most elegant. About the brand, it is said that it is the definition of elegance by that "little black dress" and their Chanel No.5 perfume which was used and promoted by important celebrities like Marilyn Monroe. Coco Chanel is known as being the one who revolutionized the female fashion at the beginning of the 90's, having transformed the ladies' clothing in suits inspired by the masculine wardrobe.

**Gucci**<sup>6</sup> is an Italian very renowned fashion company which was founded in 1921 by Guccio Gucci and it is a representative luxury brand from Italy. The company, which started its activity in Florence, was at the beginning a leather specialized store but it became to be the most sold Italian brand with a profit of 4.2 billion dollars in 2008. The company stayed in

the mind of the luxury fashion consumers as those who revived the fashion by the beginning of the 90's. During the period following the decrease of the fashion sales in the 80's, the Gucci people were the first who understood the necessity of a rebranding to meet the new demands of the society. Thus, the brand started a series of defiant advertising campaigns which stressed the fact that Gucci is a sexy brand with a high degree of sensuality, expressing a lifestyle like that of the stars. That series of image campaigns and the new very provocative clothing line saved the brand and turned it into what it is today.

**Prada**<sup>7</sup> is a listed fashion company but it also started like a private company founded by Mario Prada in 1913. Though the company founder believed that women should have nothing to do with the management part of a company, irony was on his side as Mario's son had no inclination to entrepreneurship and his daughter, Luisa Prada, was his successor and managed the company for 20 years. Luisa's daughter, Muccia Prada took over the company in 1978 and she was the one who remained the image of the Prada brand. At the beginning of the 80's Muccia realized that all the fashion industry companies has significant losses. She understood how important it was the positioning on a clear segment of consumers from the category of luxury products consumers and this led to her cooperation with Patrizio Bertelli in that sense. Muccia, together with Bertelli, came up with a brand promotion idea and a new clothing collection based on creativity and delicacy and thus they ended up being associated with artists, elegant ladies and young female entrepreneurs of that time.

**Dior**<sup>8</sup> is a French luxury fashion brand seated in Paris and founded by Christian Dior on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1946 having an extension of 210 stores throughout the world. The Dior brand is part of the group LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy), owned by Bernard Arnault, the greatest luxury group in the world and Dior holds almost half of the voting rights of it. The Dior brand was among the first fashion brands of the world which started to sell the license „Christian Dior“ which was known in the world as haute-couture producer, on luxury products like furs, leather, underwear and jewels. Though important personalities of the group Dior are exactly Christian Dior and Bernard Arnault, the highest notoriety was brought to the brand by Evita Peron who, in 1950, was a true image of elegance or, at present, one of the Dior endorsing celebrities like Natalie Portman<sup>9</sup>. The Dior brand is distinguished among the luxury fashion market competitors by elegance, love for the classic and seniority in this field.

**Yves Saint Laurent**<sup>10</sup> is a luxury fashion house which was set up in France by Yves Saint Laurent himself and Pierre Berge, his partner. The fashion brand was founded in Paris in 1961 and it is one of the most competitive brands of this industry being known in the fashion world by the modern design and by certain representative pieces like the dinner jacket for ladies. The designer was one and the same person with the founder of the brand, being one of the characters of it, together with Hedi Slimane who took over the position of creation manager in 2002 when Saint Laurent achieved his last haute couture collection. Another representative designer for this fashion house was Tom Ford, until 2004, and he took care exclusively of the pret-à-porter line of the brand. Today, the brand has stores all over the world and it is sold in luxury products specialized centers. Also, YSL has its lines for: clothing, cosmetics, jewels, leather products, shoes for women and men. Even the designer said that „Chanel gave women the freedom, I gave them the self confidence“(YSL), referring to the modern wardrobe he offered the ladies.

The **Burberry**<sup>11,12</sup> brand is the most often met model on all the products of the store: clothing, footwear, umbrellas, hats, on the well known scarves and even on the Burberry

perfume box. The black checkerboard on a beige background came to be the most representative image in the consumers' mind but also in the memory of any person who ever had anything to do with fashion. The Burberry brand is the most known luxury fashion brand in England as it is one of the greatest competitors of this industry. The company is managed today by John Peace and Angela Ahrendts, and has as its main activity the luxury fashion in clothing, accessories and perfumes. Thomas Burberry, at the age of just 21 was the one who opened his first store in London in 1856 and became known, unlike the other fashion brands, for his interest in the day-to-day fashion for ladies. Burberry is known as being the inventor of the trench coat which is even today the fashion house *pièce de résistance*, with a lining which has as its design the Burberry checkerboard.

All the above mentioned luxury brands are present in Romania but everyone differs in the proportion in which it is present in the country. Chanel, Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, Burberry, Gucci, Prada brands are present just in our capital city and Gucci may be seen in other cities of the country besides Bucharest (for example Cluj-Napoca). Certain products of those brands may be purchased in specialized stores also in other parts of the country, in commercial centers specialized on luxury fashion products. Those brands are for sure those which can be called great competitors on the Romanian luxury fashion market. The detail which makes the difference between our country and the rest of Europe is, for example, the level of the salaries which makes those fashion tycoons gain great sales percentages in developed countries with a flourishing economy but this does not place them on top of the brands sold in Romania.

The **Zara**<sup>13</sup> brand was founded in 1974 by Armanco Ortega in Spain where it started as a retail store. The trademark identified itself as one of fashion, for the segment of average income clients who appreciate luxury fashion and it was thus that appeared the concept of fashion at an affordable price, the "affordable fashion". Nowadays, the company is part of the Inditex Group which also owns the companies: Massimo Dutti, Stradivarius, Bershka and Pull & Bear, composing the greatest retail type group of the world. The trademark extended its activity in the field of accessories, shoes, jewelry, items dedicated to interior design and perfumes. Ironically, Zara was defined by the Louis Vuitton fashion manager as "possibly the most innovating and devastating retailer in the world" for the huge success it enjoys all over the world and for the fact that it offers the consumers products which are practically identical to the luxury ones but at affordable prices. On the other hand, it was called "Spain's success story" by CNN during a coverage done by them.

**H&M**<sup>14,15</sup> is a company originating in Sweden, a Swedish multinational based on clothes retail which also has accessories, makeup, footwear and household items. The name abbreviation comes from Hennes and Mauritz, though the company was founded by Erling Persson in 1947, and now it has its central headquarters still in its country of origin but in its capital city Stockholm. Nowadays, one of the company key persons is actually Stefan Persson, Erling's successor who carries forward the company known for its specialization in the various above mentioned fields, for women, men, children and teenagers. The H&M brand has over 2600 stores open in 53 countries. The company founder got his inspiration for the business idea subsequent to a trip to the United States of America and, once returned to Sweden, he realized that a store selling fashion at attractive prices could be a success. The first store opened in 1947 focused its activity exclusively on items dedicated to ladies but, at the same time with the coming into the company of the tycoon Mauritz Wilforss in 1968, the company extended its activity also for gentlemen. If, until then, the company name was

„Hennes”, which means “for her” in Swedish, the company changed its name to H&M, at the same time with the appearance of the new partner.

The most successful great competitors of the fashion market in our country in terms of sales are: Zara, Bershka, Stradivarius, H&M, Pull&Bear and Massimo Dutti. All these brands have stores in all the big cities of the country with a number of 1,2 or 3 locations and enjoy an enormous success. The majority of these competitors belong to the Inditex Group so they address to a group of consumers with average income but who appreciate fashion as the said competitors have Zara type products which look like the present collections of the luxury brands at accessible prices. Out of the local competitors who enjoy a quite high notoriety we mention: Monesse, Guara, Cristina Nichita (Nicci), Ligia Mocan, but those competitors have a much more reduced number of stores and a lower turnover as compared to those of the Inditex Group.

### **The quality of the services offered by fashion retail units and its assessment**

The quality of the services is important in any field of activity but, in the case of the fashion retail it is vital. One of the most used practices in many retail type domains which is being more and more used is to build present consumers’ loyalty: special attention to the preservation of the present clients. The stores offer special terms like: extended shop hours for shopping in the case of current clients, special promotions, e-mails, messages, congratulatory cards with promotions created for present clients or even congratulation messages in cases of birthdays or holidays. Another very used practice is loyalty built by discount cards for clients, a practice met especially in cases of luxury cosmetics stores like Sephora, Marri- onaud, Douglas or even in the case of H&M stores, at a national level. Another method used to improve the quality of the services in fashion retail type units is that with the suggestions and claims cards addressed to clients who visited the store at least once. Such cards are sent in many cases by post together with a letter, by e-mail or even inside the fashion retail unit. Thus, consumers may express their opinion in a sincere manner and truly help solve certain problems. Another important element is the way in which the personnel reacts to dissatisfied clients, the way in which it solves the problems and manage to complete the sale because, irrespective of the product quality or the brand name, dissatisfied clients will always exist at a certain moment. The personnel must be very calm, it has to listen to the client’s problem to the end, offer solutions, help her/him find the adequate solution and solve the client’s problem. Also, it is important that the personnel apologizes and relate with the client’s problem. The manual which is at the basis of the services quality in many fashion retail stores is the manual with the good functioning practices of the store.

RSQS<sup>16</sup> comes from „Retail Service Quality Scale” which means that we speak about an assessment method of the services quality in the case of retail type services, the SERVPERF method adapted to retail and which is very adequate to the survey here. The quality of the services in the field of retail has a hierarchical order in the manner in which the 5 basic dimensions are distributed. These are: physical look, trust, interaction between client and personnel, problem solving and store policy. The physical aspects refer both to the functional elements like store arrangement, comfort, intimacy but also to elements pertaining to esthetics like the store architecture, colors, materials and style. The elements of trust focus on the combination between the promises made by the store and the correct supply of those ser-

vices. With the interaction between the personnel and the clients attention is focused on the fact that the personnel should be: friendly, helpful, polite and inspire confidence to the clients. The problem solving part refers to the personnel's ability to solve the products return or change situations but also to the manner in which it treats the claims. The policy issue refers to the strategy, the basic principles and the procedures on the basis of which the store is managed: the products level of quality, the shop hours, parking places, payment options.

Over the years, the RSQS test improved by works and research of several authors who tested, applied and improved the research method<sup>17,18</sup>.

## Methodology

The main purpose of this work was the investigation of the impact that the quality of the services supplied by the fashion retail units has on the clients' satisfaction and, respectively, on the clients' degree of loyalty from the point of view of the store recommendation and revisiting intent.

In that sense, a questionnaire was conceived, adapted on the basis of two services quality assessment models – SERVPERF, as services quality analysis general model, respectively, RSQS – specific analysis model for the quality of the services provided by retail fashion units. Thus, the services quality was measured related to the most recently visited fashion retail store, through a set of 14 assertions referring to various aspects of the services quality supplied by such a store, with answer on a scale from 1="Totally false" to 5="Totally true" (Table 2), the satisfaction being assessed by the question "How satisfied are you by your experience as a client of the store (by the services offered by this store)?" (with answers from 1 = "very dissatisfied" to 5 = "very satisfied"), while the clients' loyalty by the questions "How probable is it that you recommend this store to your friends?" and, respectively, "How probable is it that you return to this store in the future?" (with answers from 1="no, certainly not" to 5="certainly yes").

**Table 1.** Investigated sample structure

Age:	Sex:	Most recent graduated level of studies:
Below 25: 112	Man: 48	Doctor's degree: 1
26-35: 19	Woman: 101	Master's degree: 20
36-45: 12		University degree: 78
Over 45: 6		High school or less: 50

The self-administrable questionnaire was applied in April 2014, in printed form, to 149 persons of Cluj-Napoca who visited one of the Zara, Bershka, Stradivarius, Pull&Bear or H&M stores during the last year. The sample structure may be seen in Table 1.

## Achieved results

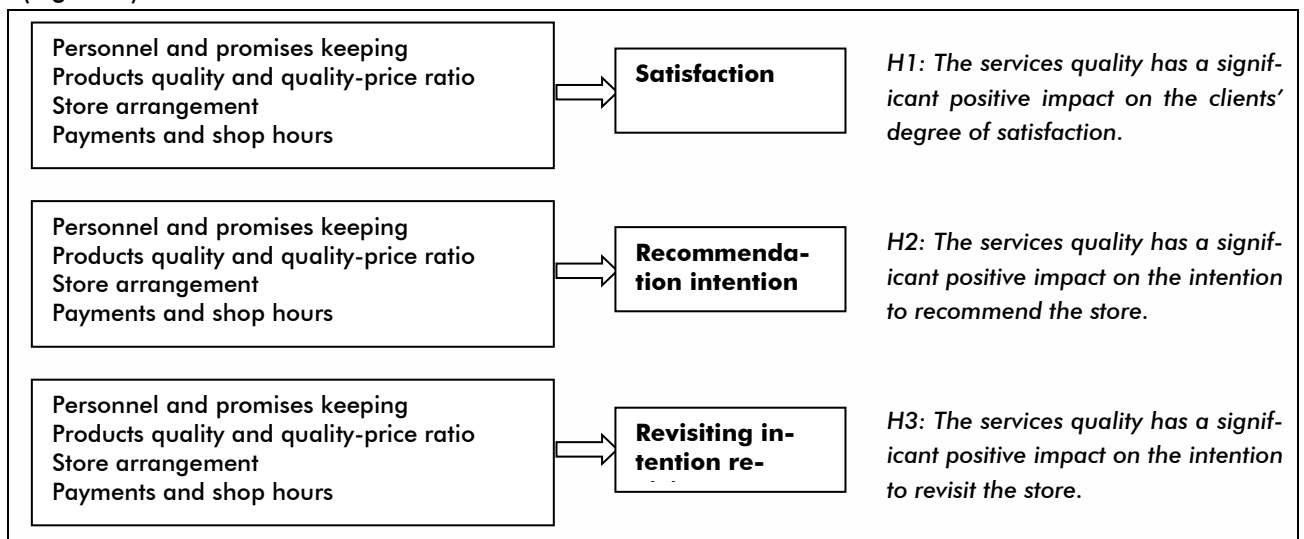
With a view to the investigation of the impact on the whole of the services quality on the clients' satisfaction and degree of loyalty, a preliminary stage was necessary to group the individual elements which reflect the services quality in a restricted number of categories of factors.

**Table 2.** Main components of the services quality  
(the analysis method of the main components, with Varimax rotation – IBM SPSS 20)

C1: Personnel and promises keeping	E1: The personnel was polite during my visit	<b>.789</b>	.046	.268	-.065
	E2: The store employees inspired confidence to me	<b>.784</b>	.038	-.043	.147
	E3: The store personnel was responsive to my demands	<b>.731</b>	.013	.182	.095
	E4: The personnel inspired dedication to their place of work	<b>.679</b>	.223	-.074	.027
	E5: The personnel fulfilled their promises	<b>.546</b>	-.130	.512	-.028
	E6: The store observed what it promised by their promotion	<b>.413</b>	.288	.003	.140
C2: Products quality and price – quality ratio	E7: The marketed accessories have a high quality	.053	<b>.835</b>	.244	-.040
	E8: The marketed clothing has a high quality	.036	<b>.834</b>	.139	.072
	E9: The store offers a good price-quality ratio	.194	<b>.660</b>	-.182	.245
	E10: The marketed footwear has a high quality	.107	<b>.654</b>	.354	-.097
C3: Arrange-ment	E11: I liked the way in which the store is arranged	.171	.348	<b>.723</b>	-.004
	E12: The design and colors fit the store style	-.048	.330	<b>.590</b>	.387
C4: Payments and hours	E13: I never had problems with products payment	.021	.139	-.102	<b>.805</b>
	E14: The shop hours is convenient to me	.217	-.088	.273	<b>.658</b>

In this sense, the method used was that of extraction of the main components by the “Varimax” statistical technique (Table 2), the results indicating an optimum grouping of the 14 elements of the services quality (E1, E2, ..., E14) into four main components: personnel and promises keeping (C1), products quality and price-quality ratio (C2), store arrangement (C3) and, respectively, payments and shop hours (C4).

Thenceforth, in order to analyze the impact on the whole of the services quality on the clients’ satisfaction and degree of loyalty, I used the modeling by multiple linear regression in which the independent variables (the factors) consisted of the four identified components of the services quality and the dependent (resulting) variables were, by turns: the clients’ satisfaction, the recommendation intention and, respectively, the intention to revisit the store. In the proposed models, each of the four components of the quality were reflected through a variable resulted as an average of the component elements:  $C1=(E1+...+E6)/6$ ,  $C2=(E7+...+E10)/4$ ,  $C3=(E11+E12)/2$  and, respectively,  $C4=(E13+E14)/2$ . Thus, three services quality influence models and, respectively, three statistical hypotheses were tested (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Proposed models and statistical hypotheses

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis (Table 3) reveal the fact that all the three statistical hypotheses laid down ( $H1$ ,  $H2$  și  $H3$ ) prove out, the results of the ANOVA test being statistically significant for all the three tested models (the value of the parameter afferent to „ANOVA  $F$ ” being of 16,62, 14,03 and 13,44, respectively, while the value of the statistical significance coefficient “Sig” is inferior to the threshold of 0,05 in all the three analyzed models).

**Table 3.** Modeling the impact of the services quality on the clients’ satisfaction and loyalty (multiple linear regression method – IBM SPSS 20)

<b>The Impact of the services quality on satisfaction</b>					
	<b>Con- stant</b>	<b>C1: Personnel &amp; promises keeping</b>	<b>C2: Products quality &amp; quality- price ratio</b>	<b>C3: Arrangement</b>	<b>C4: Payments &amp; shop hours</b>
<b>B</b>	1.128	.210	.390	.036	.124
<b>t</b>	2.275	2.805	5.371	.418	1.307
<b>Sig</b>	.024	.006	.000	.677	.193
$R^2$ square = .316; ANOVA $F$ = 16.62 (Sig = .000) Satisfaction = 1.128 + .210*C1 + .390*C2 + .036*C3 + .124*C4					
<b>The Impact of the services quality on the recommendation intention</b>					
	<b>Con- stant</b>	<b>C1: Personnel &amp; promises keeping</b>	<b>C2: Products quality &amp; quality- price ratio</b>	<b>C3: Arrangement</b>	<b>C4: Payments &amp; shop hours</b>
<b>B</b>	1.111	.037	.317	.213	.220
<b>t</b>	2.132	.471	4.152	2.364	2.210
<b>Sig</b>	.035	.638	.000	.019	.029
$R^2$ = .280; ANOVA $F$ = 14.03 (Sig = .000) Recommendation Intention = 1.111 + .037*C1 + .317*C2 + .213*C3 + .220*C4					
<b>The impact of the services quality on the revisiting intention</b>					
	<b>Con- stant</b>	<b>C1: Personnel &amp; promises keeping</b>	<b>C2: Products quality &amp; quality- price ratio</b>	<b>C3: Arrangement</b>	<b>C4: Payments &amp; shop hours</b>
<b>B</b>	1.135	.117	.229	.157	.329
<b>t</b>	2.253	1.542	3.103	1.799	3.412
<b>Sig</b>	.026	.125	.002	.074	.001
$R^2$ = .272; ANOVA $F$ = 13.44 (Sig = .000) Revisiting intention = 1.135 + .117*C1 + .229*C2 + .157*C3 + .329*C4					

As it can be noticed (according to the  $R^2$  values of each linear regression model), the four components of the services quality, taken together, determine 31,6% of the clients’ satisfaction variation, 28% of the recommendation intention variation and, respectively, 27,2% of the revisiting intention variation. Hence, it can be said that the level of the services quality of a fashion store represents a significant determinant especially of the store clients’ level of satisfaction but also of their degree of loyalty from the point of view of the recommendation and revisiting intentions.



If we analyze the three models of influence, more exactly the value of the of the statistical significance coefficients ("Sig") afferent to each component of the services quality, by the comparison of those values with the maximum significance threshold (0.05), we may highlight the fact that in the case of each model there are certain components of the quality which have a more significant impact on the clients' satisfaction and loyalty, respectively.

Thus:

- In the case of the clients' satisfaction, the significant impact is determined by C1 (personnel and promises keeping) and, respectively, C2 (products quality and quality-price ratio); in exchange, C3 (store arrangement) and C4 (payments and shop hours) do not bring a significant contribution to the overall impact on satisfaction;
- In the case of the store recommendation intention, the significant impact is determined by C2 (products quality and quality-price ratio), C3 (store arrangement) and, respectively, C4 (payments and shop hours); in exchange, C1 (personnel and promises keeping) does not bring a significant contribution to the overall impact on the recommendation intention;
- In the case of the store revisiting intention, the significant impact is determined by C2 (products quality and quality-price ratio) and, respectively, C4 (payments and shop hours); in exchange, C1 (personnel and promises keeping) and, respectively, C3 (store arrangement) do not bring a significant contribution to the overall impact of the revisiting intention.

## Conclusions

Fashion branding is an innovative domain, in a continuous change and reinventing (especially due to the online media development). Fashion in itself is always in a continuous change, with new trends coming or returning in force and thus, with new challenges for the marketers who sometimes need to assign new necessities to certain products as the fashion branding may even be considered a special form of art.

These characteristics implicitly lay their imprint on the manner in which the trade units of the field of fashion have to be administered with branding playing an essential role in their case too, the services perceived quality and, respectively, the clients' loyalty found in tight connection with the services quality, being essential components of the assets of any brand<sup>19</sup>, generally, and of any fashion retail brand, in particular.

Taking into account the results obtained subsequent to the research carried out, the conclusion may be that a good management of the fashion retail type units is essential for the generation of the clients' satisfaction and loyalty as it is necessary that the management activities be oriented toward the increase of the general level of the services quality, toward the conception of products diversified offers, the creation of an adequate environment and arrangement and, above all, the personnel training and efficient administration of the manner in which it related with the clients.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yves\\_Saint\\_Laurent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yves_Saint_Laurent)

<sup>11</sup> [http://ro.burberry.com/heritage/?\\_requestid=4163119#/heritage/heritage-1800-1](http://ro.burberry.com/heritage/?_requestid=4163119#/heritage/heritage-1800-1)

<sup>12</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burberry>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.eoi.es/blogs/ricardogarro/2012/02/02/inditex-a-closer-view-of-the-company/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hm.com/ro/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H&M>

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