Feature of Official Website Shop of Fast Fashion Brands

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Abstract: Official website shops of H&M, UNIQLO, and ZARA were investigated focusing on webpage design and displayed apparel items to understand global fast fashion brands' features and characteristics of corporate branding. Similarities and differences were compared between the three brands based on the visual information of official websites in terms of brand, country, and timeline. As a result, features of global fast fashion brands were summarized in three successes; actively utilizing the information communication technologies, consistently managing online shops in cooperation with street shops, and planning differentiation strategy to eliminate overlap in the brand positioning. Characteristics of corporate branding were found related to the webpage design and composition of apparel items. Specifically, H&M website shops provided more information about stylish dressing for young people's lifestyle. UNIQLO website shops contained more detail categories and color variations of apparel items, the apparel items were considered for comfortable depending on the climate. ZARA website shops were designed to be chic, simple and monotone, and the number of apparel items was the highest, but each item was available one color.

Key words: Fast fashion, official website, webpage design, quantity and color of apparel items

1. Introduction

In recent years, SPA (Specialty store retailer of Private label Apparel)[1] brands in the apparel industry are successfully globalized in a short period. These global SPA brands are called "fast fashion brand" since they provide high-fashion products at low prices, and quickly release new apparel items. Fast fashion brands which emphasize speed and style are continually expanding chain stores globally. There were several studies about those fast fashion brands focusing on business management, those studies have pointed time-efficient through the SCM (supply chain management) for global success in short period [e.g., 3, 5, 11]. Meanwhile, this QR (quick response) of SCM involves higher risks to management of inventory control and creation enhanced design [4, 9].

In accordance with internet user increase worldwide, brand awareness of fast fashion also rapidly improved among young people who have high style conscious. Thus internet website becomes an important resource for fashion style and fashion trend as same as conventional fashion magazines.

Official website of fashion brand is effectively utilized not only as a corporate public relations tool for their own products but also for e-commerce business. In comparison with shopping at a street shop, online shopping is carried out through a webpage screen which is strong relative to the visual information including graphic layout, text, color etc. [6, 10]. The visual components on webpage represent corporate branding based on the brand

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[1] SPA (Specialty store retailer of Private label Apparel): A business model which have declared by Donald Fisher of The Gap Inc. at the financial report in 1986. SPA incorporates the entire making process involving distribution and retail to inventory management [15].

concept. Therefore the global success of fast fashion brands could be consistently designed and managed both offline and online.

This study has presupposed that the official website shop of a fast fashion brand is strategically designed to include corporate branding as like as a street shop. The aim of this study is to understand features and characteristics of fast fashion brands in successful international business. The features of corporate branding for fast fashion brands were investigated focusing on the visual information of their online shops on the official webpages.

2. Investigations

The investigated brands were H&M, UNIQLO, and ZARA which were fast fashion brands with high sales ranking in the apparel business in 2012 as shown in Table 1. Each fast fashion brand has official online shops corresponding to different international markets. Among these markets, seven countries; China (CH), France (FR), Japan(JP), Korea(KR), Thailand(TH), UK, USA are included in common and Spain(SP) for H&M and ZARA. Consequently, the number of investigated official website shops was twenty-three: the seven countries' website shops of H&M, UNIQLO, and ZARA, H&M Spain and ZARA Spain [12, 13, 14].

Table 1. The investigated fast fashion brands [1, 2, 7, 8].

	H&M	UNIQLO	ZARA
Headquarter (Founded year)	Stockholm, Sweden (1947)	Tokyo, Japan (1984)	Arteixo, Spain (1975)
Parent	Hennes & Maurits AB	Fast Retailing	Inditex
Number of worldwide stores (2011 year-end)	2,472 stores in 43 countries	1,024 stores in 13 countries	1,830 stores in 82 countries

The methodology of investigations was to save images of the webpage design and apparel items of each official website shop were once weekly. The period of investigations was from September 2012 to January 2013. Since images were disappeared or changed by the updating for new items irregularly, some data of September and October in 2012 were missed. The visible information in consideration on the website was layout design of webpage, apparel categories, and composition of apparel items. Similarities and differences were compared between the three brands based on the visible information in terms of brand, country, and timeline.

3. Results and discussions

3.1 Layout design

The webpage layout of three brands' top pages was differently designed depending on the brand. Official webpages of H&M and UNIQLO were designed columns fixed centered layout, but ZARA was designed solo image content with menu fixed as shown in Figure 1. Each top official webpage showed a brand logo, apparel categories and information of new apparel items, and noticed bargain sale sometimes.

Top page of official website included the link for choosing country, and the language of official website was corresponded to the country. In case of H&M and ZARA, although the access country was changed, the formations of official website layout were nearly the same except the displayed language. However, UNIQLO's the formation was changed deepening on the country. The new apparel items were released on the category link

'New this week' on the top pages, H&M and ZARA changed the new apparel items on a weekly basis, but UNIQLO changed the apparel items almost every day except UNIQLO (FR) and UNIQLO (FR).
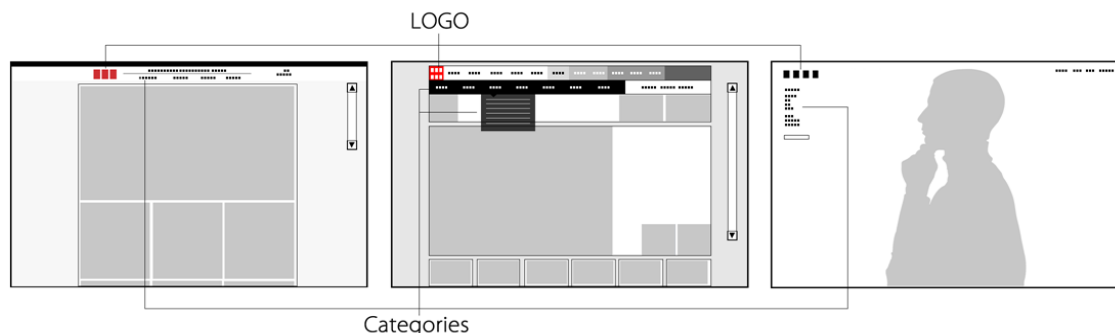

Figure 1. The official top webpage layout style of three brands: H&M (left), UNIQLO (center) and ZARA (right) on 15th January 2013.

3.2 Apparel categories

Apparel categories listed on the menu were all linkable for checking the belonging apparel items. There were eight apparel categories in common which were designated by FC1 to MC4, and categories belong to others as shown in Table 2. In terms of the number of category, ZARA was simply comprised by the small number of categories. In comparison with ZARA and H&M, UNIQLO was more subtilized and mixed categories; e.g., shirts categories divided long and short sleeve, and including collaborated brand such as Orla Kiely and UT.

Table 2. The listed apparel categories for woman and man

Apparel category			H&M	UNIQLO	ZARA
Common	Woman	FC1	Jackets&Coats, Blazers&Waistcoats	Outer, Jacket&Coat	Coats, Blazers
		FC2	Cardigans	Knit	Knitwear
		FC3	Jeans	Jeans	Jeans
		FC4	Skirt	Skirt	Skirt
	Man	MC1	Jackets&Coats, Blazers&Suits	Outer, Jacket&Coat	Coats, Blazers, Jackets
		MC2	Jumpers&Cardigans	Knit	Knitwear
		MC3	Jeans	Jeans	Jeans
		MC4	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts
Others	Woman		Dresses, Tops, Shirts&Blouse, Sportswear, Trousers, Shorts	Sweat, ultra-light down, Fleece, Poncho, Tunic&Onepiec, T-Shirts, Long sleeve T-shirts, POLO, Shirts long sleeve, Shirts short sleeve, Casual shirts, Flannel shirts, Orla Kiely, UT, Long pants, Cut pants, Slacks, Warm pants	Dresses, T-shirts, Shirts, Trousers
	Man		Hoodies&Sweatshirts, T-shirt&Vests, Sportswear, Trousers	Sweat, Ultra-light down, Fleece, T-shirts, Long sleeve T-shirts, POLO, Casual shirts, Shirts short sleeve, Flannel shirts, Long pants, Cut pants, Warm pants	Suits, T-shirts, Trousers
The number of category			20	40	18

3.3 Composition of apparel items

In this study, the number of apparel items was regarded as one measure of design importance to the brand. Quantity of apparel items was investigated by each brand of Japanese online shops from September 2012 to January 2013 as shown in Figure 2. The number of apparel items in FC1, FC2, MC1, and MC4 of ZARA which are woman/man's top were significantly higher than others until the 3rd week of December 2012. However when the 3rd week of January, the number of apparel items in eight categories were not very difference. The number of Zara's items in FC1, FC2, MC1, and MC4 was dropped remarkably because of the new uploading method of new designed items. Before the 3rd week of December 2012, each category included the corresponding new items, but from 4th week of December 2012, new items were only uploaded on the categories of 'New collection'.
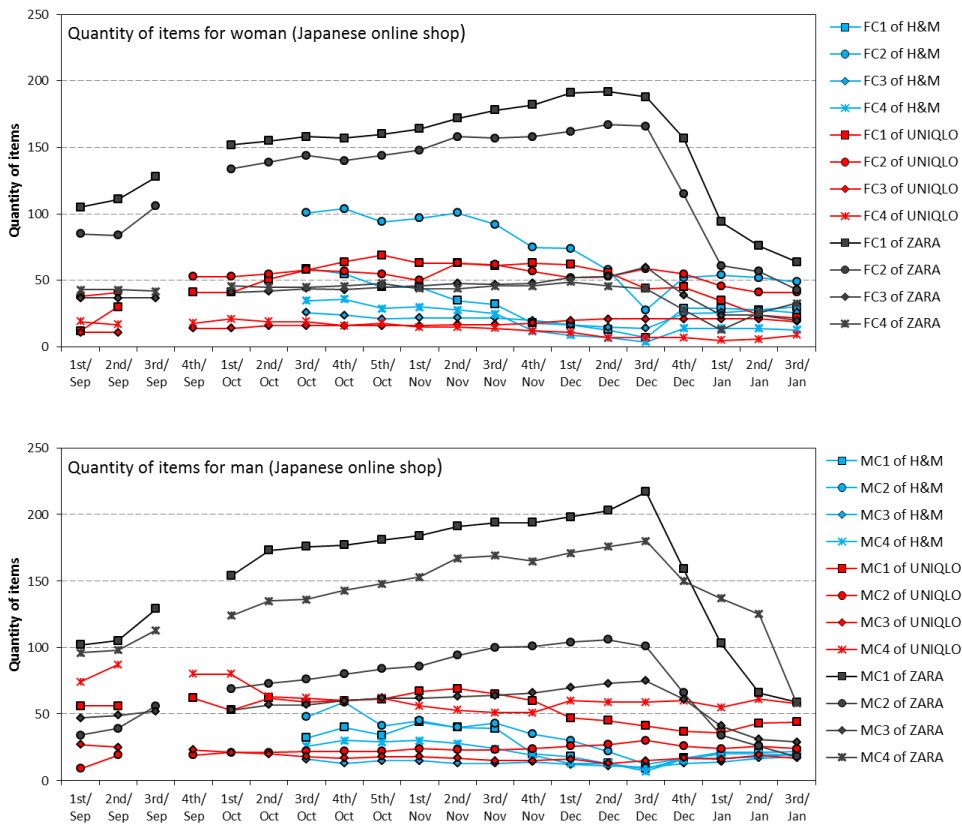

Figure 2. Quantity of items for woman categories (up) and man categories (down) based on Japanese online shop. Note: some data of September and October in 2012 were missed.
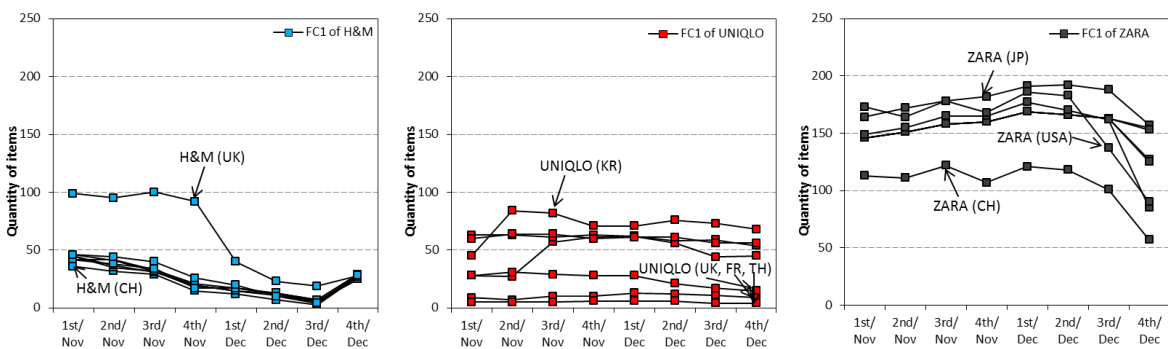

Figure 3. Quantity of FC1 of three brands: H&M (left), UNIQLO (center) and ZARA (right) for each country.
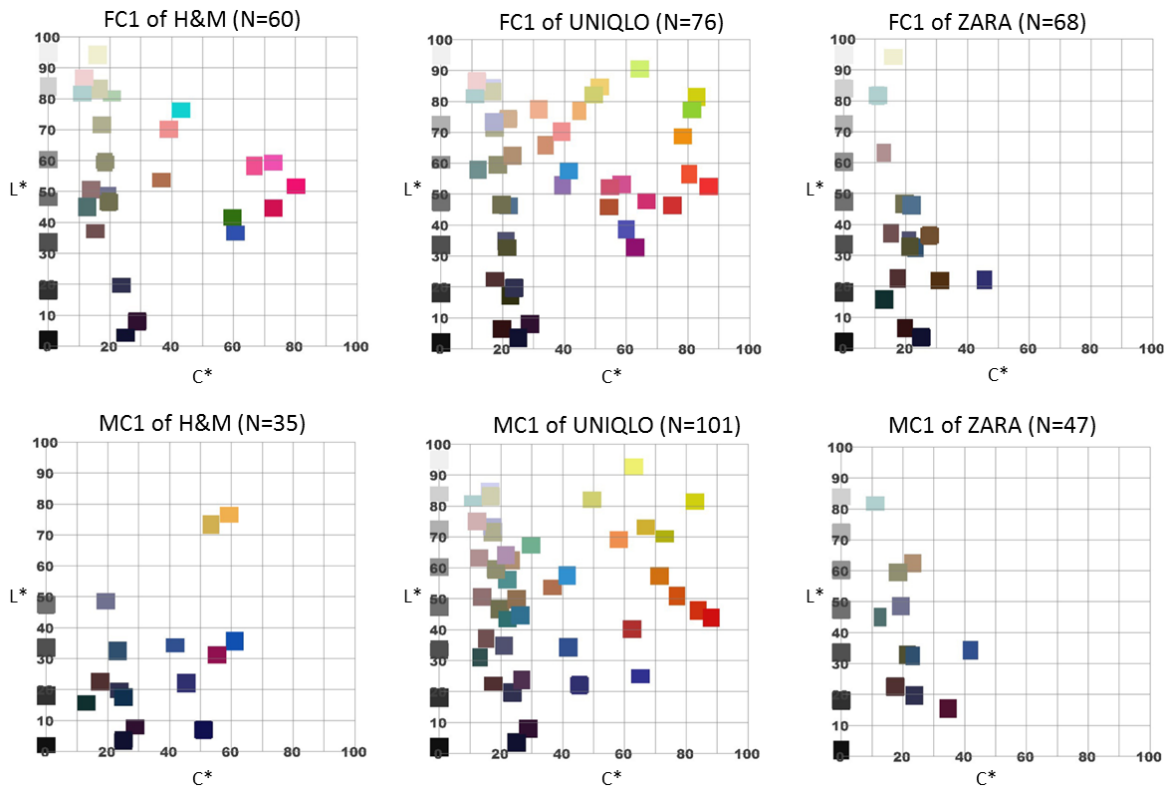
Figure 4. Color distribution of FC1 and MC1 of three brands on 26th January 2013. Note: N is added the addition number of quantity of apparel items and color variations.

The quantity of apparel items in FC1 of each country checked for eight weeks in other to know the brand globalization. H&M was arranged almost same number and same design in seven countries, but H&M (UK) only arranged items more as shown in Figure 3. UNIQLO was arranged differently apparel items depending on the country, and UNIQLO (FR) and UNIQLO (TH) were arranged few items. ZARA was arranged slight different depending on the country, but ZARA (CH) arranged items less than other countries.

In addition, items checked in terms of color compositions with considering color variations from the 4th week of January 2013. Only outer items' colors checked because total number of items of each brand was a huge therefore it was very difficult to check all items. Colors of outer items in FC1 and MC1which were as considering a main visual part for fashion coordination were measured through CIEL*a*b color space by a software Feelimage analyzer (VIVA Computer Inc.).

In case of apparel item was designed with plural colors, one color was measured that is the main color which was the largest area's color or the written color on the color information. Color distribution of apparel items was indicated on the C* (chroma) - L* (lightness) diagram as shown in Figure 4. The number of measured color was different with the above quantity of apparel items because of color variations.

Color distribution of apparel items of H&M was different based on gender. Colors of FC1 of H&M were not matched up with MC1 of H&M. Colors of FC1of H&M were included high lightness and reddish colors than MC1 of H&M. In addition, available to choose color variation of apparel items was depending on the item. Colors of apparel items both of FC1 and MC1 of UNIQLO were distributed over whole range of hue. Almost of apparel items of UNIQLO were available color variations, therefore the number of measured color was much higher than

quantity of apparel items. In comparison with H&M and UNIQLO, colors of FC1 and MC1of ZARA were concentrated on dark-tone which were the low chroma – low lightness colors and white color. Apparel items of ZARA were available one color, therefore the number of measured color was same as quantity of apparel items.

3.4 Discussions

Similarities found on official website shops of H&M, UNIQLO and ZARA were considered as feature of official website of global fast fashion brand. On the other hand, differences between H&M, UNIQLO and ZARA were considered as characteristics of corporate branding as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Feature of fast fashion brands found on official website shops of H&M, UNIQLO and ZARA

Features		H&M	UNIQLO	ZARA
Differences	Layout design	Emphatic	Segmentation	Simple
	Item categories	Basic	Detail	Basic
	Changes of item quantity	Regular item quantity	Changing quantity by the country	Flexible by the season
	Displayed item image	Different models, poses, and places by the item	Laid item on white background	Several models took the same pose on white background
	Item color and color variation	Color changing by the season, color variations depending on item	Whole range of color, most of items are available color variations	Concentrated on dark -tone and white color, no color variation
	Providing type of information	Mainly image with other match item images	Combination of image and description about material	Mainly image with only primary info.
Similarities	● The local languages are provided for worldwide official websites ● Available SNS (Social network service) ● Present varied promotional videos ● Release new items every week ● Announce the information of bargain sale			

On the whole observation, these fast fashion brands were effectively utilizing the information technologies on their official website. For example, the varied promotional online videos gave 3D fitting images and style to online shoppers. In addition, brands were able to gather directly consumer opinions to the brand and items in real time through SNS such as Facebook or Twitter.

Frequent changes and updates on new release apparel items at least once a week were found to be a common feature of official website shops of fast fashion brands. In addition, official website shops provided material, color, and price information of apparel items sold in their street shops at the same time. Their official online shops were designed in cooperation with their street shops.

The differences between H&M, UNIQLO and ZARA were discussed found on webpage design and composition of apparel items. These fast fashion brands planned differently to eliminate overlap in the brand positioning. Through the complexity of webpage design, H&M focused on the main theme which is changing by the season. UNIQLO equally focused on apparel items in various categories with colorful variations. ZARA focused on the substantive style, and using color and displayed item images were related to the concept of simple and chic.

In addition, official website information were indicated the target brand position. H&M provided more information about stylish dressing for young people's lifestyle using the H&M life webpage which is including

Ways to wear it, Style insight, Trend report, etc. UNIQLO provided information about functionality of UV cut shirts, UL (Ultra light down), HEATTECH, etc. which items were considered for comfortable life depending on the climate. ZARA provided only primary information for online shopping e.g., size, material, price.

4. Conclusions

Features of global fast fashion brands were discussed based on the results of the investigations of their official webpages and online shops. Similarities and differences between three fashion brands were related to the success of fast fashion industry in the global markets which could summarize as follows.

　　1) Actively utilizing the information communication technologies.

　　2) Consistently managing online shops in cooperation with street shops.

　　3) Planning differentiation strategy to eliminate overlap in the brand positioning.

Characteristics of corporate branding on each brand were found related to the webpage design, composition of apparel items, and provided information. Specifically, H&M website shops provided more information about stylish dressing for young people's lifestyle. UNIQLO website shops contained more detail categories and color variations of apparel items, the apparel items were considered for comfortable depending on the climate. ZARA website shops were designed to be chic and simple and monotone, and the number of apparel items was the highest, but each item was available one color.

The object of this study was global fast fashion brands which was scope limitation in the apparel industry. This study was able to know features of fast fashion brand, however it was not able to compare the features with different brand types such as luxury brand or sports brand which are also globally succeed. In further study, the scope of the investigation would extend to other apparel brands. In addition, investigation term was not long enough to be clearly explaining the relationships between corporate brand and the effects of general factor; season, annual events, and financial condition, etc.

Since this article was simply discussed the results based on observation and the counting apparel items, the further study about a method of quantitative measurement by the information of online official website is necessary for the systematic evaluation of brand characteristics.

5. Acknowledgment

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