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THE IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE STRATEGY ON A COMPANY'S RESULTS AND PERCEPTION BY THE MARKET:

an analysis of case studies in the textile industry

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ABSTRACT

The liberalisation of international trade has transformed the corporate world by creating a global market, intensifying competition, and demanding effective corporate strategies. The development of an assertive strategic planning requires a comprehensive market knowledge and understanding of competition and acting forces in the market. Thereby, the companies must design the best way to manage its resources to achieve the companies' goals.

This dissertation aims to explore the influence of strategic planning on a company's performance and market perception, with a focus on the textile industry. By examining real cases of companies such as Primark, Pull and Bear, H&M, Decathlon, Zara, and C&A, the study seeks to provide valuable insights for entrepreneurs and corporate leaders on the importance of strategic planning.

The literature review approaches different concepts regarding corporate strategies and their implications, examines distinct strategic typologies, analyses the correlation of corporate strategies with big data and its impact on firm performance. A strategic analysis of the textile industry is conducted, examining the strategies usually implemented in the sector.

Subsequently, this dissertation presents a case study of the selected companies, evaluating their market positioning and the potential strategies employed with the addition of the analysis and results of the empirical research conducted in this dissertation. This study's conclusions provide insights into the importance of corporate strategies for the positioning of companies within the market and with consumers, as well as its impact on overall performance.

RESUMO

A liberalização do comércio internacional transformou o mundo empresarial, criando um mercado global, intensificando a concorrência e exigindo estratégias empresariais eficazes. O desenvolvimento de um planeamento estratégico assertivo requer um conhecimento abrangente do mercado e a compreensão da concorrência e das forças actuantes no mercado. Assim, as empresas devem conceber a melhor forma de gerir os seus recursos para atingir os seus objectivos.

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo explorar a influência do planeamento estratégico no desempenho de uma empresa e na perceção do mercado, com enfoque na indústria têxtil. Através da análise de casos reais de empresas como a Primark, Pull and Bear, H&M, Decathlon, Zara e C&A, o estudo procura fornecer informações valiosas para empresários e líderes empresariais sobre a importância do planeamento estratégico.

A revisão da literatura aborda diferentes conceitos sobre estratégias corporativas e suas implicações, examina tipologias estratégicas distintas, analisa a correlação de estratégias corporativas com big data e seu impacto no desempenho da empresa. É feita uma análise estratégica da indústria têxtil, examinando as estratégias habitualmente implementadas no sector.

Posteriormente, esta dissertação apresenta um estudo de caso das empresas seleccionadas, avaliando o seu posicionamento no mercado e as potenciais estratégias utilizadas com a adição da análise e dos resultados da investigação empírica realizada nesta dissertação. As conclusões deste estudo permitem compreender a importância das estratégias empresariais para o posicionamento das empresas no mercado e junto dos consumidores, bem como o seu impacto no desempenho global da empresa.

SUMMARY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The liberalisation of international trade has created a global market, transforming the corporate world. A dynamic market structure, differing market conditions and the existence of innovative competitors intensify an increasing competition. Thus, determining the right strategies and creating different values become fundamental to obtain an advantageous position in the global competitive environment (Dereli, 2015).

Corporate strategy is the pattern of a company's decisions that determines its objectives and the main policies and plans for achieving those goals (Foss, 1997). The process of strategic planning is individual and depends on the context in which the firm is inserted. Therefore, the degree of assertiveness of the designed strategies comprises more than understanding the company's operations and internal processes. It involves comprehensive knowledge about the market in which the company operates and its respective opportunities and threats, knowing the competitors and which are their strengths and weaknesses, as well as a deep understanding of its stakeholders and its characteristics that might be optimised or better explored.

In this context, the importance of developing strategic plans for a company to thrive nowadays is clear. However, to what extent can it influence a company's performance and how its brand is perceived by the market and the consumers? This dissertation objects to answer this research question, exploring the theories that supports the adoption of different corporate strategies. Moreover, it will investigate the strategies usually assumed in the market, specifically on the textile, and the importance of its accuracy on its results and positioning in the market.

The importance of this research question lies in better preparing the decision-makers to act in a market with a continually increased level of governance, demanding enhanced strategy in management. Understand the influence of strategic planning in the company performance and positioning in the market can enhance the engagement of the company's leaders with strategic planning. This fosters the different departments to act in cooperation to optimize the way through reaching the company's goals.

The objective of this study is to elucidate the importance of investing time and resources in developing well-structured strategic planning. In addition to that, the research seeks to determine the effects of having a clear definition of the company's objectives and the path to reach them. By examining the importance of corporate strategy on a company's performance and market positioning, particularly within the textile industry, this dissertation provides valuable insights for entrepreneurs and corporate leaders.

The findings of this research can assist industry professionals in understanding the principles behind strategic planning and its implications. Furthermore, might clarify the logical functioning of the market, guiding them through identifying its company's place among competition and consumers, and which are the possible and best decisions to be assumed.

Seeking solid conclusions based not only on theories but also in practical examples that illustrate the research, real cases of companies from the textile industry will be examined. This study will delve into the strategies adopted by the companies Primark, Pull and Bear, H&M, Decathlon, Zara, and C&A. In addition, this study seeks to analyse how these strategies have influenced the perceptions of these companies by their competitors and consumers, and how these perceptions have, consequently, impacted their overall results.

For this purpose, this dissertation is composed by four main chapters. The first one consists of a review of the theoretical and empirical literature on factors and theories that support the existent studies regarding. corporate strategies. The theoretical framework approaches different concepts regarding corporate strategies and their implications, examines distinct strategic typologies, analyses the correlation of corporate strategies with big data and, finally, its impact on firm performance.

On the second chapter, a strategic analysis of the textile industry is presented, including both PESTEL and SWOT analyses. Subsequently, the third chapter encompasses the case study of the companies examined in this dissertation, evaluating their market positioning and the potential strategies employed. The fourth chapter presents the research conducted, including the analysis of primary data generated from a survey specifically developed and applied for this study. Finally, the conclusions provide insights into the importance of corporate strategies for the positioning of companies within the market and with consumers, as well as the impact on overall performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical background concerning corporate strategy is vast and allows for application in different companies and industries. In this chapter, an exploration of the existing literature concerning corporate strategies will be developed, seeking to establish a strong base for the analysis of the relationship between the theme and the performance of industries in the textile sector. Furthermore, empirical research evidence on strategy-performance relationship will also be analysed.

2.1. COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

Having a competitive strategy is an inherent process of every organisation that competes in an industry. However, the differentiation lies in procedures minutely studied and developed through strategic planning, or procedures evolved alongside the activity of the several departments of the company. In this last case, each department ends up following strategies biassed by its professional orientation, incentives of the internal management and the objectives from the own sector – which hardly aligns with the optimal strategy to achieve the company's goals (Porter, 1980).

To survive, and further than that, to succeed in such a complex and dynamic environment as industries, a company must articulate its structures, processes and resources and make sure that they are aligned with its goals and objectives. The path that the organisation chooses to follow to accomplish this articulation and alignment is summarised by its competitive strategies. In this concern, developing a competitive strategy is to evaluate which are the organisation's goals and objectives, articulate how to achieve them, and establish which policies and procedures will be required for that (Anwar, 2016).

Moreover, to assume and maintain a position in the market, a company must ensure a sustainable competitive advantage. This depends on the development of key capabilities through the optimal investment of the right resources – which will probably lead to a superior performance in the long-term (Hax and Majluf, 1996). Further than that, owing a competitive advantage in the market can be characterised as earning a higher economic profit than the average of the competitors. As regarding the economic value, it consists of the difference between the perceived benefit, from the product or service, and the cost incurred in its production or development. Hence, achieving a competitive advantage requires creating and delivering a higher economic value than the competition, being able to address customer needs better than potential substitutes (Besanko et al, 2016).

In addition to insert itself in the market, a company must manage to adapt to the changes and the uncertainty present in the environment. This comprises a process with high complexity for most organisations, that requires strong alignment between the external environment and the management of internal procedures and interdependencies (Mile et al, 1978). The analysis of the external environment enables the companies to deeply understand the market and its competitors, finding their unique position and turning this study into a particular competitive strategy.

The established goals and policies must be consistent with the available resources and techniques, and, finally, the management must ensure clear and congruent communication and implementation of the procedures. Moreover, the numerous decisions and conducts must be applied across several organisational levels, to management until the production itself.

The theorical framework regarding the acting forces in the market defines the strengths and weaknesses as internal forces within the company and refer to its skills and assets, such as financial resources, brand positioning, and technological availability. Therefore, the need and motivations that key executives must consider drawing the strategic planning are represented by the company's value. Those, combined with its internal forces, determine the internal limits of the competitive strategy that can be successfully adopted by the organisation (Porter, 1980).

At the same time, the forces exerted by the external environment on the organisation are called opportunities and weaknesses. Their impact on the market defines the competitive environment and constitutes the external limits for the competitive strategy development (Porter, 1980). External forces are experienced by all companies in the market, thus, their differentiation lies on how they face and adapt to changes, succeeding the ones that better optimise and align its abilities. Organizations differ in the way to select, process, interpret and react to stimuli on their external environment based on the strategic positioning they implement (Spanjol et al., 2012).

2.2. STRATEGIC TYPOLOGIES

In the intricate process of adapting to the external environment while coordinating internal resources and structures, strategic typologies have emerged as a result of the search for patterns in business behaviour and corresponding performance. The objective is to elucidate the logics and strategies that could support students and managers in the organisational adaptation process.

The typologies proposed by Miles et al (1978) and Porter (1980) since their publication, have received significant attention in the educational community and remain among the most cited, analysed, and tested. Therefore, it becomes fundamental to develop this present study in the light of the theories and analysis developed by those authors. Even though, as stated by the authors, the organisations are too complex and mutable to allow for a typology that specifies every form of strategic behaviour (Miles et al, 1978; Hambrick, 1979).

One of the guiding strategic typologies is proposed by Miles et al (1978), which classify organizations four different types: the Defenders, Analysers, Prospectors and the Reactors, which are the companies that fail to follow one of the first three typologies. The first type described, the Defenders, focuses on stability by producing a limited product range to a specific market segment. Its success comes primarily from efficiently serving a stable domain. The Prospectors' prime capability lies in finding and exploiting new products and market opportunities. In contrast to the Defenders, its focus is flexibility, with a usually broad domain that is in a continuous state of development. They aim to survey a wide range of environmental conditions and trends, requiring a high flexibility in its technological and administrative structure.

In the middle of the extremes of stability and flexibility, there is the third strategic typology that works towards balance: the Analysers. Blending the solutions from the first two strategic types, they adopt the products or market innovations that were successfully developed by Prospectors and gain most of their results from a stable set of products or clients' groups, as the Defenders. Thus, to succeed in this strategy, a company must be able to quickly follow the lead of key Prospectors meanwhile maintaining operating efficiency in its stable product and market areas (Miles et al, 1978).

Another main typology adopted in the field is proposed by Porter (1980) and constitutes two generic strategies that can be pursued singly or in combination: overall cost leadership and differentiation. Those strategies relate to how the company will create economic value. To achieve a low-cost position, a company must assure an efficient-scale production, strict control over costs and minimise costs in various areas. The strategy of differentiation lies in creating a product or service that is perceived as unique in the whole industry. When successfully achieved, this strategy leads to above-average return because of brand loyalty by customers. This results in lower sensitivity to price, allowing higher margins.

In addition to decide *how* to create economic value, a second key positioning lies in deciding *where* it aim to create value. One alternative is focusing on a narrow set of products, buyers, or market (Porter, 1980). By serving a narrow strategic target, a firm can be more effective or efficient than competitors who are competing in a broader way. In alternative to the focus strategy, the broad differentiation strategy involves identifying a competitive advantage that sets the company apart from competition in the industry. Thus, a product that comes from a broad differentiation strategy must be widely valued by consumers (G. Team, 2022).

2.3. CORPORATE STRATEGY FACING BIG DATA

The increasing availability and accessibility of big data enable the extraction of valuable insights that are revolutionising the shopping experience, both online and in traditional stores. Big data is defined by its “5-V characteristic”, which are Volume, Velocity, Veracity, Variety and Value (M. Naeem et al, 2022). Generated by a variety of instruments, sensors and computer-based transactions, the big data provides accurate knowledge extracted from the user's purchases, mouse clicks, social media posts, among other actions. This is leading to individualised shopping experiences, shifting the relationship between data and strategy, especially in certain economic sectors such as the textile.

Many industries are actively investing in big data projects and adopting it, objecting to develop new competitive advantages such as a personalised customer service, more efficient processes, better integrated and managed supply chains and improved product offerings (Mazzei, M. J., & Noble, D., 2017). However, the disruptive potential of big data is necessarily attached to the company’s involvement with it on a strategic level (Morabito, 2015). A big data set becomes useless when the data is not treated and analysed, extracting important information for managerial decision-making. According to researchers from the McKinsey

Global Institute, big data represents the next wave of innovation, competition, and productivity. (Manyika, J. et al, 2011)

This evolving scenario marks a significant transformation in the generation and treatment of managerial information. Previously, a company's corporate strategy dictated the data collection and analysis process. In contrast, there is a notable shift, wherein the available data and its derived insights now play a significant role in guiding and influencing corporate strategies. This new dynamic allows for exploring new ways of creating, delivering and capturing value through leveraging the adoption of Big Data (Adaga et al, 2023).

The extent data sets enable companies to have a broader and more comprehensive view of potential new markets to explore. In addition, it also provides more specific and assertive insights on how to better address the customer needs and understand market trends, all while keeping track of information in real-time. As a result, competition in the market has intensified, representing new barriers to the entry of new firms, and leveraging the advantage of innovative business.

The facts stated above highlight the strategic importance of Big Data as a unique asset, once it allows companies that effectively use it to differentiate itself from its competitors (Adaga et al, 2023). As such, it plays a crucial role in the development of the digital transformation, enabling companies to remain competitive in an increasingly digital world (Li et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Big Data analytics can be employed to forecast demand accurately. This leads to better inventory management, reducing overstock and stockouts. By analysing all information retrieved from Big Data, specific patterns and economic indicators can be identified, allowing for an optimization in logistics and distribution, reducing costs and improving efficiency (Builtin, 2024).

As regarding the theoretical framework about Big Data analysis in business strategy, a resource-based view (RBV) of the firm defines Big Data as a non-substitutable resource, rare and valuable, that allow for competitive advantage creation (Mazzei and Noble, 2019). This study suggests that the proficiency in using Big Data allows companies to faster adjust to shifts in the market and customer needs, resulting in optimised organisational agility and responsiveness ultimately and enhancing overall firm performance.

To this extent, Big Data leads the companies' decision-making process to be based on empirical evidence rather than intuition, resulting in better accurate and effective strategies (Akter, and Haque 2022). Its adoption leads to identify bottlenecks in firms processes and respective streamline of operations and inefficiency mitigation, enhancing productivity and reducing costs. These results are particularly important sectors where operational efficiency significantly affects profitability and customer satisfaction, as in the textile industry.

Table 1, presented in the Appendix, summarizes the main authors, their works and their respective contributions to the literary framework on which this dissertation is based.

3. STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF TEXTILE INDUSTRY

3.1. PESTEL ANALYSIS

Before exploring and analysing the strategies adopted by each player in the market, it is important to examine the macro-environment in which they operate. It includes relevant components over which the firm cannot control directly, such as economic conditions and the competitive environment. The broader environmental context significantly influences several criteria used in a company's strategic planning, and therefore, demands preliminary analysis prior to closer examination.

A highly important tool in strategic planning, the PESTEL analysis provides a list of potentially important issues that might influence a corporate strategy. To elaborate that, the PESTEL framework classifies the environmental factors into six key factors: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological, and Legal, thus the analysis' name PESTEL. Those factors must be analysed both in the market environment, that involves suppliers, customers, and competitors, and in the non-market environment, that involves the government, media, and non-governmental organisations.

In this context, a PESTEL analysis of the textile sector will be developed below.

3.1.1. Political

The political environment of a country or economic group directly influences the functioning of all the industries within it. Companies that operate on politically stable countries or economic groups benefit from predictable regulatory frameworks, consistent economic policies and reliable governance structures. These factors foster a conducive environment for long-term strategic planning and makes it more feasible for companies to act accordingly over the years.

In the textile industry, a stable political environment is a critical factor for business prosperity. Stable political environments are associated with higher levels of economic growth, which in turn, lead to an increase in the level of investment and consumer purchasing power, directly affecting sectors such as textiles (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, political stability minimizes the risks associated with sudden policy changes, such as tariffs and import or export restrictions, that represent high risk of disruption in supply chain and unexpected increase in operational costs for companies.

Additionally, a stable political scenario stimulates trade agreements and partnerships, which facilitates international trade. This factors particularly benefits the textile industry, that highly relies on a global supply chain for sourcing raw materials and to expand its target market. The World Trade Organization emphasizes that stable political environments enhance trade facilitation measures, leading to reduced costs and complexities of international trade The (World trade organization, 2023).

Furthermore, geopolitical tensions affect the credit availability in the market, reducing investments and business opportunities, as well as reducing the consumers' ability to leverage their purchase power. Lastly, the political factor significantly influences industries as regarding governmental support for technology or sustainable practices, that dictate waves and trends in the market, as is the case with the increase in textile eco-productions. Beyond that, subsidies such as tax incentives can support strategic industries or stages of production.

3.1.2. Economic

The economic conditions have great impact in the textile industry, influencing both offer and consumer demand. Similarly to a stable political landscape, a stable economy allows a company to develop and follow long-term strategic planning and attracts higher levels of investment. As cited before, economic growth leads to increases in wage and disposable incomes, boosting consumer spending on textile products. Conversely, economic downturns result in smaller purchasing power, leading to lower demand for textile goods. In addition, rising inflation also leads to a reduction in consumption.

An economic expansion also fosters the emergence of new players in the market, increasing competition. This can result in reduced profit margins, increasing the importance of leveraging new technologies that allow for cost reduction, differentiating the players in the market. In addition, exchange rates also play a fundamental role, once fluctuations in currency directly affect the cost of raw materials and the pricing of good in international markets. Beyond that, volatile exchange rates create uncertainty, jeopardizing pricing strategies and forecasts for companies that operates internationally (World trade organization, 2023).

Moreover, macroeconomic policies direct impact the business environment in which textile companies operate. Policies that seek to stimulate economic growth can enhance consumer spending and investment attraction in the industry. Conversely, restrictive economic policies can lead to reduced business activities and consumer expenditures.

3.1.3. Social

The textile is a sector highly impacted by consumer preferences, therefore is profoundly influenced by the social environment in which the company operates. For a company to thrive, or even survive, in such a dynamic sector, it must be flexible enough to rapidly adapt its production to changes in consumers lifestyles and trends as sustainable and fair-trade fashion.

Globalisation and the easiness of information access has leveraged population social conscience, leading to higher concern with the company's social practices and policies. Companies' public stance on news and events directly affects their consumers' decisions, as does their code of ethics and the adoption of good practices with their employees.

Additionally, demographic shifts, such as population ageing in developed countries and a growing middle class in emerging countries influence market dynamics and differentiate the more agile companies that faster adapts to the new conditions. While the ageing factor influences the products design and qualitative factors, the rising middle class in countries as China and India increases the demand for higher quality clothing.

3.1.4. Technological

Technological advancements are driving innovation and efficiency in the textile industry. Textile manufacturing technologies such as automation, robotics, and 3D printing are transforming the production processes, reducing costs and increasing productivity. Adopt new technologies is what enables companies to be flexible enough to rapidly adapt its production processes to a dynamic and fast changing market. The development of new technologies become essential to innovation in sustainable materials and production processes, which are crucial for the textile company nowadays.

Furthermore, as previously approached in the chapter about Big Data, technology revolutionized the shopping experience with e-commerce in retail and distribution channels, additionally to the use of artificial intelligence usage for customer experience. Beyond that, the data-driven strategic planning makes it more assertive, greatly impacting the growth of companies that are able to leverage the use of technology.

Another significant impact of industry 4.0 technologies happens on supply chain management, with tools as blockchain technology. Kamble et al. (2021) argues that implementing blockchain in production can improve the economic performance of a company in several ways. According to the authors, it can make the production process more sustainable, by reducing cost and waste because of a better use of raw material and more energy efficiency. Furthermore, blockchain can guarantee more data security and authenticity and reduce human errors and transaction time.

3.1.5. Environmental

Aligned to a higher awareness of social responsibility of its purchasing, consumers are becoming increasingly more aware of the environmental impact of their choices. The textile industry is one of the largest polluters globally, with substantial water consumption and waste generation. Therefore, there is a growing pressure from governments and consumers to the adoption of sustainable practices.

As consumers become more aware of the environmental impact of their purchase, the demand for eco-friendly products continually increases. Thus, the adoption of sustainable practices improves a company's brand image, enhancing customer loyalty and making it more competitive in the market.

Furthermore, there is a tendency to the emergence of new regulations related to waste management, pollution and carbon emissions. Therefore, companies with well-developed strategic plans can anticipate regulatory changes and, when new regulations are implemented, outperform their competition. Lastly, climate change and its impact on crop yields on raw materials as cotton affects its availability and price.

3.1.6. Legal

Lastly, the textile industry is subject to several regulations and standards that vary by country or economic group. Compliance with labour laws and regulations, including health and safety standards are essential for legal and operational reasons. Beyond that, companies must be aware of intellectual property rights protection for designs and trademarks and product safety regulations, such as labelling requirements and restrictions on hazardous substances.

In addition, as this industry often has production processes in different countries, they need to comply with different trade laws and tariffs. Preferential trade agreements represent opportunities for new markets and cost reductions, while tariffs and trade barriers can increase expenses and limit market access (World trade organization, 2023).

3.2. SWOT ANALYSIS

The swot analysis is another management tool that aims to evaluate the scenarios, but focusing more on identifying the internal aspects that stimulate the business growth and the points that hemp this evolution. Therefore, the conclusions retrieved from the PESTEL analysis of the potential issues present in the textile industry were used as a basis for the development of a SWOT analysis. The name SWOT summarizes the factors analysed with this tool: the company's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

This tool guides for a better understanding of the organisational scenario, optimising the strategic decisions. Its results allow the organisations to understand its inside strengths and weaknesses, which are the factors that may differentiate itself in the market and make it better prepared to address outside factors. Further than that, it clarifies which are the opportunities and weaknesses existent on the market it operates, that represents factors to which the company must adapt or be prepared to face and thrive. Although this analysis primarily focuses on internal factors of the firm, a generalist analysis will be conducted sequentially, encompassing broader factors typical of textile companies.

3.2.1. Strengths

An effective strategic plan, developed in line with a company's objectives, aligned with its operational capacity and which foresees how companies will act in different future scenarios. This allows the company to quickly and efficiently adapt and reorient itself, providing a strength capable of guiding the company in the face of all the external factors analysed in the PESTEL analysis. Corporate strategies make it possible to take better advantage of opportunities and to react more quickly and efficiently to threats that affect all market players. This allows the development of strengths that generate competitive advantage for companies.

In addition, in order to prepare a strategic plan, the company needs to deeply understand its structure and working conditions, its limitations and competitive differentials. This makes it better prepared to react to major and sudden changes in the political and economic scenario, leveraging its strengths and outperforming competition.

Advancements in technology are improving manufacturing efficiency and product quality. If the company prepares itself to be one of the first to adopt new production technologies, it becomes a significant strength that may be decisive in thriving despite competition. New technologies are responsible for great shifts in industries, for enabling new manufacturing processes, the development of new materials, faster and cheaper production. Thus, a high investment in a Research and Development department, with advanced studies and openness to new technologies may represent great strengths to the companies.

Furthermore, the companies that are able to be the first to adopt a greater proportion of eco-friendly materials, sustainable production and transparent processes aimed at a positive social and environmental impact are able to use it as a strength in front of the growing trend towards sustainable and ethical fashion. However, the impact of these factors on its popularity will vary depending on the firm's specific target group.

Well-established global supply chains and distribution networks can be a competitive advantage in terms of speed of delivery, rapid adaptation of production to new trends, as well as preventing supply chain disruption problems. Furthermore, companies that have strong and effective control over their value chain make them more efficient at adapting production, marketing, sales and administrative processes in the face of shifts in the market, becoming disruptive players with strengths in detriment of the late followers.

3.2.2. Weaknesses

Conversely to the strengths represented by embracing new technologies, failing to adopt these innovations can make production more expensive compared to competitors and likely result in a decline in product quality. In addition, it makes the company a slow reactor in front of rapid changes in consumer preferences and fashion trends, as it requires frequent product updates and adjustments in manufacturing.

A lack of bargaining power with suppliers and weak control of its supply chain leads to high vulnerability to fluctuations in raw material prices, such as cotton and polyester, as well as making it a weaker link facing a disruption in value chain. This weakness can result in increased production costs and reduced profitability. Additionally, it may cause challenges in maintaining consistent product quality, consequently harming the company's ability to meet market demand and maintain competitive advantage.

In the textile industry, over reliance on manual labour in some regions may lead to labour disputes and exposes the company to potential supply chain disruptions. Labour-intensive production processes are more susceptible to matters as strikes, labour shortages and regulatory changes.

Additionally, companies unprepared to the ethical and sustainable fashion trend can suffer with the growing regulatory compliance costs associated with environmental and labour regulations. The increasing demand for sustainable and ethically produced goods may lead companies that fail to adopt sustainable practices to face reputational damage, reduced customer loyalty and a shrinking market share.

3.2.3. Opportunities

Expansion into emerging markets with growing disposable incomes and increasing worldwide demand for clothing and textiles is a relevant opportunity to textile companies. These markets face a rising middle class, resulting in increased consumer spending on clothing and textile goods. This expansion represents opportunities both in terms of new consumer markets and access to cheaper labour, reducing production costs and enhancing profitability.

Furthermore, the adoption of digital technologies and e-commerce platforms may enable companies to reach a wider audience, enhance customer engagement and conquer international customer loyalty. As stated before; by leveraging technologies as big data and data analytics, retailers can provide personalized shopping experience, more efficient marketing and more accurate products. As well as better cultivating its audience, these initiatives can make the sales and promotion process cheaper by guiding companies more directly and more quickly to its objectives.

In front of the growing ethical and sustainable fashion trend, collaboration with sustainable fashion initiatives, brands and digital influencers that promote eco-friendly practices and products are great opportunities. Nowadays, consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the social and environmental impact of their consumption and support. Thus, they are becoming more concern as regarding companies positioning and adoption of sustainable and social practices. Therefore, this represents a relevant opportunity to creating competitive advantage in the market by aligning with these values and prioritizing transparency and sustainability into operational processes. This fosters loyalty with conscious consumers, increasing market share and brand reach. This strategy not only addresses a growing consumer demand, but also favours companies in regulatory measures focused on sustainability and social responsibility.

3.2.4. Threats

As a highly demand-sensitive segment, the textile industry is significantly fragile to economic downturns and recessions During those times, consumers prioritize the purchase of essential goods, leading to reduced spending on discretionary items like clothing. Additionally, the sector is also highly exposed to disruption of global supply chains due to geopolitical tensions, natural disasters and worldwide events as health pandemics. These bottlenecks in the production process result in delay in production and delivery, increasing costs and inability to meet market demand. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted supply chains, emphasizing the fragility of the textile industry's international operation (World Trade Organization, 2023).

The ease of access to international market has intensified competition from low-cost producers in countries with lower labour and production costs. The increased competition reduces operational margins and creates barriers to the entry of new players. The textile sector is characterized by intense competition from both domestic and international manufacturers, from small companies to large corporate groups. This scenario may lead to smaller prices and reduced profit margins, making it more threatening for companies to maintain profitability.

Moreover, stringent environmental regulations increase compliance costs and impact profitability. Companies are forced to rapidly adopt sustainable practices to meet legal requirements, which can be costly and time-consuming. Furthermore, failing to attend these regulations can result in fines, legal issues, as well as harming the brand reputation.

Lastly, this industry also suffers with imitation products undermining brand reputation and market share. Counterfeit goods push down the value of authentic brands and reduce consumer trust and loyalty. This problem is particularly relevant in the textile industry, where brand integrity is crucial for a company to thrive and conquer its market share.

This SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the textile industry's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, helping companies to identify strategic priorities and mitigate potential risks. The results showed that a strong investment in the research and development department can be a major differentiator in this sector, as it enables to identify or develop new trends and quickly identify the possible use of new technologies in production, making the company a first mover in the market.

4. CORPORATE STRATEGY IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Even though each company typically develops and applies corporate strategies specifically tailored to its unique operations, goals, and market, industry trends tend to guide, or at least influence, most of the companies operating within it. Porter (1980) stated that the industry functioning highly influences the determination of strategies potentially available to the firm. Moreover, the industry structure plays a significant role in determining the competitive dynamics within that market.

As regarding current trends in the textile industry, it is possible to cite short delivery time, mass customization and zero inventory (Chen, C.L., 2020). As a fast-moving industry, in which customers have wide access to its innovations and tendencies, companies must be always prepared to reach the "fashion pace". The textile industry is strongly driven by consumer behaviours, perceptions, values, knowledge, and awareness (Dickson, M.A., 2000). The companies in this industry are required to be agile and responsive due to the fast-paced nature of fashion trends. Aiming to better anticipate and adapt to fast-changing consumer preferences, the companies can leverage market research and customer feedback, ensuring that their portfolio remains relevant and appealing.

However, fast fashion companies - that are the ones better prepared to rapidly adapt to new fashion and design trends, are on the opposite side of the growing trend to support sustainability and circular fashion. According to the European Union (2022), the consumption of textiles has the fourth highest impact on the environment and climate change, after food, housing and mobility.

This pushes authorities and private initiatives to support a sustainable textile industry. The European Union is promoting, from 2022, a transition pathway for the textile ecosystem to become more resilient and successfully achieve the green and digital transitions. This plan involves that, until the year of 2030, all textile products produced or sold in the EU market are durable, repairable and recyclable, free of hazardous substances and produced with a socially conscious production process. This initiative has a slogan of "fast fashion is out of fashion".

This scenario forces fast fashion companies, such as Primark and H&M, to rapidly adapt and reinvent themselves, seeking to reach low cost without sacrificing sustainability in their production process and reaching a minimum quality level - that allows their product to participate in a circular fashion.

4.1. CASE STUDIES

The following case studies were analysed using information published by the companies on their websites, and news reports approaching the companies' strategies. The information analysed is regarding the global strategy of the selected enterprises, even though the six of them focus its operations on occidental countries. Therefore, the analysis and its results provide

The approached content clarifies, in addition to the strategies actually adopted by the companies, how they want to be seen by the market and their consumers. The description of the strategies adopted by each company, usually included in the website section described as "About Us", also says a lot about how the brand positions itself in the market, or at least how it intends to position itself.

4.1.1. Primark

On this section of Primark's website, it's clearly notable that its focus is offering affordable products. Beyond that, the company states that it aims to provide a wide range of products, from everyday essentials to stand-out style, addressing a wide target audience, women, men, and kids. In addition, the company offers a wide range of products for its vast audience, from clothing for different occasions, beauty products, footwear and accessories to home decoration products, bed and bath linen and other utilities.

Furthermore, the firm approaches its objective of making more sustainable fashion affordable for everyone. In this context, Primark states a series of sustainable practices in its production it aims to achieve by 2030. It includes using recycled or sustainably sourced raw material, designing products to be recyclable and reducing carbon emissions in its value chain. (Primark, 2023).

Those statements sourced in Primark's website allows to conclude that the company follows a cost leadership regarding strategic positioning. Primark's business model allows it to sell wares cheaper than its competitors and still generate margins in line with the industry standard. A firm that follows a strategy of cost leadership creates more value than its competitors by offering products with the lowest cost (Besanko et al, 2021). In this case, this happens because the cost leader offers a product that is qualitatively different from that of its rivals. The base of Primark's competitive advantage is a differentiated organisational capability, and it was built by redefining their products, allowing economies of scale in production, and yielding substantial differences in cost.

While fancier rivals cherish and advertise that every shop has a unique assortment of regularly updated goods, Primark orders large batches of the same product, which take months to be available for purchase (The Economist, 2021). These factors allow Primark to concentrate manufacturing in lower-cost countries, such as Bangladesh, and still keep delivering charges low by sending goods by ships, enabling the charge of the cheapest prices.

In addition to that, Primark maintains low costs in marketing, with almost no advertisements and few discounts, once its prices are already low. This practice also contributes to its brand image and perceived value proposition. These configurations established by the company for its value chain allow it to perform its activities more efficiently, achieving a lower price than rival products. However, despite its minimalistic approach to marketing, Primark has an effective strategy in driving consumer engagement, leveraging the benefits of consumer referrals and social media viral attention, expanding Primark's presence despite its small efforts in traditional marketing (Kotler et al., 2020).

Considering all the facts, it is also clear that Primark adopts a broad coverage strategy, proposed by Porter (1980) which is characterised by the offer of a full line of related products to most customer groups in the market. As an adverse effect of this strategy, the brand identity may suffer some dilution when compared to competitors who adopt a focus strategy, specialising in specific market segments or range of products (Kapferer, 2012).

The offer of a wide range of products across different categories leads the company to achieve a broad customer base and high market share, but it makes it more challenging to create a strong emotional connection with consumers. This may make the company struggle to establish a clear and distinctive brand identity in consumers' minds, because the brand's messaging and positioning becomes less focused and coherent (Kapferer, 2012).

Exploring Miles et al (1978) Strategic Typologies, Primark's business strategies share characteristics from both Defender and Prospector types. Its cost efficiency, with low-cost products offer is a classic Defender element, once being the lowest-cost provider in a certain market segment allows the company to protect its market position. In addition, its operational efficiency, including minimal marketing spend and concentration of manufacturing, also reflects a Defender position of focusing on operational efficiency.

However, Primark also presents Prospector elements due to its wide range of products, from everyday essentials to household products, indicating a willingness to explore and meet diverse consumer needs. Beyond that, Primark's ability to provide affordable versions of popular fashion trends also demonstrates a high level of market responsiveness, similar to a Prospector's approach. In conclusion, Primark aligns with the Analyser typology, as it gathers the efficiency and cost leadership shown by a Defender, alongside with the adaptability and market responsiveness of a Prospector. This strategic positioning allows Primark to maintain its competitive advantage in the highly competitive and dynamic fashion industry.

4.1.2. H&M

The "About Us" section of H&M's website also begins by stating the focus of its business model, which is to make more sustainable fashion and design available to everyone. In a document published by the company, called "This Is Our Way", it detailed H&M Group's culture, values, policies and guidelines. As described on the website, "It defines who we are, what we do and how we do it" (H&M, 2024). H&M declares, through its social media, that their focus is to offer the best combination of fashion, design, quality, price and sustainability. The brand also emphasises that it ensures compliance with its code of ethics and sustainability commitment, doing business in an ethical, responsible, sustainable and transparent way.

Despite citing its intention to widen access to fashionable and sustainable products, the company focuses on attributes relating to the quality of its product, such as trendiness, design and personal expression of its customers. Furthermore, its main targets are adolescents and young adults, offering a narrower set of products. Its portfolio includes only clothing and apparels such as shoes, belts and sunglasses (H&M, 2024). The company's collaboration with designers, influencers and celebrities enables them to create unique collections and capitalise on emerging trends, beyond enhancing their relevance among target consumers.

In terms of its pricing strategy, the company maintains prices that are accessible to its young audience and competitive within the market, although its main focus is not to maintain a low price. Thus, it is possible to state that the company does not follow a price leadership. More likely to achieve a benefit leadership, H&M seeks to offer products with the same or higher cost, but with a higher perceived benefit.

Although it doesn't have prices as low as Primark, H&M has very competitive prices, which makes it a rival. Companies that operate in price-sensitive markets, such as textiles, and focus on keeping prices low despite focusing their strategy on a better perceived benefit, run the risk of failing to adopt a clear strategy. Porter (1980) uses the expression *stuck in the middle* to describe firms that do not achieve the cost leadership nor the benefit leadership when pursuing elements of both at the same time. The author argues that an unclear definition of focusing on cost advantage or benefit advantage typically leads to a less profitable operation than from competition that has a clear definition of its leadership.

Besanko et al (2021) explains that the absence of a clear definition regarding which leadership strategy to pursue often leads firms to fail in their competitive decision-making process, resulting in strategies that lack clarity and coherence. This is due to the fact that economically powerful strategic positioning typically involves trade-offs. As an example, Ikea chooses to keep its prices low at the expense of some customer service attributes, such as the customer assembling the furniture themselves.

Nevertheless, in some specific cases, the company that has already reached the benefit leadership increases its market share, reducing its average cost because of economies of scale or by exploiting the learning curve. As a result, that firm might achieve both a high-quality and a low-cost position in the market. This is stimulated by the fact that the reduction of costs by accumulated experience is often greater for products with higher quality. Since their production process is more thorough, leading to more discoveries of errors and defects that might not be noticed in low-quality products (Besanko et al, 2021).

Furthermore, the company follows a focus strategy, by offering a range of related products to a narrow set of customers. Thus, this strategy is pursued through customer specialisation. In this sense, while companies that follow a broad-coverage strategy may fail to meet some of their target audience's needs, companies with customer specialisation can focus on meeting the specific needs of their consumer group.

In an article about H&M's more recent practices, Forbes states that the company is known for quickly copying runway fashion and trends (Forbes, 2023). Analysing this statement as regarding strategic typology, H&M fits the Analyser category. The company adopts products or market innovations that successfully become trends, and gain most of their results from a stable set of products and clients' groups. The company strives at following this strategy once it is able to quickly follow trends, as stated by Forbes, meanwhile maintaining operating efficiency and its low costs.

4.1.3. Decathlon

Focused on the sporting market, Decathlon has a page on its website called "Inside Decathlon". There, the company states that for 40 years they had led the way toward high-quality and low-cost products, offering the best value-to-price in the market. It is important to highlight that differently from Primark and H&M, Primark focuses on a specific segment of sports, and does not compete with these brands in all products. Nevertheless, it is interesting to point that this firm potentially represents a successful case of pursuit of both cost and benefit advantage (Decathlon, 2024).

Furthermore, Decathlon emphasises community engagement as part of its marketing strategy. The company promotes sports events, workshops and initiatives that foster a sense of belonging among customers and promote an active lifestyle. These initiatives enable the brand to build a strong relationship with its target customers, enhancing brand loyalty and customer retention. Beyond that, they highlight the importance of their supplier relationships and ethical practices. By prioritising this positioning in its supply chain, Decathlon escalates its brand reputation.

The company highlights the importance deployed on its Research and Development department that constantly seeks for innovations and better efficiency, which enables them to practise lower prices. In addition, they cite the mass development of products, which also leads to a reduction in prices, and the optimization of materials, components, shapes and assembly that allow them to create more useful and efficient products for customers. It's important to note that although Decathlon focuses a lot on the quality of its products, design is not one of its priority attributes, unlike the cases mentioned above (Decathlon, 2024).

When approaching the logistics structure, the company declared to control and invest in logistical organisation. They cite optimizations in aspects such as storage, transportation and automation, driving its costs down and reducing environmental impact, adopting practices such as eliminating packaging. In April 2024, Forbes magazine published an article about a new global strategy announced by Decathlon. It involves an enhanced and immersive customer experience, a strong commitment to sustainability and an overall modernisation of the company (Forbes, 2024).

With all these facts leveraged above, it is also possible to conclude that Decathlon follows a focus strategy, specific to the Sports market. This strategy allows the company to exploit economies of scale and learning economies within the sports products (Besanko et al, 2021). Furthermore, when focusing on a particular niche, as Decathlon, a brand can tailor their products, customer experiences and marketing strategies to meet exactly their target customer needs and preferences. This leads to a stronger brand image and more loyalty among their customers.

When analysing its strategic positioning, Decathlon stands out as a Defender in Miles et al (1978). The brand focuses on stability by efficiently serving a specific market segment, the sporting goods, despite having a wide range of products in this segment. Beyond that, Decathlon controls many aspects of its supply chain, from product design and manufacturing to retail. This vertical integration enables the company to reduce costs and maintain high quality control, a key characteristic of the Defender Strategy. Lastly, the company provides reliable and affordable products, Decathlon builds strong customer loyalty, ensuring a stable customer base.

4.1.4. Pull and Bear

Pull and Bear is among the companies that composes the Inditex Group, which also includes Zara, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho and Zara Home. In the Inditex group's annual report, there is a section dedicated to information about its corporate strategies. This section was the source of most of the information used to analyse this case, detailing the strategies adopted by the company and showing the position it intends to take in the market. The company states, on the report, that all companies that composes the group share the same objective of offering customers an inspiring, quality and responsibly produced fashion proposal (Inditex, 2023).

Nevertheless, there is specific information, on their website, regarding the brand Pull and

Bear's strategies. The company states that since its foundation, in 1991, they have a clear international mission of dressing young people who are engaged with the environment, with a 'casual dress sense' and that mind The company says that since it was founded in 1991, it has had a clear international mission to dress young people committed to the environment, with a "sense of casual dress", who that seek to avoid stereotypes and seek to feel good about what they are wearing. For this purpose, Pull and Bear affirms to blend the latest international trends, fashion influences from streets and clubs, comfort and easiness (Pull and Bear, 2024).

The company's approach to trend forecasting, design innovation and product development processes enable Pull and Bear to stay relevant and appealing to its target consumers. Moreover, the brand's emphasis on promoting a lifestyle associated with casual, environmentally friendly and trendsetting youth culture shapes its image and enhances its connection with their audience. This positioning is reinforced by its marketing strategies such as influencer collaborations and social media campaigns.

It is important to emphasise that when defining and publicising its mission and strategy, the brand doesn't mention price or how affordable its products are. This indicates that Pull and Bear does not seek to differentiate itself by cost, and therefore does not follow price leadership. On the contrary, the company focuses on attributes related to the benefit perceived by its consumers, such as fabric quality, trendiness, comfort and ease of use (Pull and Bear, 2024).

Similarly to H&M, previously analysed, Pull and Bear has a greater tendency to achieve benefit leadership regarding strategic positioning, within its specific segment, in the price range it seeks to offer. Thus, this brand seeks to keep its prices competitive within its market, while offering a better experience to its consumers.

As far as the target audience is concerned, the brand focuses on a specific segment, namely young people. As detailed by the company, it seeks to meet the needs of teenagers and young adults, as well as men and women "with a young mindset". In addition, its portfolio includes a limited range of products and accessories, demonstrating the brand's product specialisation strategy. Similarly to Decathlon's case, the focus strategy enables the company to better exploit the learning curve, optimising its performance, seeking to improve its positioning in the market as a benefit leader. (Besanko et al, 2021).

With regard to the typologies suggested by Miles et al (1978), Pull and Bear shows strong indications of being more suited to the typology of Prospector. First, due to its emphasis on trend forecasting, design innovation, and willingness to explore new market opportunities. Beyond that, the brand promotes a lifestyle, which suggests a proactive approach to shaping market trends and consumer preferences. Furthermore, the use of influencer collaborations and social media campaigns to engage with their target audience indicates a dynamic approach to marketing, typical of Prospectors who are constantly seeking new ways to connect with consumers.

4.1.5. Zara

Also part of the Inditex Group, Zara is one of the biggest international fashion companies. The company declares the customer as the centre of its business model, which includes design, production, distribution, and sales, through an extensive retail network (Zara, 2024). On its own website, Zara's "About Us" section is very minimalist, as are most of its products. This is an example of how companies with a clearly defined business strategy can reflect it in the different details that make up the company. This allows them to create a solid brand, with a clear definition for the market and its customers.

Nevertheless, Inditex's website has a specific page about Zara, where it declares that this company's mission is to provide everyone with inspiringly beautiful, always on-trend, and responsibly crafted fashion. With a customer-centred business strategy, Zara aims to nourish an intimate relationship with its audience, which enables them to respond instinctively to their changing needs and feedback, and react to the latest fashion trends (Inditex, 2024).

Part of Inditex since 1975, while Pull and Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka and Stradivarius only joined the group in the ninety decades, Zara is significantly the most profitable company and the most famous brand of the group (Inditex, 2023). With boutique spaces, self-checkout cash registers and smart terminals for online orders and returns, Zara seeks to make it clear that it keeps up with all the latest market news, from new fashion trends and designs to manufacturing and service technologies.

The company has a specific platform that aim to hedge on new technologies, materials, and processes to limit the environmental impacts of their products and to help them progress toward more sustainable solutions and circularity. They affirm to be working on the different stages of Zara's value chain, from product designing to logistics and management of warehouses and stores. The company also states that for that, they are in close collaboration with its supply chain, international organisations, environmentalists, and NGOs (Zara, 2024).

Beyond emphasising the company's intention to keep up with the increasing concern about the industry impact on the environment, those statements highlight a positioning and an image that the company seeks to establish in the market and among consumers. Being an environmentally conscious brand not only makes Zara part of one of the biggest trends in the fashion industry, but also helps it get closer to its target audience. This allows the brand to create new and stronger connections with its customers, to retain their loyalty, maintain its market share, and get closer to new audiences who are more concerned about the environment.

One of its main forces, Zara's supply chain strategy constantly evolves as the group grows and adapts to different external factors and its internal needs. Similarly to its fashion offer, the company ensures to stay ahead of the logistics curve. Beyond its flexibility of supply, Zara's business strategy relies on response speeds, technological innovation and instant absorption of market demand.

Without mentioning a concern for the affordability of its products, Zara comes across as a more exclusive brand than Pull and Bear, targeting mostly middle-class women, while Pull and Bear targets young people with casual clothing. The company clearly follows a differentiation strategy, aiming to offer the best product in the market, concerned with the sustainability of their products.

Nevertheless, its pricing strategy lies in building its stores in the best location, in a commercial centre, making price not a problem for its target consumers. Furthermore, the company has a cost-cutting strategy of low investments in marketing campaigns, only announcing the start of the season on its highly well-located stores.

With its prime capability to exploit new products and market opportunities, Zara fits as a clear Prospector, as regarding Miles et al (1978) strategic typologies. The company is known for its rapid turnaround times in design, production and distribution, which enables it to quickly offer new trends to the market. Furthermore, despite its differentiation strategy and not too focused concern regarding its pricing, its products are still affordable for middle-class consumers that value trendy and high-quality fashion, making the products accessible to a broader audience within this segment. This is all possible only due to its fast technological pace and complex and well-vertically structured administration.

4.1.6. C&A

Founded in 1841, C&A carry until today the work philosophy of offering the best of fashion at affordable prices. In the company's website section about their history, they approach their low-cost strategy adopted since 1896, when they sold ready-made ladies' coats by a third of the price of the cheapest coat then sold by other shops. (C&A, 2024).

The company states that it played an important role in turning the latest fashions accessible and affordable by the start of the 20th century (C&A, 2024). Working with small margins, profits laid in the high volumes sold, revealing a low-cost strategy through the benefits of economies of scale. Furthermore, C&A has made it clear by publicising its strategy, since its foundation, that it consistently focused on achieving cost leadership. Beyond that, the company also emphasises a high concern regarding its sustainable practices.

The brand states that half of their collections are more sustainable, and that they have reached nearly all their 2020 sustainability goals. They state that their sustainable strategy is based on three key objectives: Unite & Inspire, Renew & Restore and Innovate & Lead (C&A, 2024). Those statements reveal that although the company intends to keep its costs and prices low, it won't happen in detriment to sustainable practices. This puts it in a good position when it comes to one of the fastest-growing issues in all industries today, especially in the fashion industry: concern for the environment. For a company with more than a century of history, C&A seeks to position itself as a modern and innovative company, which keeps up with the current standards and trends.

Although its main audience is young women, the brand offers clothing, footwear and accessories for children, men, and women of all ages, from youth to maturity. It can therefore be concluded that C&A has focus differentiation on products, even though having a wide target audience. The company's dual focus on cost leadership and differentiation enables C&A to maintain a broad audience while maintaining a competitive edge.

Lastly, C&A exhibits characteristics of being an Analyzer in Miles et al (1978) strategic types by balancing the flexibility to adapt to market changes with the efficiency needed to achieve a cost leadership. This scenario increases the importance of using big data to refine its strategies based on real-time insights, ensuring a sustainable competitive advantage in a highly dynamic market.

The table 2, presented below, summarizes the typologies attributed to the companies in the case studies, based on the theorical framework of this dissertation.

Table 2 – Summary of typologies attributed in the case study

Company	Strategic Typologies	
	Proposed by Miles et al (1978)	**Proposed by Porter (1980)**
	Defender, Prospector and Analyser	**Overall cost leadership and differentiation**
Primark	Analyser	Overall cost leadership with broad coverage strategy
H&M	Analyser	Benefit leadership with focus strategy
Decathlon	Defender	Hybrid typology, combining cost leadership and differentiation with focus strategy
Pull and Bear	Prospector	Benefit leadership with focus strategy
Zara	Prospector	Benefit leadership with focus strategy
C&A	Analyser	Overall cost leadership with broad coverage strategy

5. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

This section approaches a survey conducted to retrieve practical conclusions and deeper understanding of consumer perceptions regarding the perceived quality of the studied brand`s products and its positioning in the market. The application of the survey objective to analyse how consumers evaluate these brands in terms of quality, brand image, and overall market positioning. This analysis seeks to identify key factors that influence consumer perceptions and how these perceptions align with the corporate strategies adopted by the companies studied, namely Primark, Pull and Bear, Decathlon, H&M, Zara and C&A.

5.1. METHODOLOGY

The survey was administered using the platform Lime Survey and was published to the entire community of the University of Porto as well as published by the author, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. The survey received 451 answers in total. However, for the analyses described in sequence, it was considered only the ones that filled all the questions, which totalized 239 answers.

Answers from people aged under eighteen years old were not accepted and the anonymity of participants was safeguarded, with no identifying information requested. Furthermore, the confidentiality of the data was ensured, with only the author and its advisor having access to it. Additionally, the data collected was intended exclusively for academic and scientific purposes.

5.2. FINDINGS

Following, the findings from the survey will be presented[1], highlighting the key insights and discussing their implications for the companies studied. The survey is presented in its entirety in the Appendix of this dissertation. By analysing the results, the study aims to uncover patterns and trends that can inform strategic recommendations for enhancing brand positioning and performance in the textile industry. Furthermore, the analysis can provide valuable perspective on the effectiveness of current corporate strategies.

This survey has been segmented into four categories, which include questions of related subjects. This facilitates the respondents' response experience, contributing to more natural

[1] The answers on the option "I don't know" were disregarded for the analysis.

and therefore more sincere answers. Each category will be explained below, explaining what was sought to be found or analysed with the application of each one, as well as cross-analyses of the responses from different categories.

5.2.1. Sociodemographic questionnaire

Following the question related to informed consent, the survey's first group of question was a sociodemographic questionnaire. The first question asked which gender the respondent identified itself to. Following, the second question asked which was the respondent age, and the last sociodemographic question asked about the last educational level completed.

These three questions were used to segment the answers to the other questions in the questionnaire. This allows for a better understanding about the profile of the respondent, seeking to identify a pattern of behaviour among people of the same gender, age or level of education. By filtering the answers to the following questions by answers from this group, it is possible to identify the different nuances in the answers, verifying the different perception of specific target segments regarding the positioning of the brands. These findings can guide textile companies in making their products more accurate by enabling clearer focus to the details that are most perceived in general by each segment.

The respondent base is balanced between the genders, with the female gender being slightly more present, with 55% of the public. Most of them fit the 18-24 age range, being 35% of the total. 20% fall into the 25-34 age bracket and the rest are evenly distributed between 35 and more than 65 years old. As such, the conclusions are more assertive and representative of the younger audience. As for the respondents' education, 60% had between a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, 24% had secondary education as the last educational level completed, and 9% had a Ph.D.

5.2.2. Shopping Experience

The second category seeks to identify which factors exercise more influence in the shopping experience of the consumers. The question that composed this category contained some attribute related to shopping experience, and the respondents were asked to rate each one from a scale of influence. The scale varied from 1 to 5, being: 1 - does not influence at all, 2 - influences just a little, 3 - indifferent, 4 - influences, and 5 - influences a lot.

The attributes selected for consumer evaluation relate to different brand positioning or the consequences of specific corporate strategies adopted by companies. These were: (a) price, (b) quality of the material, (c) design and fit of the clothes, (d) originality of the clothes, (e) alignment with current fashion trends, (f) brand reputation, (g) customer reviews and recommendations and (g) sustainability and environmental practices of the company. The evaluations of these features provide important information about the preferences of each specific segment of consumers.

Table 3 below cross-references the data from the first question, regarding the genders with which the respondents identify, with their assessment of which attributes most influence their shopping experience. This analysis seeks to identify the gender to which the attribute was valuated as more relevant for shopping experience.

It is important to note that approximately 55% of respondents said they identified with the female gender and 43% with the male gender, representing a balanced base for analysis in this regard. Nevertheless, it is also important to clarify that for reasons of lack of sufficient volume for the purposes of comparing responses and identifying patterns, the genres that obtained fewer than 10 responses have been removed from this comparative analysis.

The degree of influence of price was rated beyond four and five to more than 90% of the respondents. Although being a highly relevant attribute for both genders, it was slightly voted as overall more influential for women. The quality of the material also received more than 90% of the votes between the degrees of four and five. However, it was not possible to draw conclusions regarding which gender classified this factor as more influential.

The influence of the design and fit of the clothes also received most of the votes between the degrees of four and five, and similarly to the price factor, was also rated as more relevant to the women. The first of the evaluated factors to receive more than five percent of votes to "non influential at all", the originality received around sixty percent of the votes among the degrees of 3 and 4, differently from the previous factors. This one also received a balanced level of degree rate between both genders. Nevertheless, the gender which evaluated the most this attribute as exercising a degree of influence of "five" was masculine.

The following attribute, alignment with current fashion trends, was the one that received the most votes to the degree one of influence. In addition, it was one of the brands with the most evenly distribution among the five degrees, aligned with the factor of brand reputation. Beyond that, it is relevant that while less than 4% of the woman respondents rated sustainability practices as not influential at all, more than 20% of the man respondents did so. However, the fifth degree of influence of this attribute received a similar proportion of votes of both genders.

Table 3 - Influence of determinated factors in shopping experience by gender

Factor	Degree of influence	Gender	
		Woman	Man
Price	1	1,53%	0,97%
	2	5,34%	7,77%
	3	1,53%	0,00%
	4	41,98%	54,37%
	5	49,62%	36,89%
Quality of the material	1	0,76%	0,00%
	2	3,82%	0,00%
	3	0,00%	3,88%
	4	51,91%	56,31%
	5	43,51%	39,81%
Design and fit of the clothes	1	0,00%	0,00%
	2	3,05%	2,91%
	3	1,53%	5,83%
	4	43,51%	52,43%
	5	51,91%	37,86%
Originality of the clothes	1	5,34%	6,80%
	2	13,74%	11,65%
	3	27,48%	27,18%
	4	42,75%	39,81%
	5	10,69%	14,56%
Alignment with current fashion	1	12,21%	15,53%
	2	22,90%	19,42%
	3	29,77%	30,10%
	4	31,30%	27,18%
	5	3,82%	7,77%
Brand reputation	1	9,92%	6,80%
	2	21,37%	18,45%
	3	25,95%	23,30%
	4	32,06%	35,92%
	5	10,69%	14,56%
Customer reviews and recommendations	1	4,58%	9,71%
	2	17,56%	18,45%
	3	12,21%	23,30%
	4	50,38%	31,07%
	5	15,27%	17,48%
Sustainability and environmental practices of the company	1	3,82%	20,39%
	2	19,85%	16,50%
	3	21,37%	20,39%
	4	44,27%	32,04%
	5	10,69%	10,68%

Legend: 1 - does not influence at all, 2 - influences just a little, 3 - indifferent, 4 - influences, and 5 - influences a lot.

Source: Developed by the author, 2024

The Table 4 presents a cross-analysis of the data from the first category, regarding the respondents' age, with their evaluation of each factors' degree of influence on shopping experience. This analysis aims to set a pattern for factors that become more relevant the older the target audience, or the opposite. The summary of each column, by factor, totalizes 100% of the respondents from each category.

By analysing the data contained in the table, it is possible to notice that the majority of people between 18 and 34 years old rate the price with the fifth degree of influence. After that, the importance decreases with age, receiving increasingly lower rates of influence for older groups. However, the majority still voted it as influential, fourth degree.

The quality of the material presented a peak of importance in the group of 35 to 44 years old, although it was rated with high influence across all age groups, with majority rating it as four or five. In addition, there was a slight increase in importance in the oldest age group. The design and fit of the clothes also had high influences across all groups considered, despite having less importance to older age groups when compared to quality.

Beyond that, the importance of the alignment with current fashion trends decreases slightly in older age groups but remains relatively significant across all groups. As regarding brand reputation and customer reviews, presented a consistently influence across all ages, despite presenting increased importance in middle-aged groups. Lastly, sustainability received increased number of votes as the fifth degree of influence among older groups, indicating a growing concern for environmental practices with age.

Therefore, the findings point out that most of the factors, as price and quality, remain significantly influence to younger and older consumers. However, younger target audiences emphasize current fashion trends and design, while older consumers rate as more important sustainable practices and brand reputation. These insights can guide decision-makers to design more assertive product offerings to better meet the preferences of the different age demographics.

Table 4 – Influence of determinated factors in shopping experience by age

Factor	Degree of influence	Age					
		18 - 24 years	25 - 34 years	35 - 44 years	45 - 54 years	55 - 64 years	More than 65 years
Price	1	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	3,03%	3,85%	5,88%
	2	1,20%	6,12%	0,00%	9,09%	26,92%	5,88%
	3	0,00%	0,00%	3,57%	0,00%	3,85%	0,00%
	4	43,37%	40,82%	53,57%	57,58%	38,46%	64,71%
	5	55,42%	53,06%	42,86%	30,30%	26,92%	23,53%
Quality of the material	1	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	3,85%	0,00%
	2	3,61%	2,04%	0,00%	3,03%	0,00%	0,00%
	3	2,41%	2,04%	0,00%	0,00%	3,85%	0,00%
	4	60,24%	63,27%	42,86%	54,55%	34,62%	41,18%
	5	33,73%	32,65%	57,14%	42,42%	57,69%	58,82%
Design and fit of the clothes	1	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%
	2	3,61%	2,04%	0,00%	6,06%	0,00%	5,88%
	3	3,61%	6,12%	3,57%	6,06%	0,00%	0,00%
	4	46,99%	38,78%	53,57%	45,45%	50,00%	58,82%
	5	44,58%	53,06%	42,86%	42,42%	50,00%	35,29%
Originality of the clothes	1	6,02%	8,16%	0,00%	9,09%	3,85%	11,76%
	2	14,46%	20,41%	7,14%	9,09%	11,54%	0,00%
	3	25,30%	20,41%	39,29%	27,27%	30,77%	29,41%
	4	38,55%	42,86%	39,29%	45,45%	46,15%	41,18%
	5	15,66%	8,16%	14,29%	9,09%	7,69%	17,65%
Alignment with current fashion	1	13,25%	18,37%	14,29%	12,12%	11,54%	5,88%
	2	24,10%	20,41%	17,86%	24,24%	15,38%	23,53%
	3	34,94%	20,41%	28,57%	27,27%	38,46%	29,41%
	4	20,48%	36,73%	32,14%	36,36%	34,62%	23,53%
	5	7,23%	4,08%	7,14%	0,00%	0,00%	17,65%
Brand reputation	1	9,64%	6,12%	17,86%	3,03%	11,54%	5,88%
	2	21,69%	34,69%	10,71%	6,06%	19,23%	17,65%
	3	25,30%	22,45%	35,71%	27,27%	19,23%	11,76%
	4	33,73%	26,53%	25,00%	51,52%	23,08%	47,06%
	5	9,64%	10,20%	10,71%	12,12%	23,08%	17,65%
Customer reviews and recommendations	1	4,82%	4,08%	7,14%	9,09%	15,38%	5,88%
	2	25,30%	22,45%	10,71%	15,15%	3,85%	11,76%
	3	15,66%	14,29%	10,71%	15,15%	19,23%	41,18%
	4	43,37%	36,73%	60,71%	39,39%	46,15%	17,65%
	5	10,84%	22,45%	10,71%	21,21%	15,38%	23,53%
Sustainability and environmental practices of the company	1	14,46%	14,29%	10,71%	3,03%	11,54%	5,88%
	2	18,07%	26,53%	14,29%	15,15%	19,23%	11,76%
	3	27,71%	26,53%	17,86%	12,12%	7,69%	11,76%
	4	38,55%	22,45%	42,86%	57,58%	38,46%	41,18%
	5	1,20%	10,20%	14,29%	12,12%	23,08%	29,41%

Legend: 1 - does not influence at all, 2 - influences just a little, 3 - indifferent, 4 - influences, and 5 - influences a lot.

Source: Developed by the author, 2024

5.2.3. Familiarity with the studied brands

The survey contained two questions that seek to evaluate the familiarity of the respondents with the studied brands. Zara was the best-known brand of all those studied, which strengthens the analysis previously developed of its strong brand image. It also shows that the respondents' evaluations of this brand are the most accurate. The next most popular brands were Decathlon, C&A and H&M.

These results indicate the positive results of Decathlon's and H&M's focus strategy, analysed in the previous chapter, that generates stronger brand image and enhanced consumer loyalty. As for C&A, it confirms the brand's efforts to be present in the daily lives of the widest possible audience since its long foundation. In the same vein, Zara, Decathlon and C&A were, consecutively, the brands most voted for as those from which respondents consumed the most.

5.2.4. Personal evaluation of brands

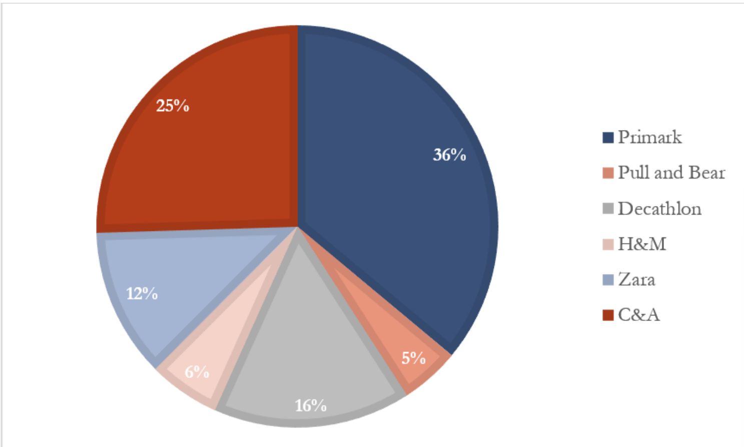
The third category aim to collect a personal evaluation, from the respondents, regarding the studied brands. Therefore, a few affirmatives were given to the respondents, which were asked to select which brand best fitted each of the statements. For each statement, only one brand could be selected.

The objective was to verify how the consumers see and perceive each brand. This could lead to a conclusion regarding the effectiveness of the positioning the brand aimed to reach, which was previously studied in the last chapter.

Each statement selected for the brands evaluation will be following described, as well as the objectives behind this question and the answers retrieved from the survey to this specific question. The first statement was "I use this brand because of its prices". Primark received most of the votes, followed by C&A. This clear perception of choice for its prices is in line with the cost leadership strategy that is also clearly followed by both companies.

This question evaluate which brand is more related, for the consumers, to low cost. All the brands studied are competitors, seeking to serve a similar audience, albeit with different focuses and scope. Thus, being the most selected brand in this sentence indicates that price is the most relevant attribute of this brand for consumers, since among other brands with similar prices, it received the most votes. The fact that the two most voted brands openly and avowedly seek to be low-price leaders shows not only an alignment to keep their products more affordable against the competition, as stated by them and analysed in the previous section of this chapter, but also a clarity in defining their brand for consumers.

Graph 1 – I use this brand because of its prices



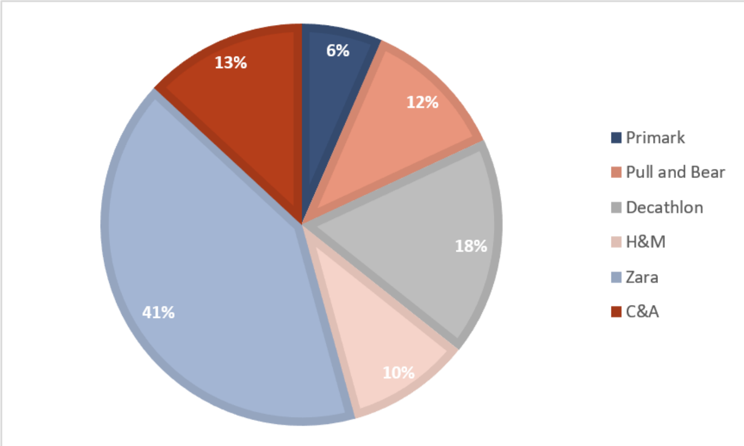
Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

The second statement, "This brand is one of the ones I usually wear", seek to identify the brand that the consumer perceives as a common choice for itself. The brand with the majority of votes was Zara, which received more than twice as many votes as Decathlon, the second most voted brand.

On this question, as the respondent probably uses more than one of the brands, the choice of only one brand also indicates that it is the most remarkable for this person among the choices. Thus, being selected one this question also provides information regarding consumer loyalty. Zara, firstly, when choosing a clear benefit leader strategy, prioritizes its imagine and positioning among consumers, focusing on conquering and fidelizing its target audience, with a stable market share. While Decathlon, with a narrow focus on sportive articles, conquers a strong presence in consumers choices. As the company seek to be the best one to provide specific needs to the target audience, it makes a clear relationship to its public as regarding its objectives and capabilities.

Therefore, when a consumer chose among different brands, Zara and Decathlon win space due to its strong brand image. It is important to point out that both companies follow a focus strategy, which allows the company to centre its human, financial and time resources in better addressing its targeted consumer needs and fostering a strong connection with them.

Graph 2 – This brand is one of the ones I usually wear

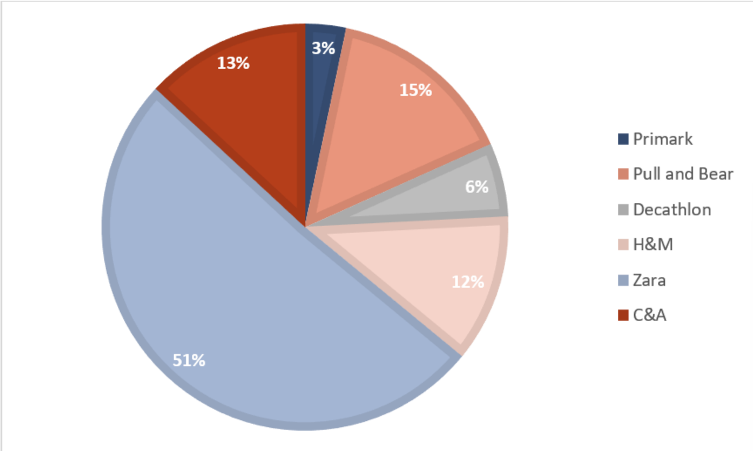


Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

The following question sought to evaluate consumer preference, among the studied brands, when looking to purchase clothing. The statement of the third question was "Whenever I'm looking for clothing, I prefer this brand", and had a similar objective from the previously question. The most voted brand on this question remained Zara, with an even more relevant difference from the second one.

The second most voted brand was Pull and Bear, which also follows a focus strategy, followed by C&A and H&M. Therefore, three out of the four most voted brands on this question have a focus strategy, which can also indicate stronger brand image among the ones that follow this strategy.

Graph 3 – Whenever I'm looking for clothing, I prefer this brand

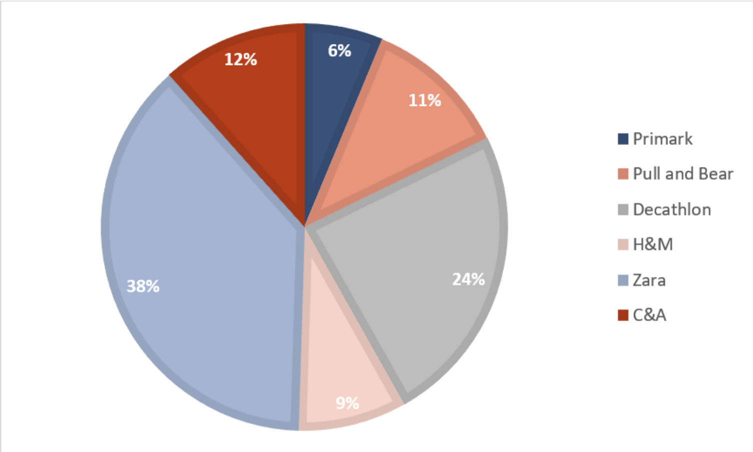


Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

The fourth and fifth question of this category aimed to evaluate consumer preference among the studied brands, similarly to the previous question. The fourth statement stated about repeating the choice of the brand, consuming from it again, and the fifth one approached the brand's meet of the consumers expectations.

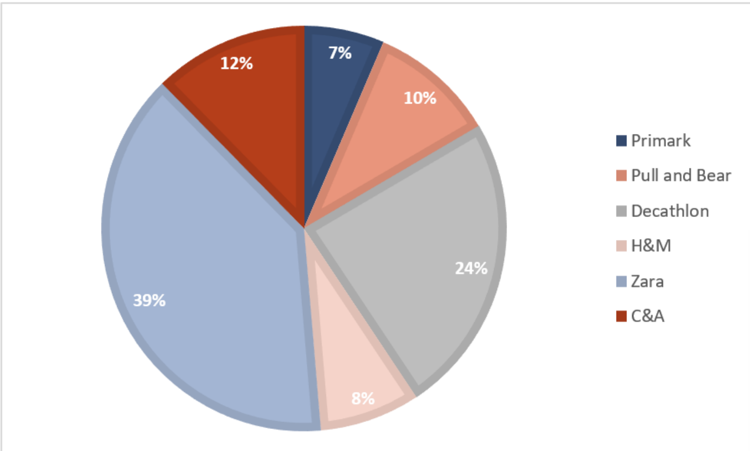
It is important to emphasize that the focus of Decathlon's operations is the sporting goods market, a wider segment than clothing, the one to which the previous question was specific about. Therefore, the difference between the relevance of the votes that Decathlon received on the previous question and the next two is explained by the specificness of the previous question. Despite this fact, the proportion of votes of the other brands remained closely similar to the statement regarding consumer preference for clothing shopping, reaffirming the conclusions retrieved.

Graph 4 – I would buy this brand again



Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

Graph 5 – This brand meets my expectations



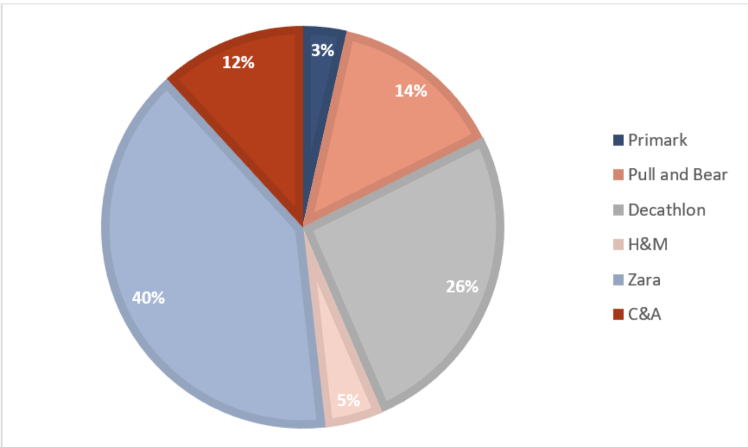
Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

After assessing consumer preference on the previous statements, the two last ones seek to assess not only consumer loyalty, but also their alignment with the brand's positioning and everything it stands for. First approaching the pride of using the brand and then about its recommendation to friends. The difference in the votes for these questions, compared to the two previous questions, points out the importance of a strong brand positioning which, in addition to maintaining a stable market share, leads to a loyal and engaged public. This can boost the company's popularity, especially in the face of the advance of social networks and online shopping.

H&M, C&A, Pull and Bear and Zara remained with a similar proportion of the previous question's votes. Zara and Decathlon maintained most votes when it comes to consumer preferences, reaffirming its strong brand positioning and connection with clients. Decathlon, meanwhile, received even more votes than on the second statement. As discussed in the "case studies" section, the Decathlon is concerned with promoting community engagement, fostering customer loyalty and retention. The success of these strategies is demonstrated with the high increase of votes when it comes to "pride of using the brand".

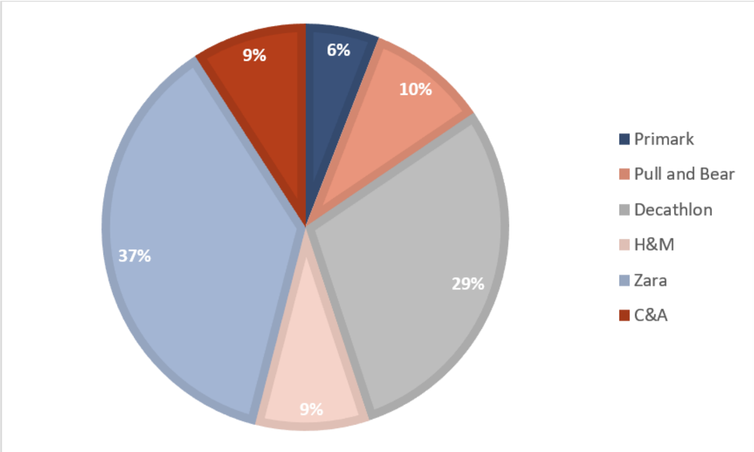
It is important to highlight the case of Primark, which received the vast majority of votes in the question that assessed choice due to the prices offered by the company but received the minority of votes in the three subsequent questions that assessed consumer preference and loyalty. By guaranteeing the lowest prices, to the detriment of quality, innovation and meeting the more specific needs of a specific public, Primark gains a significant market share from a public that prioritizes prices over perceived quality. However, it is possible to see that this public is not necessarily loyal to the company, and when it can afford to pay more, it would probably choose another brand, nor that this public is proud to select the brand. This shows that a strong brand image is directly related to the strategies the company chooses to follow, which does not necessarily create a strong bond with its public.

Graph 6 – I am proud to use this brand



Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

Graph 7 – I would recommend this brand to friends



Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

The last three statements sought to retrieve negative experiences or perception of the consumers regarding the brands. The statistics generated from the votes of these three phrases are presented below. Its analysis enables comparing the brands' votes received facing positive statements versus now, when negative statements are being attributed to the brands.

The brands H&M, Decathlon and Pull and Bear received the minority of the votes, totalizing less than twenty percent in the three questions. H&M and Pull and Bear, as indicated in the Case Studies section of this dissertation, follow a benefit leadership. Therefore, being among the last three voted on these negatives statements regarding the goods' quality corroborates with the classification attributed to the firms. Pull and Bear received significant votes on the previous statements beyond receiving less votes on the negative ones. This indicates strong alignment between the strategies the brand stated to follow on its publications with its own positioning in the market and the client's perception of its goods, prices and brand definition.

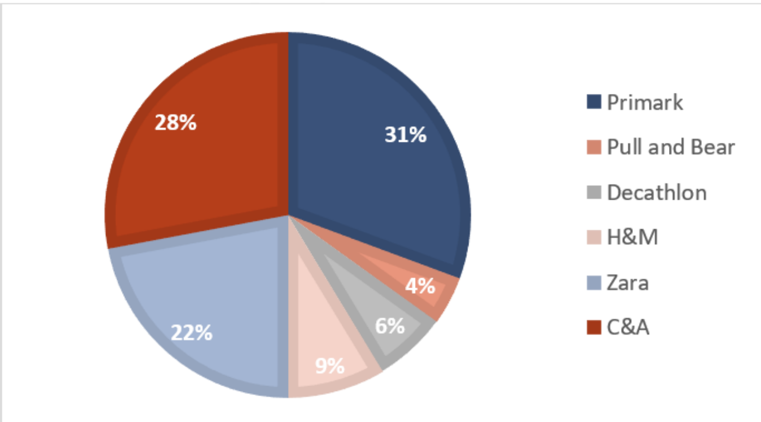
In addition, Decathlon was cited as a brand that "potentially represents a successful case of pursuit of both cost and benefit advantage". The findings of the survey confirm this theory once the brand was the third most voted by the clients in the first questions regarding choice due to the offered prices and was one of the less voted to the fitting with negative statements regarding goods' quality. This phenomenon is explained by the brand's high investment in research and development (Decathlon, 2024), which allows it to develop high-quality products that meet the needs of its specific niche audience at a low price.

On the opposite side, the predominance of Primark in the votes to negative perceptions regarding product perceived benefits are also aligned with the attribution of cost leader of the textile sector. The clear focus on achieving the lowest cost in the market is followed in detriment to attaining the same quality offered by higher cost players. Although the votes attributed to the brand are negative, this is not necessarily a bad thing for the company as long as it maintains its market share among the public it is trying to reach. The strategy designed and publicly carried out by Primark involves catering to a public that gives up the greater benefits perceived in the use of a product in favour of lower prices.

The same analysis can be applied to C&A, that since its foundation declare to fetch achieving the lowest possible cost. In this case, the company also manage to reach low prices at the detriment of the perceived quality.

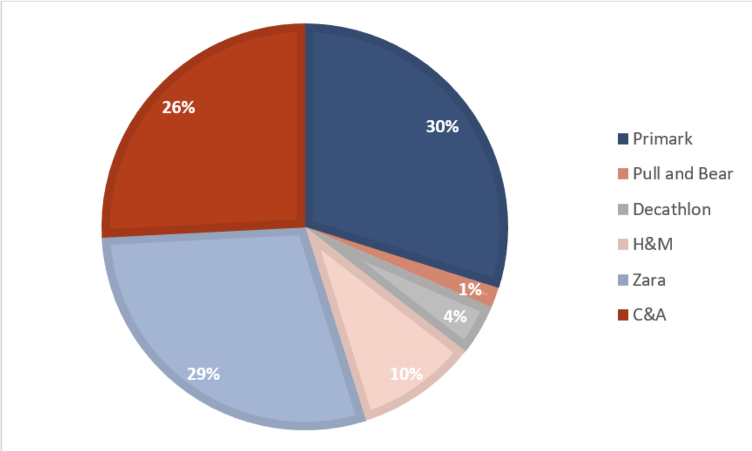
However, Zara also received a significative amount of votes regarding bad perceived quality. These results contradict the attribution that the brand seeks to be a benefit leader. Neverthe-less, on the first question that evaluated choosing the brands due to its prices, Zara was the fourth brand with the most votes. Therefore, it might indicate that despite not following a clear low-price strategy, the brand is able to reach affordable prices to its target audience, while maintaining a strong brand image and loyalty among consumers, once it was the brand with the best performance on votes regarding consumer preferences and loyalty.

Graph 8 – I own products from this brand, but I have reservations about the quality of some of them



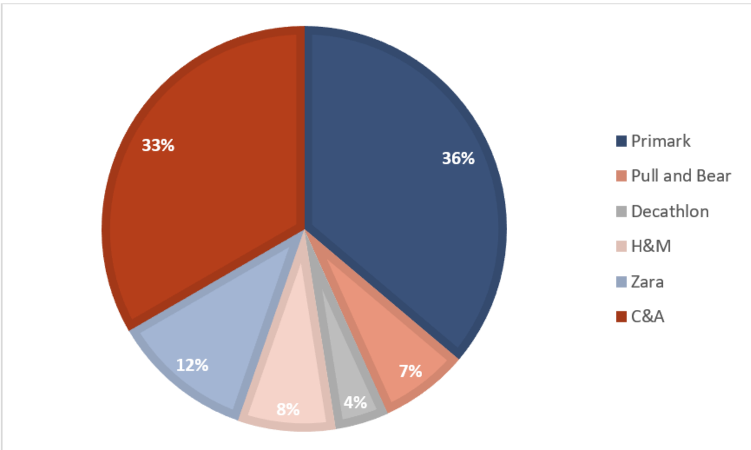
Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

Graph 9 – I have received negative recommendations about this brand



Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

Graph 10 – I would recommend this brand to friends with reservations (it's good if you don't mind poor quality)



Source: Data retrieved from the survey applied by the author

The survey disclosed how consumers perceive and evaluate the selected textile brands, with a focus on their evaluation regarding pricing, customer loyalty, and overall brand positioning. Primark and C&A were primarily chosen for their low prices, consistent with their cost leadership strategies analysed in the previous chapter. Zara was the one with most votes as the most frequently worn and preferred for clothing, indicating strong consumer loyalty and a successful focus strategy that led to strong brand image, also pointed in the previous chapter. Decathlon, despite focusing on sports goods, also showed significant consumer preference due to its strong brand image and community engagement efforts as previously analysed and published by the company on its website.

In terms of negative perceptions, in the last questions applied, H&M, decathlon, and Pull and Bear were the brands that received fewer negative votes, which reflects their benefit leadership strategies that was previously analysed. On the contrary, Primark, that focuses on low costs, received more negative votes regarding product quality, aligning with its market positioning. Similarly, C&A's low-price strategy also resulted in perceptions of lower quality. It is important to also point out that, despite Zara's strong consumer loyalty and preference, it received notable negative votes on quality, suggesting a balance between affordable pricing and maintaining brand loyalty among consumers.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the critical role of clearly defined corporate strategies in shaping a company's positioning in the market and overall performance, especially in highly dynamic markets as the textile industry. The case studies of Primark, Pull and Bear, Decathlon, H&M, Zara, and C&A demonstrate that companies with clearer strategies are more successful in building strong brand identities, fostering loyal consumers and stakeholder networks.

Moreover, the research emphasizes the importance of knowing its company in depth. To fully understand its respective strengths that can be developed into competitive advantages, its weaknesses, what the possible consequences of these might be and how they can be dealt with. In addition, the analysis shown how fundamental it is to clearly establish its target audience, understanding as deeply as possible what their needs are, which of them its products and services seek to meet and exactly how to do this to the detriment of competition.

Nevertheless, this dissertation faced limitations due to lack of financial information from the companies selected to the case studies. Many of the analysed companies operate in multiple sectors and publish consolidated financial statements. Therefore, the data publicly available about the companies does not allow for cross-checking, in numerical terms, the corporate strategies adopted by the companies studied with their operational performance.

Beyond that, the survey conducted had notable answers on the option "I don't know", suggesting that the sample to which the survey was applied was not the most effective one. For future studies in this field, a new survey could be applied to people that are more likely to know all the cited brands, enhancing reliability of the survey findings. Furthermore, in future studies, a higher number of companies can be analysed, aiming to find more case studies of strategies successfully applied. In addition, it could generate relevant analysis regarding appliance of this theories in different cultures, as approaching brands that are more focused on oriental countries.

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8. APPENDIX

Table 1 - Literature Review

Authors	Article/Book	Contribution
Adaga, E. M., Okorie, G. N., Egieya, Z. E., Ikwue, U., Udeh, C. A., DaraOjimba, D. O., & Oriekhoe, O. I. (2023)	The role of big data in business strategy: a critical review.	The use of big data to develop competitive advantages and in the development of business strategy.
Akter, J. S., & Haque, S. A. Z. U. (2022).	Innovation management: is big data necessarily better data?	Innovation in management strategies and the use of big data at a managerial level
Besanko D.; Dranove D.; Shanley M. and Schaefer S. (2016)	Economics of Strategy	Elucidates distint corporate strategies, based on different theorical framework
Hambrick, Donald C. (1979)	Environmental Scanning, Organizational Strategy, and Executive Roles: A Study in Three Industries.	Organizational strategies
Hax, Arnoldo C. and Majluf, Nicolás S. (1996)	The strategy concept and process: a pragmatic approach.	Corporate strategy concept.
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Manyika, J., Chui, M., Brown, B., Bughin, J., Dobbs, R., Roxburgh, C., & Hung Byers, A. (2011)	Big data: The next frontier for innovation, competition, and productivity.	The use of Big Data as the next wave for innovation, competition and productivity.
Matthew Mazzei and David Noble (2017)	Big data dreams: A framework for corporate strategy	Relationship between data and strategy
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Morabito, V. (2015)	Big data and analytics.	The industrial use of Big Data.
Naeem, M., Jamal, T., Diaz-Martinez, J., Butt, S. A., Montesano, N., Tariq, M. I., ... & De-La-Hoz-Valdiris, E. (2022).	Trends and future perspective challenges in big data.	Definition and impplicances of Big Data, analyzing future perspective challenges.

Image 1: Survey - Cases in the Textile Industry: analysis of brand positioning and product quality

The present questionnaire was developed as part of a Master's dissertation in Business Economics and Strategy at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto.

Thank you in advance for your collaboration!

There are 8 questions in this survey.

Informed consent

1

Thank you very much for your attention and, in advance, for your willingness to collaborate. Your participation is very important for the data collection for this study, which aims to understand the importance of corporate strategies in the performance and positioning of companies in the market, with a case study analysis of the textile industry.

Your participation involves answering this questionnaire, which is completely **voluntary**, and you can withdraw at any time.

Please note that the **anonymity** of participants is safeguarded, no identifying information is requested, and the confidentiality of the data is ensured, with only the master's student and their advisor having access to it. Additionally, the data collected is intended exclusively for academic and scientific purposes.

There are no right or wrong answers, so I ask that you respond sincerely to all the questions posed.

Completing the questionnaire takes approximately **3 minutes.**

Any questions regarding the questionnaire can be clarified through the following email: up202200913@edu.fep.up.pt

I declare that I have read and understood the information provided and that I have been informed about the objectives and conditions of participation:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Sociodemographic Questionnaire

2

Gender with which you identify:

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Man
- ◯ Woman
- ◯ Non-binary
- ◯ Prefer not to disclose

3 **Age:**

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Under 18 years
- ◯ 18 - 24 years
- ◯ 25 - 34 years
- ◯ 35 - 44 years
- ◯ 45 - 54 years
- ◯ 55 - 64 years
- ◯ More than 65 years

4 **Last educational level completed:**

Choose one of the following answers
Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Primary education
- ◯ Secondary education
- ◯ Bachelor's degree
- ◯ Master's degree
- ◯ Doctorate/Ph.D.
- ◯ Another scholarity

5

Please rate how each of the following factors can influence your perception when purchasing clothing from a specific brand.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Does not influence at all	Influences just a little	Inddiferent	Influences	Influences a lot
Price	○	○	○	○	○
Quality of the material	○	○	○	○	○
Design and fit of the clothes	○	○	○	○	○
Originality of the clothes	○	○	○	○	○
Alignment with current fashion trends	○	○	○	○	○
Brand reputation	○	○	○	○	○
Customer reviews and recommendations	○	○	○	○	○
Sustainability and environmental practices of the company	○	○	○	○	○

Familiarity with the studied brands

6

Identify your level of knowledge regarding the following brands.

(Select "Yes" if you know the brand, "Uncertain" if you're not sure whether you know it, and "No" if you're unfamiliar with the brand)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Yes	Uncertain	No
Primark	◯	◯	◯
Pull and Bear	◯	◯	◯
Decathlon	◯	◯	◯
H&M	◯	◯	◯
Zara	◯	◯	◯
C&A	◯	◯	◯

7

Among the brands you are familiar with, which one have you consumed the most?

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Primark
- ◯ Pull and Bear
- ◯ Decathlon
- ◯ H&M
- ◯ Zara
- ◯ C&A

Personal evaluation of brands

8

Please indicate which of these brands best fits each of the following statements.

(You can select only one brand per statement)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Primark	Pull and Bear	Decathlon	H&M	Zara	C&A	I don't know
I use this brand because of its prices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is one of the ones I usually wear	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Whenever I'm looking for clothing, I prefer this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am proud to use this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would buy this brand again	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I own products from this brand, but I have reservations about the quality of some of them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have received negative recommendations about this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend this brand to friends	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend this brand to friends with reservations (it's good if you don't mind poor quality)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand meets my expectations	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

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