

Public Summary – Bachelor Thesis Steven Oosterkamp

Amstervan is a start-up established by Manon de Beer and Tom Kooijker in 2022. The premise of their business is to convert Renault Trafic vans into trendy campervans. Currently, Amstervan is nearing the end of the initial phase of product development and is shifting its focus to ways to increase brand awareness among consumers. Within the business, design plays a major role. Every product Amstervan delivers strives to convey a sense of well-thought out and handcrafted design, which is also a major selling point for Amstervan. Keeping in mind the background of the problem and Amstervan's characteristics, the following research question was established: "How can small design-led companies strengthen their brand?"

To grasp the essence of the problem and the research question, multiple definitions of terms related to branding were explored. Firstly, the definition of a 'brand' itself was researched. Over the past decades, a lot of research has been conducted on this topic. Consequently, numerous definitions have been established to capture the meaning of a brand. While researching these definitions, it became clear that the importance of a brand to a company has drastically changed over the years. Traditional definitions of a brand are more product-oriented and consider branding to be a less important part of building a company. In contrast, more modern definitions recognise branding as an important part of creating customer value, making the definitions more customer-oriented.

After establishing the definitions of a brand and associated terms, the question arises of what can be considered a 'strong' brand. While the term 'strong' is inherently subjective, there is a concept within branding that can be used to assess the strength of a brand: brand equity. Whilst brand equity is a term used to describe a variety of measurements, in the thesis, a definition by Keller (2012) is used, describing customer-based brand equity (CBBE) as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand" (p. 69).

Within modern marketing-related research, there are two widely used models which outline different strategies for increasing CBBE. Aaker's CBBE model describes five categories which all equally increase brand equity, whilst each category carries its own unique advantages (Aaker, 1991). Keller's CBBE model takes a different approach to CBBE and describes creating brand equity as a step-by-step process in which each phase has to be completed in order to move on to the next phase. Completing the last phase (brand resonance) should theoretically result in ultimate brand equity (Keller, 2012). Considering Keller's model requires every phase to be completed well and the way design-led strategy businesses like Amstervan curate every part of their business carefully for their consumers, Keller's CBBE model was used as a foundation in the case study.

Considering the explored research, Amstervan's brand was analysed in order to find new strategies to increase their brand equity. Firstly, Keller's model was used to indicate in which phase Amstervan is. Considering the background of the problem and the reaction of consumers at multiple fairs, Amstervan was analysed to be in the first phase of Keller's model (brand salience). The goal of the first phase of Keller's model is to clearly outline and hone a brand's identity in order to create deep, broad brand awareness. Through co-design sessions with Manon throughout the process and different tools, Amstervan's brand identity was outlined and compared to their current way of communicating with potential consumers. Based on these findings, new strategies were ideated. A handful of concepts were briefly developed, including ways to convey the core of Amstervan's brand and ways to embrace design as their unique selling point even more, thereby answering the main research question.

References

Aaker, D. A. (1991). Building Strong Brands. The Free Press.

Keller, K. (2012). Strategic Brand Management, Fourth Edition. Pearson Education Limited.