

WHAT MAKES A BRAND SUCCESSFUL? - A CASE STUDY OF THE MUsETTE BRAND

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ABSTRACT. The study of gender differences has recently become a growing focus. Nothing is more evidence of this than the fact that in 2023 Claudia Goldin (who studied the position of women in relation to the labour market) was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics. Furthermore, internationally, there are numerous studies that examine the differences between women and men as leaders and managers. The question arises as to what factors play a significant role from the perspective of women managers in starting and managing a successful business. The present research focuses on the analysis of a Romanian brand - Musette³ - which is co-founded by a woman (through Cristina Bâţlan) and is represented internationally. Despite the considerable success of the Musette brand, there is a lack of literature in Romania on the study of this brand⁴. Consequently, the objectives of our study are⁵: (1) to identify the conditions that should be the pillars of a start-up business, (2) to identify the factors without which there is no possibility of further development and lasting success, and (3) to examine the brand personality characteristics of Musette.

Keywords: female managers, market, employee, communication, brand personality

JEL classification: M10, M31

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³ Is one of the most known brand in shoes and handbags business industry in Romania.

⁴ Cojocarú mentions the brand and its success in a 2014 study.

⁵ In our opinion, the familiarization of domestic brands and their promotion among students through various didactic methods can be identified as a primary pedagogical objective.

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Introduction and review of literature

Society's perception of women has taken many different forms throughout history. Today it seems almost incomprehensible, but there was a time when the only activity women could do in public was shopping (Törőcsik, 2006). Moreover, there were periods in history when the position of women as workers and managers was unintelligible. One need only think of the significant statement in the film based on Agatha Christie's novel *The Case of the Missing Will*: "Oh, if I were a man, I'd get a loan tomorrow", from the bank. According to one of the male characters, this phenomenon can be explained by the evidence that: "Women in business would always be begging for discounts". In response to the above dialogue, Captain Hastings hesitantly remarks: "Well, I don't know many women in business life". It is a fact that the position of women as leaders and managers is extremely complex nowadays: it is therefore important to understand what characterises the communication of women entrepreneurs and to identify the specific factors that play a significant role in female-led businesses.

As a starting point, it is worth noting that firms with a more diverse workforce (in terms of ethnicity and gender) perform better financially (Hunt et al., 2015), despite the fact that women are not better managers than men, and vice versa. However, due to their psychological, gender differences, women have different skills and leadership styles (Merchant, 2012).

One of the characteristics of female leaders is that they weigh their self-image in the context of relationships, which suggests that female leaders have a more interactive leadership style that serves to create a sense of belonging (Karim et al., 2022): this form of expression can also be found in their everyday communication, as "they are better able to convey the message to their partner through posture, movement, eye contact: I am listening to you, I care about you, I am interested in what you have to say" (Huszár, 2014, p. 21). In relation to their communication at work, women are more likely to have "an expressive style of communication as they will be able to confide in others and are more sensitive to issues than men women will be able to build, maintain and strengthen the relationship" (Mohindra & Azhar, 2012, p. 27). However, in business, they prefer to use text messaging, social media and online video calls (Kimbrough et al., 2013), i.e. they are more likely to take advantage of the online space for communication, while male leaders, conversely, prefer face-to-face forms of communication (Tench,

2017). Moreover, female entrepreneurs tend to use more specific language when describing their businesses than their male counterparts (Huang et al., 2021), and they also communicate their successes differently (Grant & Taylor, 2014). The way women managers communicate is shaped by the context and the roles (woman, mother, wife) in which they appear (Netshitangani, 2008), as their communication reflects how family and career can be compatible and synchronised, thus setting an example (Zeler et al., 2022). It is also important for them to communicate that they are members of the team and not above the team (Timko, 2017), but interestingly, when women adopt a more masculine communication, they are perceived as less sympathetic (von Hippel et al., 2011).

Material and methods

This research is based on one of the typical methods of quantitative marketing research, namely observation, including content analysis. Prior to the content analysis, a Google search engine was used to search for content related to Cristina Bâtlan⁶.

From the content displayed, the communication technique chosen was the one in which Cristina B. personally tells - at length - about herself as an entrepreneur and manager. Consequently, the content analysis was based on the following podcast: Cristina Bâtlan, a lioness who built an empire: At home with Măruță [Cristina Bâtlan, o leoaică ce a construit un imperiu: Acasă la Măruță].

The podcast

- date of release: 10th April 2022.
- 825,102 views at data collection period.
- duration: 2:56:10⁷.

The content analysis was carried out according to the following research questions:

- a. What are the criteria that should be the main pillars of a start-up business?
- b. On which variables can Musette be analysed in the market?
- c. What characterises Musette's management?
- d. According to which criteria - in the case of the Musette brand - is the employee approach based on?

⁶ Cristina B.'s work is also worth studying because she appears as the only female investor in the 'Empire of Lions', between 2021-2023, and she is a big fan of female entrepreneurs in the Chapters series events.

⁷ The podcast can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BejCPA7SRck> (April 2023).

The content analysis was followed by an analysis of the viewers' comments on the podcast, with reference to the research question: What are the human qualities that define Cristina B. and that are also the personality characteristic of the Musette brand?

The following points should be noted about the audience reviews:

- A total of 650 reviews were written about the podcast at the time the data was collected⁸.
- Once the personality characteristics had been identified, they were structured, as the respondents used several synonyms to express the same personality characteristic. However, it is also worth noting that there were instances where commentators used the same concepts identified by Jennifer Aaker (1997, in Kotler & Keller, 2006) as brand personality characteristics. These are: intelligent, reliable, upper class, charming, down-to-earth, daring, honest.
- Audience reviews were collected and categorized between 10 April 2023 - 11 April 2023.

Results and discussions

The figure below (Figure 1) summarises all the criteria that the entrepreneur considers necessary to create a viable business. In Cristina B.'s opinion, (1) awakening latent needs, (2) creating a better quality product portfolio and (3) managing the challenges posed by changes in the macro-environment in such a way that they have a positive impact on the target segment are cardinal points in the life cycle of a business. It should be noted that a business can only create long-term added value in both directions (micro and macro) if it makes investments that are in harmony with the values it communicates, and therefore the application of ethics in business is more than necessary (Figure 1).

According to Cristina B., the relevance of the following is indisputable for entities that want to achieve significant results in business:

- ✓ The need to listen to inner instincts, the need for autonomy.
- ✓ A belief in ideas, in enterprise, in the impossible.
- ✓ The process of selecting stakeholders.
- ✓ Continuous analysis of the market in order to identify the needs of consumers.
- ✓ Holistic knowledge of consumers.

⁸ Note that the proportion of negative comments was negligible.

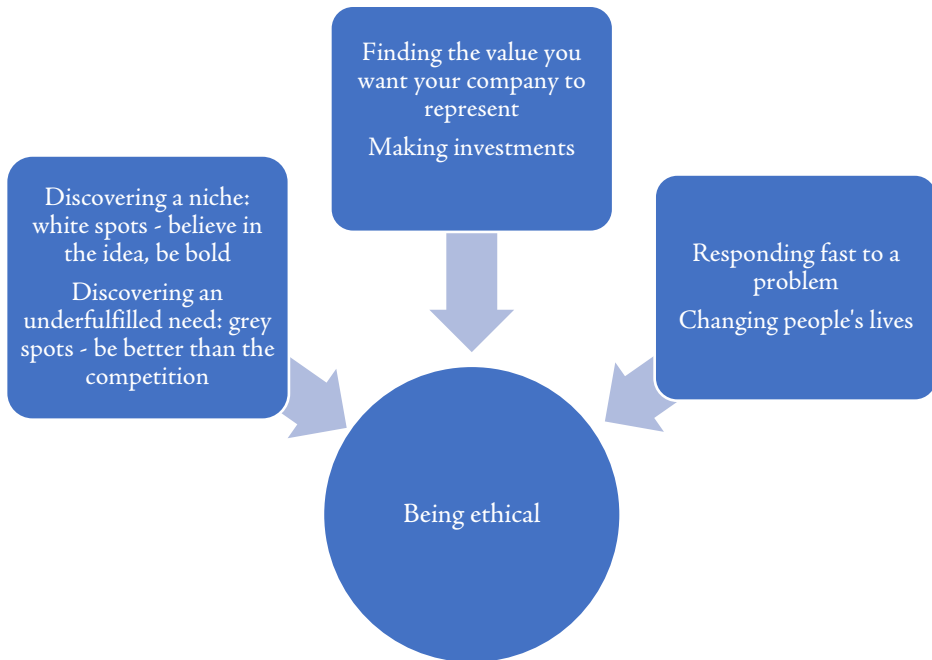


Figure 1. The pillars of a successful brand as seen by Cristina B.
Source: own, based on the pitches observed: podcast Cristina Bătlan,
a lioness who built an empire: At home with Măruță

- ✓ The application of relationship marketing.
- ✓ Following trends.
- ✓ Avoiding long-term planning: customer behaviour changes in 6 months.
- ✓ Use of the JIT system.
- ✓ Creativity.
- ✓ Flexibility.
- ✓ Redefining strategies.
- ✓ Interpreting and using information appropriately.
- ✓ The curious, inquisitive nature of the entrepreneur.
- ✓ Preparing for a potential opportunity.
- ✓ Taking significant risk, as this can lead to greater success.
- ✓ Anticipating failure. Learning from mistakes. Formulating conclusions and building on them.

- ✓ Hiring skilled people, because they are the real value. Corporate success comes from its employees. People have value, money is less important. For employees, appreciation is more important than any financial incentive.
- ✓ Increasing expertise, continuous learning from young people as well as from seniors.

As noted above, the interdependency between market, management and employees is the corporate entity without which there is no development (Figure 2).

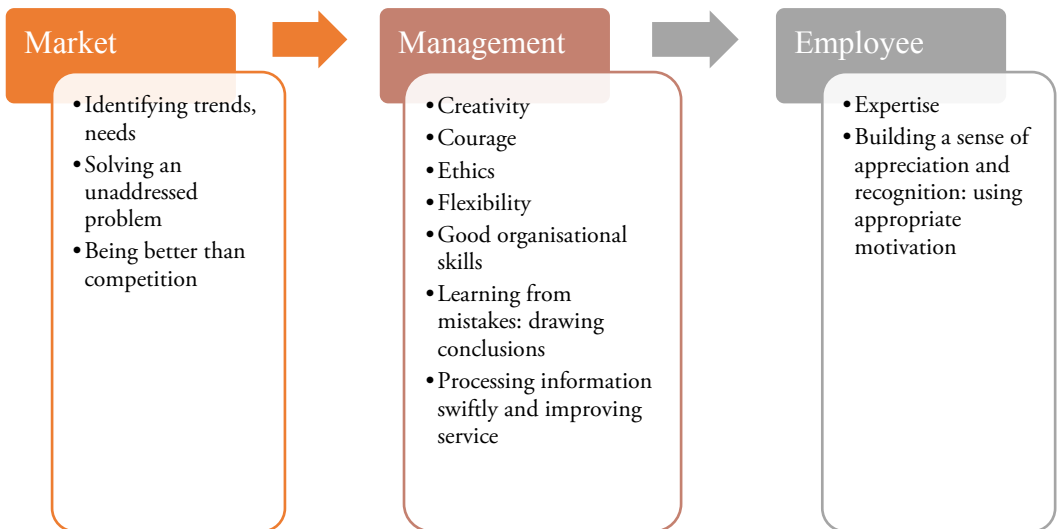


Figure 2. “Three in a pair”, or the triad of market, management and employees

Source: own, based on the pitches observed: podcast Cristina Bătlan, a lioness who built an empire: At home with Măruță

As noted in the literature, consumers see the brand through the human resource (Olins, 2010) also implicitly through the owner, the manager. His/her behaviour and communication play a significant role in creating the brand identity. What is more, the personality traits that define the brand representatives are transformed into brand characteristics. Consequently, a brand can also be sincere, exciting competent, sophisticated, rugged (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

The following is a summary of the personality traits that are specific to Cristina B. and are also personality characteristics of the Musette brand.

- (1) Sincerity: down-to-earth, honest, healthy⁹, optimist¹⁰,
- (2) Excitement: daring, dynamic¹¹, imaginative¹², modern¹³,
- (3) Competence: reliable, intelligent¹⁴, successful¹⁵,
- (4) Sophisticated: upper class, charming¹⁶,
- (5) Ruggedness: tenacious¹⁷, active¹⁸.

Conclusions

Our analyses are consistent with:

- (1) with Karim et al., (2022), concluding: in the podcast, Cristina B. also refers to her employees as peers, with respect and appreciation, reflecting on the power of belonging.
- (2) with Netshitangani's (2008), opinion: Cristina B. answered the questions proposed during the podcast as a woman, as a mother, as a (former) wife.
- (3) with the remarks of Merchant (2012): during the podcast, Cristina B. set an intimate, personal tone, sharing information that was very personal, and reflected her personal qualities: promoting a different approach and leadership style.
- (4) with the conclusions of Zeler et al. (2022): Cristina B. was identified as an inspiring example by several people who expressed their opinion on the podcast.

According to the podcast, the success of the Musette brand relies on the corporate philosophy, as it is fundamentally determined by the management's belief in (a) constantly monitoring the macro environment, (b) monitoring consumer needs and (c) managing employees. It is worth noting that sincerity is a brand personality characteristic without which there can be no long-term planning, as it activates and helps to build and maintain customer loyalty.

⁹ healthy mentality

¹⁰ happy

¹¹ willingness/desire to act

¹² special, interesting

¹³ open-minded

¹⁴ in addition to the notion of intelligent, the comments also included the concepts such as: clever, complex thinking, wise

¹⁵ mentor, role model, etalon, model, idol, inspiring, motivating, remarkable

¹⁶ in addition to the term charming, the comments also included: very beautiful, beautiful, wonderful, brilliant, magnificent, fabulous, dazzling, enchanting, elegant

¹⁷ strong, persistent

¹⁸ diligent

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- *** The movie: *The Case of the Missing Will*, based on the novel written by Agatha Christie, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aAkSNMaRCQ>. At 00:9:57 of the film those statements can be heard, which are presented in the *Introduction* and *Review of Literature* sections.
- The podcast: Cristina Bâtlan, a lioness who built an empire: At home with Măruță [Cristina Bâtlan, o leoaică ce a construit un imperiu: Acasă la Măruță], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BejCPA7SRck>

