

INFLUENCE OF THE PARTICULAR BRAND ON THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

Many companies are able to build a very strong bond with consumers, allowing them to be one step ahead of the competition. The brand often means much more than the product itself. For building a really strong brand it is required to know the needs of the target group and to try to satisfy them. In current global society, consumers have not purchased a specific product based on quality, or on the basis of whether they need it. In a world of very strong competition, the brand has become the driving force of sales of consumer goods. Brands represent a guarantee of certain quality for customers. Brand value increases not only the benefit of the product itself, but also its attractiveness. The higher brand value is appreciated also by companies themselves because customers are willing to pay a bigger amount of money for the product or service. The most successful brands in the world have a common feature. They symbolize values and opinions of their customers and they successfully communicate them. The main aim of this paper is to show how the brand influences consumer behaviour of young people aged up to 29 years in Slovak Republic. Two well-known brands were chosen – Pepsi and Coca-Cola. Based on the results of the realised blind test, the results of previous studies of these brands were confirmed. We found out that the brand name is stronger than the sensory inputs and it can as well provoke a strong emotional experience. It was confirmed that Coca-Cola is more favourite than Pepsi.

Key words:

Blind test. Brand. Branding. Brand preferences. Emotional bond. Emotional experience. Consumer. Consumer behaviour.

1 Introduction

A consumer and his behaviour is affected by many factors during the buying process. The buying process in many respects depends on individual preferences, consumer perceptions of the product, his reference groups, and also on the environment in which he lives and realizes his purchase. One of the dominant factors which influence consumers and their behaviour related to products and services is the brand. In current global society, consumers have not purchased a specific product based on quality, or on the basis of whether they need it. In a world of strong competition, the brand has become the driving force of sales of consumer goods. The brand is a very significant factor, the principle of which is the formation of associations in the consumer's mind about who he is going to become when he buys a selected product. Coca-Cola and Pepsi are nearly identical in chemical composition, yet humans routinely display strong subjective preferences for one or the other. This simple observation raises the important question of how the brand combined with content to shape our perceptions.

The preciousness and prestige of brands is the result of longitudinal work of the companies with innovations, advertising and other forms of promotion, effective strategy of building the market position, and also the quality of products. In the power game for customers very often a small detail decides which brand the consumer will choose. In the process of buying, the consumer is frequently driven by emotions that influence him. Vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch are receivers that cause that the consumer can perceive stimuli. These impulses are transmitted to the brain and subsequently the brain sends further signals to our body that we call

feelings and emotions. Nowadays, almost all manufacturers and distributors use mostly positive emotions in their marketing strategies and marketing communication, because they realize that it is emotions that sell their products. That is why, individual sensory inputs are sometimes contradicted and consumer chooses on the basis of which stimulus evoked a stronger emotion. The brand that brings the most of positive emotions can create the most powerful relationship with the customer, can change his perception and influence his buying behaviour.

2 Consumer or customer? And why the difference matters?

The consumer is the person who pays for the consumed goods and services. Consumers play a vital role in the economic system of the nation. In the absence of their effective demand, the producers would lack a key motivation to produce, which is to sell to consumers.¹ Any individual who purchases products or services for his personal use and not for manufacturing or resale is called a consumer. A consumer is the one who is the decision-maker whether or not to buy an item in the store or someone who is influenced by advertisement and other marketing activities. Every time someone goes to a store and buys a shirt, toy, beverage or anything else, they make a decision as a consumer.² The term customer refers to the person who orders, purchases and pays chosen products. The consumer is for example also a child for whom a mother purchases diapers. But he becomes a customer only after that he realizes a purchase on his own for the first time.³

The terms "consumer" and "customer" are often used interchangeably, but a consumer and a customer are not always the same entity. In essence, consumers use products and customers only buy them. A consumer may also be a customer and a customer can also be a consumer, but situations occur where this is not the case. In general, your marketing efforts should be geared toward the consumer, rather than the customer.⁴ Now, there is a trend in marketing to individualize the concept of "A Consumer". Rather than generating broad demographic profiles and psycho-graphic profiles of market segments (which has been the norm), marketers are now starting to engage in personalized marketing, permission marketing, and mass customization. Marketers are paying close attention to consumer behaviour or to how potential buyers act when purchasing goods or services for personal consumption.⁵ This new knowledge is used for placing products on the market not only by large multinational

¹ Boundless. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at:

<<https://www.boundless.com/marketing/textbooks/boundless-marketing-textbook/consumer-marketing-4/introduction-to-consumers-33/defining-consumers-173-1278/>>.

² Consumer Rights. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at: <<http://www.consumerrights.org.in/meaning-of-consumer.htm>>.

³ KOMÁRKOVÁ, R. et al.: *Psychologie trhu*. Praha : Grada Publishing, a.s., 1998, p. 29.

⁴ JOSEPH, CH.: *Customer and Consumer Definitions*. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at: <<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/customer-consumer-definitions-5048.html>>.

⁵ Boundless. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at:

<<https://www.boundless.com/marketing/textbooks/boundless-marketing-textbook/consumer-marketing-4/introduction-to-consumers-33/defining-consumers-173-1278/>>.

brands and private labels⁶ but also by small domestic brands. They're trying to create a bond with consumers and gain their loyalty.

3 Consumer behaviour and brands perception

Consumer behaviour is a rapidly growing field of study. This term means more than just how a person buys products. It is a dynamic, complex and multi-dimensional process and reflects the totality of consumers' decisions with respect to acquisition, consumption or use and disposal activities. Consumers exhibit very significant differences in buying behaviour and play an important role in local, national or international economic conditions. One of the aspects common to all of us is that we are all consumers. The main reason for a company to come to the marketplace is to find consumers who have unfulfilled or only partially fulfilled needs. No matter who we are, urban or rural, male or female, young or old, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, believer or non-believer, or whatever - we are consumers. The consumption related behaviour influences the development of technology and introduction of new and improved products and services.⁷

Table 1: Factors influencing the consumer behaviour

Social and Cultural Factors	Social Influences	Individual Influences	Psychological Factors
Culture Sub-culture Social class	Family Family life cycle Reference groups	Job Income Personality Values Lifestyle	Motivation Perception Learning Attitude

Source: KULČÁKOVÁ, M., RICHTEROVÁ, K.: *Spotrebiteľské správanie (Vybrané kapitoly)*. Bratislava : Ekonóm, 1996, p. 7.

A final purchase decision is the result of each of above mentioned factors (Table 1). An individual consumer is led by his culture, his subculture, his social class, his membership groups, his family, his personality, his psychological factors, etc., and is influenced by cultural trends as well as by his social environment⁸. The perception of consumers is very important as well. The perception is the organisation, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environmental clues. All perception involves signals in the nervous system, which in turn result from physical or chemical stimulation of the sense organs. Perceptual constructs are generally multidimensional, integrating multiple physical and cognitive dimensions to generate coherent behavioural preferences. In sensory processing, the idea of multidimensional integration has long been used to

⁶ KOŠIČIAROVÁ, I., NAGYOVÁ, L.: *Private label: the chance how to increase the consumer's interest in a proper retail chain*. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at: <<http://www.icabr.com/fullpapers/icabr2014.pdf>>.

⁷ SATISH, K. B. et al.: *Consumer behaviour*. India : Excel Books, 2009, p. 4.

⁸ *The consumer factor*. [online]. [2016-10-5]. Available at: <<http://theconsumerfactor.com/en/4-factors-influencing-consumer-behavior/>>.

frame a range of questions about cross-modal interactions in physiological and behavioural responses.⁹

The importance of the brand has changed significantly in recent years. The brand is no longer used only to differentiate itself from the competition but it also has a more important role - to influence the consumer behaviour. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these terms that are used to identify products and services of one or more sellers and to differentiate them from the competition".¹⁰ The brand has an enormous importance not only for the consumer but also for the company. It helps the consumer to better understand product categories, identify the manufacturer and then assign specific responsibility for the quality, usefulness, and overall satisfaction with the product. The consumer behaviour is also influenced by the experience with the particular brand that is either positive or negative.¹¹ Branding as a process of brand building changes common commodities to specific and desirable products. In the perception of consumers, branding adds a value to these products and increases consumers' willingness to pay more for them. Only a few companies manage to establish a strong relationship and bond with their customers and these companies then benefit from the weakness of others. The brand is much more than the product itself. It includes the environment, communication, as well as attitudes and behaviour of its representatives. If the process of brand building is not controlled, it develops randomly and often creates a confusion in the consumers' minds.

Building a successful brand requires an absolute understanding of the needs and desires of the target group. Every marketing decision, which is applied on the market, has its impact on the brand. All features of design, graphic representation, used colour scale, used language and the presentation of the company interact in branding. It is therefore extremely important to speak the same language, use consistent strategy and tactics, which underlines the desired brand perception at every single contact with the public.¹² Strong brands are finding the journey to the mind but also to the heart of potential customers. They embody personal beliefs, they are a sign of what consumers are looking for, whether it's beauty, pride, a sense of freedom, life attitude or style. If the choice of a particular brand gives the customer a good feeling and brings some experience, it gives diversity and depth of brand experience.¹³

The term "brand equity" describes the value of a well-known brand. It is based on a principle that a well-known brand generates higher profits than less known brands or no-name products. The brand is the most valuable asset that a company can possess. Brand equity is a factor that can increase the financial value of the brand.¹⁴ Brand equity is the added value that the brand lends to the product. The product is something that offers financial benefits. The brand is a name, symbol, design, or

⁹ McCLURE, S. M. et al.: Neural Correlates of Behavioral Preference for Culturally Familiar Drinks. In *Neuron*, 2004, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 379-387.

¹⁰ KELLER, K. L.: *Strategické řízení značky*. Praha : Grada Publishing a.s., 2007, p. 800.

¹¹ NAGYOVÁ, L. et al.: *Marketing*. Nitra : Slovenská poľnohospodárska univerzita v Nitre, 2015, p. 233.

¹² ŠKUTKOVÁ, J.: *Budovanie značky*. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at:

<<http://www.marketingovo.sk/products/budovanie-znacky/>>.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ *Datamar*. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at: <<http://www.datamar.cz/wysiwyg/Brand%20equity.pdf>>.

assessment, which increases the value of the product beyond the functional purpose.¹⁵ Brands represent a certain guarantee of quality for the consumers. Brand value increases not only the benefit from the product itself, but also its attractiveness. Higher brand value is appreciated also by the company itself because customers are willing to pay more for the particular product or service.¹⁶ The most successful brands in the world have a common feature. They symbolize values or opinions of their customers. The fact that we possess a product of particular brand say something about us and our perception.¹⁷

4 Pepsi vs. Coca-Cola

In 1975, Pepsi came up with a campaign called "Pepsi Challenge". Thousands of consumers were involved in blind testing. They were given two unmarked beverages and they were asked to decide which beverage has a better taste. In the 80s the Pepsi managed to beat the competitors and was on the top of the list. Also some European countries were already involved in blind testing. For example, last year the campaign took place in Poland, where more than 140,000 people tasted beverages. The taste of Pepsi was preferred by 60% of respondents. In Russia, around 845,000 consumers were involved in testing and the result was very similar. In Romania, with the participation of 104,000 consumers, Pepsi gained 62%¹⁸. Recently, the Pepsi Challenge took place also in the Slovak and Czech Republic during the summer holiday 2016. Pepsi organized roadshows on selected festivals, sport events or in frequented localities. The main idea of the challenge was to make people choose a drink on the basis of their taste preferences and not on the basis of another factors and marketing activities.

S. McClure et al. in 2004 found out that Coke and Pepsi are special in that, while they have very similar chemical composition, people maintain strong behavioural preferences for one over the other. They initially measured these behavioural preferences objectively, by administering double-blind taste tests. They found out that subjects split equally in their preference for Coke and Pepsi in the absence of brand information. When subjects had information about brand, they preferred the Coke.¹⁹

Neuroscientist Read Montague carried out the research also in 2004. Volunteers were scanned by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which can identify activity in different parts of the brain, while they blindly drank either Coke or Pepsi and told scientists which they preferred. The results show that different parts of the brain light up, depending on the type of cola drink being drunk. He considers Coca-

¹⁵ FARGUHAR, P. H.: *Managing Brand Equity*. New York : Free Press, 1989, p. 24-33.

¹⁶ NAGYOVÁ, L. et al.: *Marketing*. Nitra : Slovenská poľnohospodárska univerzita v Nitre, 2015, p. 236.

¹⁷ ŠKUTKOVÁ, J.: *Tajomstvo silných značiek*. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at: <<http://www.marketingovo.sk/products/tajomstvo-silnych-znaciek/>>.

¹⁸ *Pepsi alebo Coca-cola. Slováci rozhodnú, ktorá chuť najviac*. [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at: <http://strategie.hnonline.sk/media/783050-pepsi-alebo-coca-cola-slovaci-rozhodnu-ktora-kola-chuti-viac>>.

¹⁹ McCLURE, S. M. et al.: Neural Correlates of Behavioral Preference for Culturally Familiar Drinks. In *Neuron*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2004, p. 379-387.

Cola drink to be more favourite than Pepsi.²⁰ Many others experiments were conducted during the decades. Among other things, while Coca-Cola is more often associated with burgers and french fries, Pepsi leans toward pizza. A similar analysis of alcohol brands revealed that while Coke dominates the Jack Daniels association, Pepsi has a comparative advantage with Appleton's Rum.²¹

5 Data and methods

The main aim of this paper is to show how the brand influences consumer behaviour of young people aged up to 29 years in Slovak Republic. Based on the secondary data, it is well known that consumer behaviour of young people is often influenced by various factors, by attitude toward the brand or the company, as well as by a set of different marketing tools of selected company. In order to obtain primary information a questionnaire survey together with the blind test were conducted. The questionnaire survey was used to find out which brand would consumers choose. The obtained data were verified by the use of blind test. The sample consists of 200 young people - university students - under the age of 29 years. The main reason of choosing only young adults to the sample is that young people are much more affected by factors such as advanced technologies, social networks, applications and the like. Young people are affected not only by modern technologies but also by the reference groups and the groups to which they belong or want to belong. The young consumer is forced to adapt to his environment which is also the reason why he buys brands that are already well-known in his groups, that has built the image. The largest group of the sample includes young people from 21 to 23 (66%) and the least numerous group of respondents are those from 27 to 29 (Chart 1).

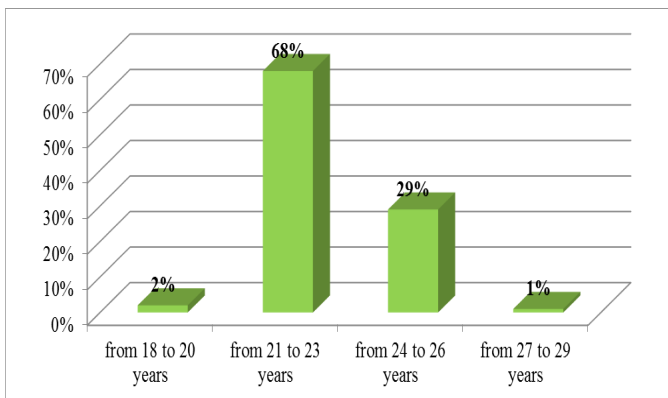


Chart 1: Sample of respondents

Source: Own processing

²⁰ *Coke or Pepsi? It's all in the head.* [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jul/29/science.research>>.

²¹ LOVEJOY, J.: *Analysis: The Coke vs Pepsi Social Presence Showdown.* [online]. [2016-10-05]. Available at: <<https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/the-coke-vs-pepsi-social-presence-showdown/>>.

The questionnaire survey was conducted in the Slovak Republic during one month, specifically during the September 2016. Selected statistical methods were used, graphs and tables were used to show the findings. Assessment of the questionnaire survey was conducted with a graphical and tabular display and selected statistical methods. The main aim of the blind test was to find out if the answers of respondents in questionnaire correspond with their preferences of particular beverages. The object of the research were cola drinks without added sugar from the two largest world producers - Coca-Cola (Coca-Cola Zero) and Pepsi (Pepsi Max). Respondents were given two unmarked beverages in a blind test, they did not know which the Coca-Cola Zero is and which the Pepsi Max is. On the basis of taste, colour, smell and amount of bubbles, respondents decided which sample they preferred. Coca-Cola and Pepsi products were chosen for the research because both companies produce similar products.

6 Results

The brand as a factor significantly influences consumer in the buying process. For the consumer the brand provides basic information about the goods and establishes relations that affect the organization of ideas in the mind of a consumer during the purchase, affects consumer behaviour and decides whether the consumer buys the product or does not. By the suitable arrangement of marketing activities it is possible for companies to create associations through which the consumer is more prone to buy the particular brand. In the questionnaire survey we were interested in whether young people are influenced by a particular brand. Up to 77% of the respondents believe that brands affect their buying behaviour (Chart 2).



Chart 2: Brand's influence on consumer behaviour

Source: Own processing

The questionnaire survey showed that if consumers have to decide between brands Coca-Cola and Pepsi, up to 70% of them would opt for Coca-Cola. This decision may be caused by the fact that Coca-Cola is more traditional and is already deeply embedded in the minds of consumers. The main element of the advertising campaign of Coca-Cola is a family, and family is the most important reference group, which since childhood influences consumer behaviour of its members (Chart 3).

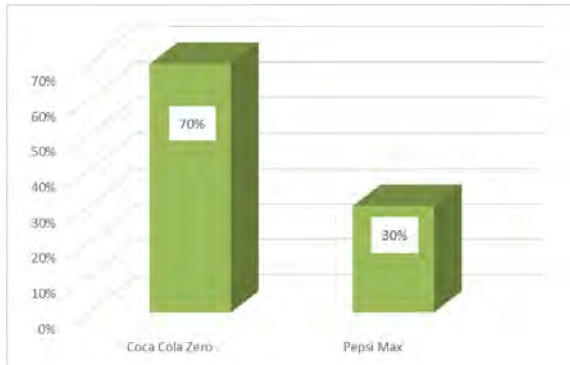


Chart 3: Selection of brands

Source: Own processing

The results of the questionnaire survey showed a preference of the Coca-Cola products. Coca-Cola Zero is familiar to 91% of respondents while Pepsi Max is familiar only to 56% of respondents. Based on the answers of respondents we can assume that Coca-Cola is more familiar brand in the minds of consumers. This may be caused by its long history, longer performance on the market, but also by an appeal to the family as the first reference group, Coca-Cola is very often the first choice for young people in restaurants, discotheques or bars. Only a small number of respondents consumes regularly cola drinks without added sugar. Only 6% of respondents consume Coca-Cola Zero and 7% Pepsi Max. This may be caused by the higher awareness of healthy lifestyle among young people. Many of these respondents stated that instead of cola drinks they rather consume pure water or mineral water. Most respondents stated that they know cola drinks of other brands on the Slovak market and the most frequent answer was Kofola soft drink without sugar (74%). Kofola is the typical Slovak cola drink and has roots in this country. All 200 respondents who were involved in the questionnaire survey were also involved in the blind testing. Respondents were given two samples and they evaluated the taste, smell, colour and the amount of bubbles in drinks. Based on a blind test, 54% of respondents decided that Pepsi Max has better taste (Chart 4).

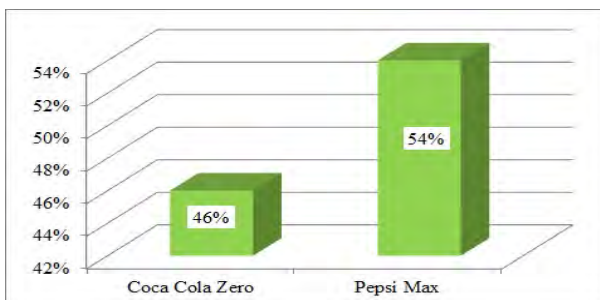


Chart 4: Results of the blind taste test

Source: Own processing

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We can conclude that from the sample of 200 respondents, more than 150 respondents stated that the brand has an influence on their buying behaviour. The blind test showed that on the basis of taste, colour, smell and the amount of bubbles, respondents would choose the different cola drink than they stated in the questionnaire. We can assume that this difference is caused by the strong influence of the brand and related marketing activities.

In order to prove statistically significant differences in consumers' preferences according to blind test the Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test is applied. It is the non-parametric test of null hypothesis that the medians of two paired samples can be considered equal. Results of the two-sided test are summarized in Table 2. If the p-value is less than $\alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that there is statistically significant preference of one brand among the consumers.

Table 2: Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test for the medians of Pepsi Max and Coca-Cola Zero

Category	Group		p-value	Category	Group		p-value
Taste	Age	18 to 20	0.2500	Smell	Age	18 to 20	0.5000
		21 to 23	0.3153			21 to 23	0.0118
		24 to 26	0.1409			24 to 26	1.0000
		27 to 29	0.2500			27 to 29	1.000
	Sex	Female	0.4096		Sex	Female	0.0023
		Male	0.4996			Male	0.1516
	Brand influence	Yes	0.8027		Brand influence	Yes	0.0342
		No	0.8714			No	0.6177
	Total		0.7110		Total		0.0290
	Colour	Age	18 to 20		1.0000	Bubbles	Age
21 to 23			0.1839	21 to 23	0.0000		
24 to 26			0.8555	24 to 26	0.0012		
27 to 29			0.2500	27 to 29	0.2500		
Sex		Female	0.1089	Sex	Female		0.0000
		Male	0.7905		Male		0.3240
Brand influence		Yes	0.3817	Brand influence	Yes		0.0000
		No	0.4545		No		0.0807
Total			0.2185	Total			0.0000

Source: Own processing

All groups of consumers rank the taste and the colour of Pepsi Max and Coca-Cola equally. The differences can be found in the categories smell and content of bubbles (Table 2). Furthermore, one sided test confirmed that consumers prefer the smell of

Pepsi Max and content of bubbles of Coca-Cola Zero. Among the groups of consumers:

- Women;
- consumers who claim the brand has influence on their behaviour and;
- the age group from 21 to 23 (and from 24 to 26 for the category content of bubbles) ranked the Pepsi and Coca-Cola differently.

In order to link the questionnaire and the blind test, the McNemar's test is used. The preference of the brand from the questionnaire and the actual preference from the blind test are compared for the equality of proportions. The proportions should be equal if the consumers choose according to their taste preference. If the null hypothesis is rejected, then the proportions are not equal and the consumers are influenced by the brand and other factors. Table 3 documents the results for the sample of 200 consumers. P-value is less than $\alpha=0.05$, hence the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that the consumers did not choose the same drink in questionnaire and in the blind test.

Table 3: McNemar's test

Questionnaire selection	Blind test selection		Total
	Pepsi Max	Coca-Cola Zero	
Pepsi Max	30	30	60
Coca-Cola Zero	78	62	140
Total	108	92	200
McNemar's chi2(1)			21.33
p-value			0.0000
Exact McNemar significance probability			0.0000

Source: Own processing

Further, the sample is divided into two groups – consumers who admit the brand influences them and the ones who claim that the brand does not influence them. McNemar's test is applied for each of these groups to confirm the statement of consumers (Table 4, Table 5).

Table 4: McNemar's test – brand influenced sample

Questionnaire selection	Blind test selection		Total
	Pepsi Max	Coca-Cola Zero	
Pepsi Max	16	22	38
Coca-Cola Zero	66	50	116
Total	82	72	154
McNemar's chi2 (1)			22.00
p-value			0.0000
Exact McNemar significance probability			0.0000

Source: Own processing

Given the p-value is less than $\alpha=0.05$, the proportions of consumers' choices do not equal and the brand really has the impact on the sample of consumers who admitted it (Table 4). Finally, the p-value of McNemar's test for the brand uninfluenced sample is greater than $\alpha=0.05$ (Table 5). The null hypothesis cannot be rejected, which means that there is no significant difference in proportions of choices. Therefore, consumers' choices of brand from questionnaire match those from the blind test. The test proved that choices of the drink are based on the taste of consumers and probably not influenced by the brand.

Table 5: McNemar's test – brand uninfluenced sample

Questionnaire selection	Blind test selection		Total
	Pepsi Max	Coca-Cola Zero	
Pepsi Max	14	8	22
Coca-Cola Zero	12	12	24
Total	26	20	46
McNemar's chi2 (1)			0.80
p-value			0.3711
Exact McNemar significance probability			0.5034

Source: Own processing

Conclusion

For the purposes of our research, the attention was focused on products that do not contain added sugar. Both companies, Coca-Cola Company and PepsiCo, know that human senses are receivers that make people perceive their environment. That is why they focus on the human senses and emotions in their communication policies. They know the best that emotions sell.²² Based on a blind test, up to 58% of respondents chose Pepsi. We know several independent studies focused on Pepsi and Coca-Cola. In blind tests consumers always prefer Pepsi. They state that the taste of Pepsi is better. The neuromarketing research showed that the taste centre was much more active during the consumption of Pepsi beverages. When consumers knew what beverage they drank they preferred Coca-Cola. The neuro-scan of the brain showed that the knowledge that the consumer is drinking Coca-Cola caused that the centre of emotions was activated. Here we can see what a strong brand position the Coca-Cola built up in the minds of their consumers.²³

In our research, we confirmed the results of previous studies and testing, mentioned in chapter 4. Many companies are able to build a very strong bond with consumers and thus they are a step ahead of the competition. The brand is often much more than the product itself. To build up a really strong brand requires to know the needs

²² *Pepsi alebo Coca-cola. Slováci rozhodnú, ktorá chuť najviac.* [online]. [2016-10-5]. Available at: <<http://strategie.hnonline.sk/media/783050-pepsi-alebo-coca-cola-slovaci-rozhodnu-ktora-kola-chuti-viac>>.

²³ Ibidem.

of the target consumers and try to satisfy them. Strong brands make their way into the minds of consumers for a long time and very precisely. They are a sign of what the consumer is looking for, whether it's childhood memory, the feeling of freedom or lifestyle. If the consumer has the positive experience with the brand there is a chance that he will return to this brand and will become loyal. The brand can later bring back pleasant experiences and memories.

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