

Under Armour's Strategic Brand Management: Innovation, Endorsements, and Market Resilience

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Abstract. This essay applies Under Armour's brand management strategy, which describes its strength in the athletic apparel business. Under Armour differs by creating fresh and innovative products such as moisture-wicking technology and ColdGear and HeatGear products, which attract athletes from all climatic zones. Under Armour products from clothing to shoes and accessories becomes an athletes' one-stop store, thereby attaining the allegiance of customers. Successful marketing, including celebrity endorsement by athletes like Stephen Curry and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, increases brand popularity and engagement, particularly among young consumers. Sports sponsorship of children's and women's sporting activities also ensures inclusivity and consumer loyalty. Additionally, Under Armour's technology incorporation through embracing smart clothes and fitness programs also enhances customer experience. The focus of the brand on sustainability and growth into growth markets is a robust growth opportunity. Finally, Under Armour's resilience in the face of challenges, such as adjusting to e-commerce, guarantees its sustainability and success despite the unpredictable nature of the retail environment. The analysis identifies the multi-layered strategy under which Under Armour runs its brand, and how it emerges as the market leader among sportswear companies.

Keywords: Brand Management, Athletic Apparel, Celebrity Endorsement.

1. Introduction

Under Armour was founded in 1996 by former Maryland football player Kevin Plank as a brand to develop professional athletic performance apparel. Based on the research results of other literatures, this paper uses the theoretical framework and knowledge of fan economy to explore the strengths and weaknesses of Under Armour's brand marketing strategy and improve it. Research on Under Armour's technological innovation, cooperative sponsorship, product development, market expansion and other directions to help more people understand brand management and marketing.

Through the research, the authors have found that Andema has avoided its disadvantages in online marketing and market competition through a series of strategies, achieving good results in market positioning, development, digital marketing models and endorsement methods, pricing, responding to consumer demand, brand culture, marketing strategies. By formulating a brand strategy, Andema can enhance the shaping of a unique brand image, improve brand competitiveness, and strengthen the emotional connection between the brand and consumers, thereby increasing consumer loyalty to the brand.

Through a series of marketing activities such as sustainable development initiatives, the authors can win the support of consumer groups, local environmental associations, and government organizations, optimize brand image, enhance the brand's position in the minds of consumers, and develop potential customers, such as the new generation with advanced ideas, such as teenagers and college students, who are more interested in a positive brand image. Rich and reasonable pricing can to some extent stimulate more brand product lines, such as ordinary professional, high-performance, leisure, children's, to compete with other brands. By organizing a series of social activities and inviting some "opinion leaders" to participate in activities such as product evaluations, offline events,

the brand awareness of Andema can be increased directly or indirectly, thereby improving efficiency and quickly establishing direct contact with consumers.

Although they have taken some marketing measures, they have not fully understood the true needs of consumers in certain aspects, such as social needs, spiritual needs, their improvements seem to be limited to the product itself, and the authors will analyze these aspects and propose corresponding improvement plans.

2. Brand Introduction

In 1996, Kevin Plank founded Under Armour. In Under Armour's development history, the author will list several representative cases and analyze them from the following fields:

2.1. Brand Image and Brand Positioning

In 1997, the early positioning of "tight professional sportswear" emphasized functionality and technological attributes, such as the launch of HEATGEAR ® (Sweating in high temperature environment) and COLDGEAR ® the (low-temperature insulation) series quickly occupied 70% of the segmented market share [1]. Established the brand positioning of Under Armour with a focus on professional sports products and the development of high-performance sportswear.

In 1999, Under Armour sponsored the movie "Challenge Sunday", which attracted widespread attention from athletes around the world, and its products gradually gained recognition from professional athletes. After 1999, the brand gradually launched sportswear in basketball, football, running and other fields, and increased its popularity by sponsoring professional athletes and sports teams. Expanding from tight fitting clothing to categories such as sports shoes and accessories, and entering the women's market. Further enhancing its brand awareness, but still struggling to compete with industry giants such as Nike and Adidas.

The author analyzed how Under Armour has created a unique brand image, promoted differentiation in Under Armour's brand competition, avoided consumer confusion, and nurtured a unique brand culture. But the author found that there are still some marketing issues that need improvement, such as using some methods to make brand marketing more closely related to consumers' lives, and using some ways to bring products closer to consumers. By addressing these issues, consumer loyalty can be enhanced.

2.2. Brand Innovation

In recent years, the innovation momentum of the Under Armour brand has been sluggish, and the distribution of innovation is far away from the consumer group, making it difficult for consumers to perceive and experience innovative products in a timely manner (the author's analysis may be due to issues with promotional methods)

Materials and product innovation: Continuously developing new materials (such as lightweight mountaineering bag design) and environmentally friendly product lines, exploring sustainable fashion. The "EXPEDITION" mountaineering series, released in autumn and winter 2025, is inspired by Kanas and uses a layered system to meet extreme environmental needs [2]. But the author speculates that due to the fact that the research and development of the mountaineering series products is not traditional to Under Armour, the popularity of the products after they are launched may not be good, and continuous innovation, observation, and cultivation of product differentiation are still needed.

Digital Innovation: Acquiring fitness apps such as MapMyFitness and MyFitnessPal, building a digital health community with 150 million users, and promoting an increase in the proportion of online sales [3, 4]. But the authors have truly investigated and understood consumer needs online, the communication process with consumers efficient, the collected data accurate. Accurate brand innovation can not only enhance brand competitiveness and lead the times, but also attract consumers and potential special consumers (such as environmentalists, children's groups, elderly groups) by

establishing brand innovation communities, stimulating consumers' positive identification awareness, consolidating consumer organizations, and strengthening brand spirit [5].

2.3. Brand Market

Under Armour entry into European and Asian markets after 2009, opening the first flagship store in China in 2012 and gradually expanding e-commerce channels. In 2012, Under Armour open the first flagship store in China and increased influence through sponsoring events and localized marketing.

Under Armour has released its third quarter financial report for the fiscal year 2025. According to the financial report, in the third quarter of fiscal year 2025, Andema's revenue decreased by 6% year-on-year to \$1.4 billion [6]. The North American market was weak, revenue in the Asia Pacific region declined, and there were frequent management changes (such as CEO Stephanie Linnartz stepping down).

Under Armour open up international markets, promote high-end and localization, focus on key e-commerce categories, increase popularity through activities such as Curry China Tour and Chengdu CURRY flagship store opening, and plan to open more concept stores.

The author believes that by combining with local cultures of other countries, more open and inclusive consumers can be attracted. Secondly, the author believes that Under Armour still needs to continuously consolidate its global perspective through internationalization and develop products tailored to different environments, such as clothing and equipment that are suitable for geography and culture.

3. Under Armour Brand Management Analysis Using STP

Under Armour's brand management strategy can be effectively analyzed through the STP (Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning) framework, which reveals both its competitive strengths and areas needing improvement. In terms of segmentation, the brand primarily targets professional athletes, fitness enthusiasts, and gym-goers who demand high-performance sportswear, leveraging demographic factors such as age, income, and activity level. Psychographically, it appeals to consumers who prioritize durability, innovation, and functionality, particularly those engaged in high-intensity training or extreme weather conditions, as seen in its ColdGear and HeatGear product lines. Behaviorally, Under Armour caters to both serious athletes and casual users, though its expansion into athleisure has been less impactful compared to competitors like Nike and Lululemon. However, its segmentation strategy has limitations, particularly in international markets where cultural preferences differ—for instance, Asian consumers often favor fashion-forward designs over pure performance gear.

When it comes to targeting, Under Armour focuses heavily on performance-driven consumers, including professional athletes and collegiate sports teams, reinforced by high-profile endorsements from figures like Stephen Curry and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. The brand also targets fitness-conscious individuals through motivational campaigns such as "I Will," which emphasizes determination and resilience. However, its secondary audience—lifestyle and casual wear consumers—remains underdeveloped, as Under Armour struggles to compete with Nike's emotional storytelling or Adidas' streetwear appeal. The brand's recent restructuring, which involved reducing product variety by 25% to concentrate on core categories like running and basketball, reflects a strategic refinement of its targeting approach. Yet, this move risks further narrowing its market reach, particularly as competitors continue to dominate the broader athleisure space.

In positioning, Under Armour differentiates itself as a technology-driven performance brand, emphasizing innovations such as moisture-wicking fabrics, compression gear, and smart apparel integrated with fitness-tracking capabilities. This focus on functionality has earned it a loyal following among athletes but has also created challenges in building emotional connections with everyday consumers. Unlike Nike's "Just Do It" or Adidas' "Impossible Is Nothing," Under Armour's

"I Will" slogan lacks the same cultural resonance, limiting its appeal beyond hardcore sports enthusiasts. Additionally, its premium pricing strategy, while justified by advanced technology, alienates price-sensitive shoppers, especially in emerging markets where disposable incomes are lower. To strengthen its positioning, Under Armour could benefit from adopting a more balanced approach—combining performance with lifestyle appeal—and expanding its sustainability initiatives to attract environmentally conscious consumers.

4. Marketing strategy analysis

4.1. New Product Offerings

New and innovative products are a key part of Under Armour's promotional mix. It became popular mainly on the strength of its innovative moisture-wicking technology that efficiently drains sweat from the body, providing more comfort while performing physical activities [4]. The technology is of critical significance for athletes participating in high-intensity sports because it reduces disruption and improves overall performance.

The firm continues to spend a lot of money on research and development, constantly coming up with new products that cater to the different needs of sportsmen. For instance, the ColdGear and HeatGear brands are designed specifically for extreme weather conditions, offering thermal insulation during cold weather and cooling features when it is warm [5]. Such focus on technology to enhance performance not only puts Under Armour in a class of its own amongst the rest of the market, but also in a leadership role amongst performance wear companies.

Additionally, Under Armour's foray into the smart wear segment that includes fitness tracking features is indicative of its progressive nature. Offerings such as the UA HOVR smart shoes give customers instant performance feedback, thus creating an overall improved customer experience [6]. By leveraging technology and clothing, Under Armour fulfills the new market demand for data-infused sportswear, appealing to tech-conscious consumers and positioning itself as a pioneering brand.

4.2. Brand Identity Strong

The brand identity of Under Armour is strong as it reflects a clear message of hardness, determination, and athleticism. "I Will" is a phrase that customers resonate strongly with since it reflects the spirit of braving adversity and becoming better [7]. The term is not only an advertising theme but also an affirmation of the brand's inner values, and this triggers a strong emotional appeal to customers.

Under Armour uses the strong narrative method in the marketing of the product using real sportsmen and stories of their failure and success. Using such a method has the strength of humanizing the company, and people become more loyal as the experiences narrated touch them [8]. The "I Will" campaign, for example, uses the theme of athletes overcoming personal struggles, which encourages customers not only to buy Under Armour's apparel but also to struggle through their exercises.

The emphasis of the company on narratives that resonate with people's hearts significantly enhances emotional resonance, building a foundation of brand enthusiasts. Under Armour establishes a foundation of loyal customers by disseminating the notion that people can thrive through hard work and proper equipping. The brand personality of Under Armour is strong in creating the company to be different from others such as Nike and Adidas, which also focus on performance but do not necessarily elicit the same kind of emotional appeal.

4.3. Effective Marketing Strategies

Under Armour has a common advertising strategy that combines celebrity endorsements, web involvement, and social backing. The connection of the brand to prominent sport celebrities like Stephen Curry and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson tremendously increases the brand profile and

recognition [8]. The sponsorships beyond usual commercials introduces Under Armour products into real environments, thus making them desirable to the customers.

Brand promotion activities are targeted predominantly on social and digital media to increase access to young consumers. By inviting the customer to take a picture and share his or her fitness activity as user-generated content, Under Armour creates community involvement and brand attachment [9]. In addition to making the brand visible, this creates a feeling of belongingness among customers, thus increasing their emotional attachment to the brand.

In addition, Under Armour's strongly focused promotional campaigns, like the "I Will" campaign, are successful at engaging with consumers by capitalizing on athletes that overcome personal barriers. This storytelling approach not only emphasizes the utilitarian aspects of Under Armour's products but also encourages consumers to overcome personal barriers, thereby positioning the brand as a performance wear market leader.

4.4. Community Engagement and Sustainability Activities

Under Armour's emphasis on community engagement makes it stand out from the competition. Under Armour engages in supporting grassroots sporting activities and youth sports activities, fostering a sense of community among its target audience [10]. For example, Under Armour's UA HOVR community challenges and fitness classes encourage interaction and communal bonding, where individuals can share their fitness aspirations with each other.

In addition, "Under Armour Women" campaigns speak up for the issues of women athletes and increase company inclusivity and allegiance. By providing such a segment's exclusive needs and desire, Under Armour generates loyal customers who are treated with respect and appreciation.

In addition to its social efforts, Under Armour has also made significant progress in the field of sustainability by harmonizing business operations with the increasing consumer expectation of sustainable products. Under Armour has incorporated recycled material into certain clothing lines and is lowering its environmental impact by using more sustainable production methods [7]. Through sponsorship of sustainability initiatives, Under Armour appeals to environmentally aware customers who want companies that are similarly values-oriented.

The emphasis on sustainability places Under Armour in the list of good brand image as well as makes it socially responsible corporate. Being so environmentally friendly is even more important in an industry so aware of the environment, and this solidifies consumer loyalty even more.

5. Conclusion

Under Armour has established itself as a formidable player in the athletic apparel industry, thanks to its strong emphasis on innovation, high-performance products, and strategic athlete endorsements. The brand's technological advancements, such as moisture-wicking fabrics and smart fitness apparel, have set it apart in a crowded market, while partnerships with influential figures like Stephen Curry have bolstered its credibility among athletes. However, several challenges hinder its ability to compete with industry giants like Nike and Adidas. One major issue is its unclear brand positioning—while Under Armour excels in performance wear, its lack of a compelling lifestyle narrative limits its appeal to casual consumers. Additionally, its heavy reliance on the North American market leaves it vulnerable to regional economic fluctuations and restricts growth opportunities in rapidly expanding markets like Asia and Europe.

To secure long-term success, Under Armour must refine its brand identity by blending performance with lifestyle elements, making its products more relatable to everyday consumers. Expanding its digital marketing efforts and enhancing social media engagement could help bridge the gap with younger audiences, while localized product offerings in international markets would improve its global competitiveness. Addressing pricing disparities through tiered product lines—offering both premium and budget-friendly options—could also broaden its consumer base. Ultimately, Under Armour's future growth depends on its ability to leverage its technological

strengths while cultivating a stronger emotional connection with consumers, ensuring it remains a key contender in the dynamic sportswear industry.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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