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Gaining Competitive Advantage: Applying Innovativeness in Sports Wears

LITERATURE REVIEW

No particular research has been performed earlier on this topic. But certain literature work that is related to sportswear industry has been reviewed.

1. **Arnaldo Camuffo(2005):** The team of Arnaldo has performed a research on Breathing Shoe technology used by Geox (an Italian shoe manufacturer). In this particular research work, they analyzed the effect of breathing shoes in the market and consumer minds. The problems faced by the consumers earlier were sorted out and this innovation helps Geox to reach to the peak of shoe industry in Europe.
2. **Friction in Sports:** The purpose of this report was to show that friction is involved in sport and can influence the decisions on designing and buying footwear. The results interpreted that designing of shoes should be done as per the needs of the customers.
3. **Emma Jackson (March 2011):** In the green clothing and textile market, the requirement to create sustainable and marketable eco-friendly products is becoming increasingly competitive. Out-of-the-box innovation is immensely valuable in such a sector where companies seek to balance environmental marketing against increased costs- If green production can be achieved for lower costs, then major labels can and do take notice.

ABSTRACT

The sportswear industry has never been as enticing as in the recent times. The industry is witnessing an unprecedented growth with the growing awareness in consumers and the evolution of fitness culture.

Growth of international interest in sports, brand loyalty among consumers and an ever-increasing younger population are determining a successful pathway for the sportswear brands. As sports are globalized, sports products are sold nationally and internationally. To sell more such products to sports enthusiasts and consumers, sportswear companies should be innovative enough to attract the customers.

This paper aims at defining the current trends in technology in the sportswear industry.

Keywords:- Sportswear, Innovation, Performance Apparel, Adidas, Nike, Reebok, Fabric Technology, Competitive Advantage.

INTRODUCTION

Performance apparel represents one of the fastest growing sectors of the international textile and clothing industry. Market growth in this industry is being continuously fuelled by the emergence of new fibres, new fabrics and innovative process technologies. The market is also being boosted by changes in consumer

preferences and lifestyles. The worldwide market size of performance sportswear is currently estimated at US\$ 6.40bn, which is up 19.4% over the last four years, and is expected to grow a further 18.75% to US\$ 7.6bn by 2014. According to one of the reports, performance apparel will outperform all sportswear by a factor of two, raising the US\$ money value of performance sportswear from US\$ 5.89bn to US\$ 7.20bn. Its share of total active sportswear will rise from 10.71% to 11.86%.

The market ranges from specialist apparel for individual sports to sportswear worn as an everyday fashion item. New high-tech fabrics are being constantly developed for a wide range of active sports such as aerobics, athletics, running, cycling, swimming, sailing, etc. Of all of the areas of the international clothing market, the active sportswear and athletic footwear sectors are amongst those most heavily relying on brands and image.

The major players in this category of apparel are Nike, Adidas and Reebok that are followed by a second tier of brands like Puma, Lotto, and New balance etc. The tier one brands dominates the domestic scene of sportswear industry.

The domestic market is witnessing sportswear trends like acceptance of athletic footwear and apparel for casual and lifestyle purposes, entry of more women into sports and fitness arena and the growing health consciousness among consumers. But even though the sportswear industry is growing at a high rate, the larger chunk of sportswear sales is going into the wardrobe of non-sporting consumers. These consumers are trend conscious and ready to experiment with new technologies in order to stay abreast with the latest trends.

INNOVATIONS IN PERFORMANCE APPAREL

A very wide range of fabric textures is available in the marketplace for performance apparel manufacturers, thanks to innovations in yarns and new fabric technologies as also to the market demands. Polyester has come up as a favorite of performance apparel market as it can be engineered to wick moisture away from the body.

When talking about fibers, it's the synthetic microfibers that are mostly favored for performance apparel. Microfiber fabrics are lightweight, soft, easy care, low pill, low shrink and fast drying. These fabrics can perform well

even in most demanding applications. As such they are preferred for both sportswear and industrial clothing.

Consumers these days have become more eco-conscious. They want both, eco-friendly as well as performance clothing. They are not ready to sacrifice any of the characteristics. In such an event, the performance apparel sector has no other way apart from being innovative and introduce such performance apparel that are ecological too. Some of the apparel manufacturers have started showing interest in natural fibers such as bamboo, soy, and corn-based fibers or yams for the purpose. More innovative manufacturers have been experimenting with organic and recycled fabrics and many of them have come up with "Green Performance Apparel" made of such fabrics. Mostly, recycled polyester is used for the purpose.

ADIDAS AND INNOVATION

- Adidas released its ForMotion clothing technology at the Australian Tennis open in January worn by World ranked Alicia Molik. ForMotion garments are designed to enhance athletes' movements in three specific types of sports: Linear sports such as running, where the focus is on forward motion; Lateral sports, such as tennis, where the focus is on upper body rotation and quickness; And the Helix movements of football/soccer, where the focus is on lower body power and movement.

ClimaCool apparel (another innovative product) actively conducts heat and sweat away from the body through a combination of heat and moisture-dissipating materials, ventilation channels and three-dimensional fabrics that allow air to circulate close to the skin.

And now Adidas is set to unveil prototypes of a new football jumper that uses derivations of its ForMotion and ClimaCool clothing technologies to produce a tight-fitting jumper that conducts sweat away from the players body through a combination of heat and moisture-dissipating materials, and makes the surface of the jumper slippery and difficult to tackle.

- Adidas has unveiled the most advanced shoe ever. Called "1", the shoe provides "intelligent cushioning" by automatically

and continuously adjusting itself. It does so by sensing the cushioning level, using a sensor and a magnet. It then understands whether the cushioning level is too soft or too firm via a small computer and adapts with a motor-driven cable system to provide the correct cushioning throughout the run.

NIKE: FROM INSPIRATION TO INNOVATION

Ever since Nike co-founder Bill Bowerman used a waffle iron to cook up a new sole for a pair of running shoes more than 25 years ago, innovation has been Nike's bread, butter, and glory, the not-very-well-kept secret of the company's enduring success. Several years after the premier of the waffle sole came the famed "Air" cushioning system. First introduced in running shoes, it stormed the basketball shoe market on the wings of Michael Jordan and became a standard of both high performance and street fashion. Now Nike is applying its innovative spirit to a new standard of performance.

- After two years of scientific review, Nike set its sites on the elimination of PVC from footwear and non-screenprint apparel by the end of 2002. In Spring 2002 Nike highlighted two of the company's PVC-free products, Keystone Cleats and Swoosh Slides, as a way to begin a dialogue with consumers about its PVC-free commitment.
- In 2006, Nike Inc. and Apple Computer Inc. collaborated on a new product platform intended to harness the power of digital technology to improve a runner's experience. The first fruition of this partnership — the Nike+iPod Sport kit — received the 2006 Most Innovative Product Award at the first annual Consumer Goods Growth & Innovation Forum. Recognition comes not only because it is the first-to-market product of its kind, but for the creation of what may be the fastest-growing running community in the world.

The product — launched in July 2006 — involves an electronic sensor inserted under the inner sole of a new Nike running shoe called the Moire (MOR-ay). That sensor talks to a small wireless receiver that attaches to Apple's iPod nano music player. The components work together to give voice prompts, interjected while music is playing, telling runners how far they've gone and at what pace. The iPod also keeps track of the duration, distance and other information on each run.

REEBOK AND ITS INNOVATION

- In 2009, Reebok launched the EasyTone footwear collection that is designed to help tone key leg muscles. EasyTone is based on Reebok's proprietary "Moving Air" technology. It involves two balance pods under the heel and forefoot of the shoes that create natural instability with every step, forcing the muscles to adapt. Building on the success of EasyTone, in 2010 Reebok expanded its footwear offering into running with RunTone and training with TrainTone.
- In spring 2010, Reebok introduced its second innovative technology with ZigTech, an innovative running and training shoe concept for conditioning activities. Reebok's ZigTech footwear utilises a unique "Zig-Zag" geometry that delivers energy transfer back to a runner's running stride. Its unique sole propels the runner forward and is designed to help reduce muscle fatigue in shins.
- In 2011, Reebok will introduce its third pillar, supporting flexibility and natural movement. RealFlex is engineered with 76 independent "sensors" that help promote the natural movement of your feet. These sensors are positioned to flex and move throughout the stride while providing protection under the feet.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The young Indian consumer today is a product of the technology boom wherein "gizmo appeal" is every marketer's new age formula. Sportswear brands are operating in an industry that focuses on improving and meeting performance needs for athletes and end consumers, through state-of-the-art, high-end technology products.

The fundamental objective of this paper is to understand the need of innovation in sportswear industry and analyzing the recent trends.

The collection of data (facts and figures) is mainly done through secondary sources. The main source of data is internet along with recent updates of sportswear products from Newspapers and Television. Few magazines and journals on Apparel industry and Sports gear are also used as the source for data.

The selection criteria of a particular source depend on its applicability on this particular topic. The studies related to sportswear industry are

considered to be of prime importance for reference.

CONCLUSION

The business in sportswear industry is driven by the energy and excitement that comes with sports and fitness. Sportswear brands are operating in an industry that focuses on improving and meeting performance needs for athletes and end consumers.

The innovations or creativity help a company produce innovative products that keep customers interested in what they're doing. Interest generally translates into more money coming in to the company.

Earlier, the three major manufacturers of sports wears viz., Nike, Adidas, & Reebok, were catering only Niche Markets. Since now they have entered in other segments with low cost products they are facing and creating more competition. So in such a competitive era, the companies should focus on delivering something different to the customers.

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