

POSITIONING IN DIFFERENT TARGET MARKETS - A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The concept “positioning” has drawn significant attention from academics and practitioners since it was put forward, because it played an important role in marketing activities. The aim of the paper is to carry out a contemporary and concise review of the positioning research domain, in particular how scholars have approached this field of study, in which target markets positioning have been studied, and how the studies are designed. Through an iterative search in multiple literature databases, 50 qualified research studies on positioning were identified and retrieved. The study is based on research articles in English, published in academic journals, which limits the international and professional scope of the study. Another limitation is the selected time period, which does not include studies later than 2012. As a review, the main contribution of this paper is a contemporary and comprehensive overview of the field as such.

Keywords: Brand, Literature review, Positioning and Product

INTRODUCTION

Positioning is one of the fundamental components of marketing strategy and management. Kotler (1999) argues that positioning decisions determine the direction of a firm’s overall marketing strategy and that an effective marketing mix can only be developed once a company has crafted a distinct positioning strategy. By making the wrong positioning decision, a company could develop a misguided marketing mix and thus go down on an undesirable path. Hooley et al. (2001) have indicated that there is a positive relationship between company performance (in terms of profitability and/or efficiency) and well-formulated and clearly-defined positioning activities. Ries & Trout (2001) define Positioning as an organized system for finding a window in the mind of a customer. It is based on the concept that communication can only take place at the right time and under the right circumstances. Positioning is the act of designing the company’s offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market. Blanks on and Kalafatis (2004) Clement and Grottemeyer (1990) noted that the concept of product positioning strategies has become essential to the success of a firm’s marketing strategies. According to Soundararaj & Rengamani (2002) positioning is not what you do to a product, but what you do to the minds of the prospect customers; that is, you position the product in the mind of the intended client. It is understood that a product’s position is the way in which the product is defined by consumers on important attributes and the place the product occupies in the minds of the consumers relative to competing products. Fill (1999) states that the successful positioning can only be achieved by adopting a customer’s perspective and by understanding how customers perceive products in the class, and how they attach importance to particular attributes that can be grouped under a construct. As suggested by Kapferer (2004), Brand Positioning task is to give the answers to the four questions: a) “a brand for what”; b) “a brand for whom”; c) “a brand for when”; and) “a brand against whom. According to Brooks bank (1994), the positioning strategy should include three components: customer targets, which are the product of the segmentation study; competitor targets, which are a product of the analysis of external environment; and competitive advantage, which is also a product of the environmental analysis. Brooks bank (1994) had found in his research between higher and lower performing United Kingdom (UK) companies in terms of their marketing practices, that to be successful over the long term a firm’s offering must be well positioned in the market place. This is supported by authors including Clement & Grottemeyer (1990) and Devlin et al. (1995) who assert that, just as marketing has become an increasingly important element of strategic management process, so has become fundamental to the success of firm’s the adoption of the positioning concept, and Fisher (1991) contended that differentiated position generates high return on profits. Urban & Hauser (1993) states that Positioning is critical for new product. Not only must a new product deliver the benefits the customer needs, but it must do so better than competition.

In developing a positioning, the marketer must consider four things: the target market; how the product is different or better than competitors; the value of this difference to the target market; the ability to demonstrate or communicate this difference to the target market. Therefore the present work picks up on the importance of target market for positioning. A contemporary and concise review of the positioning research domain, in particular how scholars have approached this field of study, in which target markets positioning have been studied, and how the studies are designed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crawford 1985 attempted to measure whether marketers of consumer and industrial goods and services make use of the concept of positioning and if so, how they do it. The content analysis of 350 brand advertisements in 9 magazines was done and from each ad following information was collected Brand of product, company, generic class or type of product whether a consumer product or a business product, whether tangible or intangible product or service, the apparent positioning statement including the primary category and the secondary category, supporting evidence, whether the brand supported the positioning whether there was packaging support and whether there was any other evidence of support (sales promotion tools, etc.) and whether the art work in the ad supported the positioning. The study yielded a typology which included two broad categories of attributes (features and benefits) and surrogates and study revealed that Across the board, of the positioned products and services two thirds use attributes and one third use surrogates. Among the surrogates most popular were non pareil, parentage, manufacture and target the competitor position. On a second phase of the general positioning study which covered one product category shampoos for a three-year period. The shampoo data supported the use of surrogates to communicate attributes indirectly. Further study revealed that around three fourths of all products and services were positioned. Positioning was felt to be most effective when several of the marketing tools were used in concert (e.g., with brand, packaging and price together with advertising and personal selling).

Johansson and Thorelli (1985) in their paper argued that many of the considerations that go into the positioning strategy in the home country are directly relevant for international markets. The only added element of complexity in that the country-of-origin of the imported product will often be a salient factor in the buyer evaluation process. The effect of country stereotype will be to shift the position of the product in the perceptual space and alter the overall evaluation of its merits. The competitive strength of the product will thus be affected by country biases. They presented a model for positioning products in international markets and tested the positioning strategies for automobiles by taking 10 car models and 12 attributes, that is, handling, horsepower, acceleration, gas mileage, safety, driving comfort, passenger comfort, reliability, durability, workmanship, styling and color selection. They also suggested that the buyer's perception of benefit generating attributes matters more than the actual attributes.

Shostack (1987) suggested that service firms should position their products based on structural complementarity, structural diversity, and overall development direction. He used two variables to describe service processes. The variables are: complexity (the steps and sequences that constitute the processes) and divergence (executorial latitude or variability of those steps and sequences). He suggested four strategic directions to differentiate a service process which are reducing divergence (e.g., legal firms for specific service), increasing divergence (e.g., H&R Block), reducing complexity (e.g., retailer selling ice cream only), and increasing complexity (barbering, supermarkets).

Sujan & Betman (1989), with the help of Schema plus tag model and Sub-typing model suggested that presence of customers' perception about strong discrepancy helps to position a brand in a niche market segment whereas presence of customers' perception about moderate discrepancy helps to differentiate a brand and depends on brand attributes, brand evaluations and market and category perceptions.

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) explored attributes that determine images/positions of tourism destinations. They discovered eight underlying factors: comfort/ security, interest/adventure, natural state, tourist facilitation, resort atmosphere/climate, cultural distance, inexpensiveness, and lack of language barrier

Blanks on & Kalafatis (2004) explored the positioning and creative communication tactics employed in the UK plastic card service industry. For the purposes of their study, following card operators served as the representative card companies in the UK: (1) credit cards, e.g., Visa and Access (2) charge cards, e.g., Diners Club and American Express, (3) store cards, e.g., Harrods and Marks & Spencer and (4) debit cards e.g. switch. And selected two media selected for analysis. (1) Companies' brochures, leaflets and pamphlets and (2) outdoor promotions. In order to capture outdoor promotions, photographs, based on availability, were randomly taken of advertisements at bus shelters, on bus sides, at underground stations, at railway stations, on billboards and on taxi sides. With regard to positioning strategies in photographs, 'attributes' stands out as the dominant strategy. This was followed by the rest of the strategies which were split into two categories in second and third places. These were 'price/quality', 'competition' and 'user' in second place with 'product class' and 'application' falling into third place. In brochures, five key strategies were dominant. These included 'attributes', 'price=quality', 'competition', 'user' and 'product class' which fell into the first category of strategies. In second place was 'application' and 'image'. In all, the results showed that, whereas there was partial attention given to creative communication tactics, there was a general trend of uniform emphasis upon almost all positioning strategies. Furthermore, the exploratory research has, to some extent, revealed that positioning strategies can be applied in services as well as in products.

Suzuki (2000) empirically examined the nature of the relationship between positioning strategy and profit for individual carriers in the airline industry. The results indicate that positioning has a significant effect on air line profit. And , to increase profit, an airline should either (1) provide high quality customer service even though this action may result in higher airfares to passengers, or (2) provide low airfares to passengers even though this action may lead to providing relatively poor customer service quality. This pattern suggested that, other things being equal, carriers may attain higher profits by pursuing the high-quality high-price positioning strategy rather than pursuing the low-quality low-price strategy. Blanks on and Kala fat is (2004) examined the activities and congruence of positioning strategies in the UK store card sector by adapting the consumer derived typology of positioning strategies i.e. appropriate for services and goods, Executives and experts, companies' marketing communications, and members of the public, i.e. the target group of consumer were studied for the research. All types of pictorial and worded advertisements(ads) of the two store cards appearing in the newspapers and brochures, pamphlets, leaflets and outdoor, i e. advertisements from billboards, railway stations, underground stations, bus shelters, bus sides, taxi sides, and companies' premises windows were content analyzed. Using a triangulation research methodology, the results confirmed the prevalence of challenging and aggressive branding activities. The findings identified "Service", "Value for money", and "The Brand Name" as the most popular positioning strategies pursued by Marks & Spencer Card brand. In the case of Harrods Card brand, "Top of the range" and "The Brand Name" were the two dominant positioning strategies employed. The study further uncovered congruence between the two card brands' marketing "communications" efforts and consumers' "perceived" strategies. However, there was no congruence between managers "presumed" strategies and the brands' marketing "communications" efforts. More specifically, although positioning activities in "communications" were successfully recognized by the target group, managers' positioning "presumptions/intentions" were not clearly transmitted in "communications".

Hartmann, Ibanez, and Sainz (2005) proposed a set of strategic options for green brand positioning, based either on functional brand attributes or on emotional benefits. The aim of the study was to test the suggested green positioning strategies against one another, assessing their effect on perceived brand positioning and brand attitude. Results indicated an overall positive influence of green brand positioning on brand attitude. Further findings suggested distinct functional and emotional dimensions of green brand positioning with the interaction of both dimensions in the formation of brand attitude. Highest perceptual effects were achieved through a green positioning strategy that combined functional attributes with emotional benefits. A well implemented green positioning strategy leads to a more favorable perception of the brand. The study supported significant attitude effects of both functional and emotional green positioning strategies.

Gursoya, et al., (2005) examined the relative positioning of the 10 major US airlines based on 15 attributes that measure actual airline performance on critical quality criteria important to consumers. These attributes are on-time performance, involuntary denied boarding, mishandled baggage, and 12 customer complaint areas. The results revealed that all the 10 Airlines search for ways to increase product differentiation to gain a competitive advantage over other airlines in order to better position their products.

Among the strategies adopted are: implementation of capacity controls, differentiation of pricing by market segment, frequent flyer programs designed to induce travelers' loyalty, establishing alliances with other airlines for joint marketing and code sharing, improvements in terminals and on-board amenities, monitoring and improving on-time performance, etc. The analysis indicated that Southwest Airlines performed better than any other airline examined in this study because Southwest has adopted a "focus strategy" from the beginning of its operation. Unlike most other airlines, Southwest focuses on high-density direct routes, did not use a hub or spoke system service, and provides limited services. Because of its limited service, Southwest was able to improve its operational efficiency and lower its cost thereby successfully positioning itself as a low cost and problem-free airline with a few services.

Blanks on and Kala fat is (2007) examine the positioning strategies of international and multicultural-oriented service brands. They study the UK plastic card industry and present the results that single positioning cannot play a significant role in the case of four card brands (Visa, MasterCard, Amex and Diners Club). 'The brand name' and 'top of the range' were dominating strategies, whereas 'country of origin' strategy was incompatible in the UK plastic card industry.

Blanks on and Kala fat is (2007) tested the application of his newly developed typology of positioning strategies in South Africa. Following content analyses of firms' (domestic and foreign) advertisements (e.g., Daihatsu, MARMIC Used Spares, First National Bank, South African Airways, LAPTOP Technologies (PTY) LTD., First Bowring Insurance Brokers, Lucent Technologies, Grinaker Telecom, Sanlam Properties, Mitsubishi, e-TV, M-Net), With regard to positioning strategies in print media the study revealed that firms operating in South Africa tend to focus mainly on branding activities (i.e., "the brand name") stands out as the most popularly employed positioning strategy. Following in the second place was "Attractiveness". The next four strategies ("Value for money," "Top of the range," "Services," and "Reliability"), collectively, were pursued with the same amount of effort. With regard to positioning strategies in radio media "The brand name" appeared to be the most favored strategy employed in the radio media. This was followed by a group of positioning strategies ("Services," "Reliability and "Value for money"). The two remaining strategies ("Selectivity" and "Country of origin") seemed to be meagerly pursued. While they are regarded as important, these two strategies appeared to be placed in supportive role behind the six strategies. Further examination revealed that "Attractiveness," and to an extent, "Top of the range" come behind an emphasis on "consumer friendly affordability" tactics. Furthermore, firms placed little emphasis on positioning strategies and activities depicting discrimination/selectivity in segmentation, that is, "the social class system" and other issues about nationalistic emotions.

Lee and Liao, (2009) conducted the study to discuss how the attributes of Chinese tea beverage brands influence consumers' evaluations of brand positioning and the differences and competition among brands. The study revealed that Chinese tea beverage brands pursue various goals, such as quenching thirst, attractive advertising, price, brand awareness, taste, capacity, packaging quality and reliability tea attributes to develop their positions. Brand positioning implies that consumers remember particular information conveyed by the brand. Consumers mostly notice the attributes important to them. So, when a brand projects a message about something these consumers do not desire they ignore it and pay no further attention. Low price often emerged as the most important consideration when consumers choose products. The study confirmed that tea brands may move towards various goals such as being perceived as thirsty quenching, good tasting, or reliable. Therefore, when introducing a brand to the market managers must move carefully and deliberately and choose a position that is appealing but also that will be sustainable over time.

Muruganantham & Kaliyamoorthy (2009) investigated the brand positioning strategies of select personal care brands and the role of celebrities in positioning the brands in the minds of the respective target audience. For the purposes of their study, the two female personal care products that were advertised the most frequently on television during the first half of 2007 were selected: Lux soap and Pantene Pro -V shampoo. The research provided insights into the celebrity effect on the brand positioning of Lux soap and Pantene Pro V shampoo among consumers. The role of advertising is to communicate a brand's position effectively. If properly used, celebrity endorsements are an effective tool to position the brand among the consumers. The findings indicated that product quality, brand name, and influence of friends and family members were identified by the female respondents as the top three factors influencing their purchase of personal care products. Majority (80.6 %) of the female respondents used their choice of bath soap because of its quality.

Nearly 7 % identified using their brand of soap based on TV advertisements. Other notable reasons given by the respondents were fragrance, reasonable price, family soap, attractive packaging, and doctor's advice. The majority (92.4 %) of the respondents indicated that they are regular users of shampoo. Of the 266 shampoo users, 28.9 % use Pantene Pro V shampoo. It was the most used shampoo, followed by Clinic Plus and Sunsilk. The quality of the shampoo, the desire for shiny hair, and the influence of TV advertisements were the major reasons given by the respondents for using a particular brand of shampoo. The satisfaction level of celebrity attractiveness and the recall of Sushmita Sen in the Pantene Pro V advertisements were comparatively higher than the Lux soap TV commercial.

Bernadette et al (2010) through their research work, have shown positioning strategies of growing supermarkets in India. It has been found that Indian consumers are quite influenced by the visibility, advertising and attractive bumper offers on the product. Further analysis was revealed that there is a need of proper positioning of items in supermarkets to make the customers buy as many products as they can. Overall, the results reinforced the need of P-O-Ps and proper positioning of items in supermarkets to make the customers buy as many products as they can. further it was found that with higher visibility of a product, the sales for the product increases as The rate of exposure is directly related to the rate of sale of merchandise.

Abril et al., (2009) examined the positioning of Spanish retailers from a consumer point of view. i.e. identified the critical factors that define retailer's competitive advantage and whether those factors vary accordingly to the frequency of consumer purchases. The Results revealed pricing as one of the key attributes for retailer's perception along with assortment and promotion as a second factor.

Kare & Kjell (2010) investigated Chinese food retailers' positioning strategies. Specifically, retail segments and critical factors related to the nature of the food supplier relationships that may be influenced by the positioning strategies .The following positioning elements were assessed by the experts in the observational research: the products (i.e. product range, quality of products, quality of fresh products); the store format and environment (i.e. the attractiveness of the store layout, the store quality in general); customer service (i.e. the atmosphere, the shopping pleasantness); and customer communication (i.e. the existence of well-known local (Chinese) brands, the existence of well-known foreign brands). A three-cluster solution for the positioning strategies was revealed: down-market stores, middle-range stores, and up-market stores. Down-market stores: classified 25 per cent of the sample and characterized stores below average on all positioning items. In particular, the quality of the food products was lower, the product range was limited, and the number of well-known foreign brands was small. Middle-range stores: classified 40 per cent of the sample and represented stores whose position was about average on all ten positioning items. In particular, there was a tendency towards above-average on tangible, product-related positioning elements and a tendency towards below-average on store ambience-related elements. Up-market stores: classified 35 per cent of the sample and represented stores whose position was above average on all positioning items. In particular, the ambience-related criteria were above average. The positioning items related to more tangible product-related elements were closer to the average, but were still above average.

Fuchs and Diamantopoulos (2010) explored empirically the overall relative effectiveness of alternative positioning strategies from a consumer perspective. To compare the effectiveness of distinct positioning strategies the compact car market was chosen as empirical setting. The choice was based on a pilot study (using content analysis of advertisements) in different product categories, which revealed a great deal of variety in the positioning strategies followed by firms in the automobile market .Two studies (within- and between-subjects design) were conducted aimed at evaluating the positioning success of four distinct positioning strategies of real brands in terms of consumers' perceptions of brand favorability, differentiation, and credibility, while controlling for brand-specific, product category-specific, and socio-demographic influences. The results showed that the type of positioning strategy used affects the positioning success of a brand. More specifically, the study confirmed normative arguments about the overall relative effectiveness of main positioning strategies by revealing benefit and surrogate (user) positioning strategies outperform feature positioning strategies across all effectiveness dimensions (i.e. favorability, differentiation and credibility). These findings implied that marketers should be cautious using feature positioning as a dominant positioning strategy in their advertising initiatives, at least in the compact car market which stands for a high-involvement product category. Relative to feature positioning, the remaining positioning strategies (i.e. benefit and surrogate positioning) all produce acceptable results in terms of positioning effectiveness.

However, benefit (direct and indirect) and surrogate (user) positioning strategies were not distinct in terms of positioning effectiveness they produced similar scores on the three positioning effectiveness dimensions. Surrogate positioning constituted a sound alternative to benefit positioning; further direct benefit positioning was associated with significantly higher levels of favorability than indirect benefit positioning. The findings also demonstrate that no single strategy outperforms all the others on all dimensions.

Blanks on & Strutton 2011 examined the nature of positioning strategies pursued by companies (domestic and foreign) conducting business in a liberalized developing African economy, Ghana, over a ten-year period (1996 -2006). For the purposes of their study, a newly developed consumer-derived, empirically based typology of positioning strategies (Blanks on and Kala fat is 2004) that featured eight distinct positioning strategies or dimensions was adopted. The results suggest that all the eight positioning strategies (top of the range, service, and value for money, reliability, attractiveness, country of origin, the brand name, and selectivity) are invariably employed in firms' positioning deliberation. However, it was found that, overall, two main positioning strategies (the brand name and value for money) stands out as the most prominent strategies. In a supportive role, service, reliability, selectivity, top of the range and attractiveness positioning strategies appear to be in demand by firms in Ghana.

Blanks on and Crawford (2012) examined the employment of positioning strategies of retail service firms in Texas and assessed the impact of these strategies on firm performance in terms of sales, profits, return on investment (ROI), market share, consumer perception, and so on, using an inductive, interpretive case approach. The retail services domain was used to illustrate the application of the concept of positioning. The retailers selected for the study were: Panera Bread bakery-café; Chico's retail stores; Race Trac gasoline service stations; and Bath & Body Works retail stores. Four in-depth qualitative case studies and covert observation methods provide candid subterranean insight into retail positioning in a dynamic marketplace. "Branding", "service", "value for money" and, to a lesser extent, "reliability" and "attractiveness" positioning strategies emerge as the most dominant positioning strategies, although emphasis placed on each varies from firm to firm. While Panera Bread employs the "branding", "attractiveness", "service", and "value for money" strategies, Chico's store pursues "top of the range", "service", "value for money", "reliability", "branding", and "selectivity". As for RaceTrac, the main positioning strategies were: "service", "value for money", "reliability", "attractiveness", and "branding". Bath & Body Works, on the other hand, employs "top of the range", "service", "and value for money", "reliability", "and attractiveness", and "branding" positioning strategies. Furthermore, all of the firms achieve acceptable sales and favorable consumer perceptions when employing these positioning strategies. Desired profits, return on investment (ROI), and market share are associated with these positioning strategies although not as "sales" and favorable "consumers' perceptions". The results further showed that the pursuit of multiple positioning strategies relates to multiple performance indicators. All the four firms under investigation employed three key positioning strategies, namely, "service", "value for money", and "branding". The finding is consistent with the results of the de Chernatony and Cottam's (2009) study conducted in the United Kingdom. Miles and Mangold's (2005) case study research on Southwest Airlines.

Kaya and Ayman (2012) conducted both quantitative and qualitative research in North Cyprus. 440 advertisements were content analyzed according to product class, product and service category, positioning strategy that they used and brand image category for the period 1 December 2011 till 31 December 2011. In investigation of newspaper, it was seen that 69.1% of the advertisements were product and 30.1% were in service sector. According to the research, product class analyzed under 3 heading which was FMCG, shopping and specialty goods. It was found out that most of the product that was seen in newspaper, 62.7%, was related with shopping goods. Further service sector was categorized under 5 headings as hotels, banks, communication, agencies (travel and advertising) and cafe, bar restaurant. As a service category it was seen that firstly cafe, bar and restaurant (13.6%) then hotels (6.8%) have given more advertisements than the other service category. According to three analyzed newspapers 37.7% of the advertisements used product class strategy in their advertising at first. Then 28% of the advertisements used price /quality positioning strategy and 15.9% of them used product attributes and benefits strategy in their advertisements. Competitor positioning strategy and the cultural symbol strategies were used least in newspaper advertising. Also symbolic benefits were used more (57.7%) than the functional benefits for reaching their target market.

Kinoti and Njeru (2013) endeavored to find out the market positioning strategies employed by pharmaceutical firms marketing medicines in Nairobi. By using survey research design and A sample size of fifty firms. The findings from the study showed that there are a number of positioning strategies practiced by the pharmaceutical companies in Nairobi. Quality positioning strategy was the most practiced strategy. Because every company wants its company to be viewed as selling high quality medicines. Second in practice was positioning by use or application strategy by all companies the medical sales representatives of these firms carry brochures containing messages on positioning by use. These leaflets are placed in the doctors’ room for constant reminders on the use or application of the medicine. Use of product characteristics positioning strategy was also found to be common. A company which regularly highlight the features and the benefits of their medicines to the customers may perform better than completion since customers will seek a drug containing the benefits they seek. Many companies position their drugs to be better than those of competitors’’. They also position their drugs as different from those of competitors. Differentiated benefit positioning strategy like making oral and injection form of the same drug, offering same drug with different sizes and quantities, are equally important positioning strategies and are adopted by many pharmaceutical companies. Use of cultural symbols and positioning by price were the least practiced.

Bahl et al., 2012 studied the impact of Celebrity Endorsement on Brand Positioning of a product, and how celebrity endorsement influences consumers mind while purchasing a product .For their research 14 different products were taken amongst 7 different product categories. From each category 2 products are taken, one product with celebrity endorser and the second product without any celebrity endorser. The 7 product categories were: Soap, Car, Junk Food, Mobile Phones, Shampoo and Soft drink. Data was collected through primary and secondary source. From the ANOVA analysis it was found that the Celebrity Endorsement does not have a significant impact on brand positioning of product of different categories. Most of the respondents were attracted by the tagline. Among the 7 product categories only the category of soft drink has shown that it is bit influenced by celebrity endorsement. Celebrity endorsement a strategy, among various strategies incorporated by a company to position its brand is found to be ineffective.

CONCLUSION

The concept “positioning” has drawn significant attention from academics and practitioners since it was put forward, because it played an important role in marketing activities. The paper carried out a contemporary and concise review of the positioning research domain, in particular how scholars have approached this field of study, in which target markets positioning have been studied, and how the studies are designed. Positioning is emerging as an internationally recognized research domain characterized by a high degree of multi-disciplinary, rapid proliferation in and between disciplines, and a somewhat fragmented theoretical foundation. On the basis of research interests, one target market was identified that is consumers, emerging across academic disciplines. The main contribution of this paper is a contemporary and comprehensive overview of the field as such.

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