Brand Positioning: The Unbeatable Weapon in Present Marketing Scenario

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Over the decades, the sea change in the attitudes and lifestyles of people provided various big ideas to marketers, which can be nurtured out of changing social needs, desires and values of the target customers. These innovative ideas resulted in reshaping the thinking of marketers by first identifying and understanding the needs and expectations of the target group and then to come up with suitable products. In the present scenario, the innovations are taking place rapidly but even the best demanded brands are not sure regarding their survival because the innovations are difficult to develop and easy to copy. So, the marketers are continuously seeking the distinct positions for their brands in the minds of customers and hence brand positioning has emerged as the most challenging job in today's mature and overcrowded markets. It aims at imprinting a differentiated image of the brand in the minds of the prospective customers. According to Charles Mittelstadt, "Positioning refers to how you want your brand 'thought about' in connection with the competitors in its product category. It needs to be specific to your brand aimed at specific target audience". A successful brand positioning strategy concentrates on finding out the strong position in customer's mind and then sitting on it, which leads to gain the competitive advantage in the market. The marketing managers are constantly facing the dilemma to position and reposition the brands according to the changing perceptions, needs and desires of the customers. Therefore, in the light of this fact, in this present study, we tend to focus upon describing the various strategies to position brands accurately in the market. The objective of our study is twofold. Firstly, to contemplate the basic concept of positioning and secondly, to give a brief account of puzzles and advancements in positioning.

POSITIONING AS A VITAL TOOL OF MARKETING

Positioning emerged as a vital tool to understand how brands are positioned in the mind of customer in relation to relevant attributes. It is based on the functional attributes or the emotional associations with the brand. Positioning is the pursuit of differential advantage (Subroto Sengupta, 1999). Whatever the brand positioning strategy is opted by the organization, the customers and employees must get the clarity about what differentiates your brand. The organization will bear less expense if it adopts the right positioning strategy with right marketing mix aimed at specific target audience. The brands, which have a clear vision, a concise meaning and understand their parameters of relevance, are well positioned. Nike has done its positioning as: "Athletic Shoes for Winners"- Whatever you want, you can 'just do it' in Nikes. Similarly, 7-up positioned itself as 'The Uncola' drink by using colas as a frame of reference which creates its distinct image in the soft drink market. So the marketers must discover the positions which can award them the competitive advantage. Further, these positions are generally divided in three categories.

(a) Functional Positions, which can be achieved by providing benefits of the product and solutions to the problems.

(b) Symbolic Positions, which can be attained by enhancing the self-image, ego-identification and satisfaction.

(c) Experiential Positions, by providing the prospects, sensory pleasures and cognitive stimulations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POSITIONING

Positioning is the hub of business wheel

Positioning is the basis of everything done in business. No brand can be built effectively and no consistent image can be conveyed until a strong brand positioning is developed. Positioning is the foundation of R&D, Product development, Branding, Pricing, Packaging, Advertising, Promotion, Merchandising, Publicity, Distribution Channels etc.

Positioning can beat the competition

Today, the markets are flooded with clones or a sea of homogeneous products. The only way to cross this sea is to create and communicate a distinct image which makes the customers convinced to choose your brand over the competitor's brands. Lifebuoy occupies the 'Hygiene' position. The original version of Lifebuoy was targeted to rural segment. The Double-action plus was for urban teenagers (Boys) and Lifebuoy Gold for young girls, but in

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all, the position was same i.e. Germ-Killing action. On the other hand, Margo is in 'Herbal' position and Mysore sandal in 'pure and natural fragrance' slot.

Positioning drives growth

Unfortunately, many organizations tend to focus upon making products rather than building brands. Product is something which is made in a factory, whereas brands are made in the mind. A good brand name combined with strong and clearly defined positioning leads to excellent market performance and increased market share and profits.

Positioning creates brand loyalty

We are in the habit of using at least one brand of a particular product in our daily life. We keep on using that product until the manufacturer changes the product. This brand loyalty is created by strong positioning which makes the customer feel that there is no perfect substitute available in the market for their preferred brand.

POSITIONING A PRODUCT IN THE MARKETPLACE

The pillar of positioning is based on the foundation of market segmentation i.e. partitioning the market into homogeneous groups of the potential customers. To engrave a strong position for the product, marketers first have to divide the market in unique segments and then select the target segments. After discovering the way to reach the market, the next step is how to attract the customers to try their products. In the monopolistic market, though too many brands are functionally similar, yet the firm can adopt various positioning strategies, which help it to differentiate its brands on one facet or the other.

Quality

Quality had been the base of positioning and the efforts are put together to build the dominant perception of quality. It can be built up by focusing on limited range of products, specializing in them and it can also be achieved by attaching higher price tag to the brand. To some customers, a higher price tag provides the psychological satisfaction but a product must also have some uniqueness to justify the price. Eureka Forbes, Sony, Levi, Microsoft owned this qualitative perception for their products. The positioning at the lower end of price-quality range embraces the problem of upgrading the image of the product.

Features

Sticking to the facts about the product brings the credibility in positioning, either it is VW's.. 'Think Small' on the introduction of Beetle, Onida's.. 'Science of Sound' or 'Avis' the rental cars 'We Try Harder.' Product feature positioning can range from specific physical benefits to more abstract features.

Benefits

Markets overwhelmed with the brands similar in features, open doors to position on the basis of the benefits of products. This is superior convincing strategy as it aims at providing the reason to purchase the solution of the problem like Frozen meals save time of preparation, Crest reduces cavities, Head & Shoulders clears dandruff.

Value

Once the good value brands were thought to be inexpensive, but today they are more popular amongst consumers. Coca-Cola & Pepsi, besides meeting with various controversies, are still well-liked by people because of the status symbol. People don't visit McDonalds because of the services offered but for the reason that they love to be seen there. They feel proud to talk about these brands. Besides keeping hold of the strong identity, McDonalds nicely announced the 'Happy Price Menu' leaving the competitors to think about new ways.

Usage

Another influential differentiating strategy is positioning the product according to the usage occasions. Some organizations reflected the courage to dominate the usage position in the market like Dettol antiseptic for nicks and cuts. Further, Vicks Vaporub is sitting on the unchallengeable usage positioning of 'cold at night'. Dettol Soap perfectly grilled the idea of '100% bath' to refresh you up.

User Category

Delving deeply into the segment, positioning prompts are decided keeping in mind the target customers; who should buy the product. Nestlé's Cerelac, the easily digestive cereal food and Johnson & Johnson's mild shampoo were positioned for babies. Further positioning Complan for 'Growing Children' and communicating 'I am a Complan boy. No, I am a Complan girl' in their ads, Glaxo Laboratories created a distinct image in the customer's mind.

Competition

Product's superiority can be demonstrated by comparing it directly with competitors. Some organizations adopt this aggressive positioning strategy to justify that how 'their' brand is superior. This process is followed in two

ways. Firstly, by *comparative advertisements,* and secondly, by *relating your brand with the No. 1 brand.* In comparative advertisements, the product is compared with the competitor's product which is not named but can be recognized by people and then after comparison of attributes, superiority of 'our' product is justified. Cold Drinks and laundry detergents are going head to head to prove themselves better. Further if your brand is not No. 1, relate it with No. 1. Avis followed this 'Against Position Strategy' by stating "Avis is only No. 2 in rent-a-cars, so why go with us? We try harder." This was a success as consumers start relating No.2 Avis to No. 1 Hertz (Ries & Trout, 2003).

Looking inside the prospect's mind

By ignoring the conventional logics, a unique position can be found out by digging up the minds of prospects, not by looking inside the organization and product. 7-Up is still on the unbeatable position of 'The Uncola Drink' as it was able and successful to discover & extract the 'Uncola' idea from the mind of the soft drink consumer and did not look inside the product.

Hunting Holes

Exploring the unoccupied positions (not grabbed by the competitors) and getting first to the mind provides a powerful weapon in the hands of marketers to position their brands. 7-Up used 'Uncola' idea, Maggi noodles used the idea of '2-Minutes', and VW introduced Beetle in small segment by saying 'Think Small'. Further IBM was first to position the computer, yet it was not the first to invent it. Emami was the first to introduce and position 'Fair & Handsome', a fairness cream in male segment in India. Here we would like to add one more thing that if a company is first to introduce the product in market, then this fact must be emphasized to draw the attention of prospects. Coca-Cola beautifully discovered 'The Real Thing' implying that the competitors are just imitators.

Multibrand /Single Position

The pace of new technology provides numerous opportunities to enter into new markets which award the leaders with the chance of introducing multiple brands rather than changing existing brands holding the leading positions. Introducing and positioning a new brand is much more economical and simpler rather than changing the existing ones. Reliance is continuously grabbing this strategy by entering into new fields. Ries and Trout named this as a single position strategy as each brand owns a static position in the mind of the customer. Success can also be achieved by focusing on a single theme. Nokia 'Connecting People' and Amul 'The Taste of India' have been able to achieve success by focusing on a single theme and reflecting it in their communication mix respectively.

PREREQUISITES OF AN EFFECTIVE BRAND POSITIONING STRATEGY

The insight of consumer behavior is necessary for drafting a successful positioning strategy. Here, the central idea is to focus upon what consumers think about brands rather than what we think. So, positioning requires the extensive research and perfect understanding of consumers as well as brands on the different aspects such as needs of customers, product category, target segment, competition, benefits, perceptions, brand personality.

(a) Needs of customers

A good place to start with is by identifying the existing and emerging needs of the customers in the marketplace. To get a clear understanding of consumer needs, one should keep in consideration that two different types of needs exist. Functional needs and emotional needs. Functional needs are more tangible, whereas emotional needs are related to emotions or psychographic factors like self-image, status symbol, desire to be different, lifestyle, values, attitudes and beliefs etc. It is impossible to ignore any need, but the homework is related to what type of need is more important in the segment. No doubt that functional need is important but sometimes like in the case of perfumes and cosmetics, emotional needs are more important than functional needs.

(b) Product Category

Product class or product category is the set of all the products, which the consumers perceive as substitutes to satisfy the specific need. It consists of all the alternatives that the consumers can go for while facing some problem. Suppose, if a person wants snacks, then he is having various alternatives. He can either go for ready-to-eat snacks, mostly available at home, like biscuits, wafers; peanuts etc. or he can go for snacks prepared at home like pakora, sandwich, noodles, papad, dhokla etc. He can also purchase snacks from the market like samosa, pakora, burger etc.

Similarly, if a person is suffering from headache, then also he can go for a number of modes. He can take tea or drink something else, lie down or have a sleep, get a massage, take some medicine, go for the acupuncture exercise or visit the doctor.

Since, the consumers are having a plethora of alternatives to choose from, the marketers must have the knowledge of all these ways. Identifying these options and studying them in detail helps in identifying the product category,

i.e. in which class, our product will enter, which in turn will help in defining the competition.

(c) Target Segment

The next step on the ladder is finding out the target customers for our product. It involves the understanding of demographic, psychographic and usage behavior of the customers in that product category. All the audience cannot come in target segment because one positioning cannot appeal to everybody. Only those customers will be targeted who are having similar needs. Thums-Up targets those who are adventurous by saying 'Taste the Thunder'. Pepsi targets who thinks 'Young' and American Express targets 'Prestige conscious, frequent travelers, who crave recognition, attention and special service'. So, after digging out the right customers, it is important to communicate them, that this is the perfect brand which can best satisfy their needs.

(d) Competition

Product category defines the competition. The companies wish to enter in the product category grilled with less or no competition. But the reality is far beyond this situation. To face reality and to cope up with the marketing warfare, four ways are suggested.

1. Defensive Mode: Only the market leader can defend himself by strengthening his own position. Position can be strengthened by bringing out the new innovations in new products/ services that supersede his own existing ones. e.g., Nokia and Gillette.

2. Offensive mode: This is followed by the follower by searching out the negative in the leader's positioning and attacking on that negative. e.g., Vicks Vaporub.

3. Flanking mode: All the segments cannot be occupied by the market leader. So, the neglected segment is occupied. e.g., Complan.

4. Guerilla mode: Finding out the niche in the market. Niche is a very small part of the market, where the volumes are very low but margins are very high. e.g., Rolls Royce.

Earlier, while analyzing the competitive framework, the companies used to consider standard of identity but today, new ways to look at competition have emerged. Now power brands adopt perceptual competitive framework e.g. Nestle is not selling Nescafe merely as a coffee, but it is a brand associated with achievement and freedom. It is something that rejuvenates you and freshens you up and prepares you for the whole day. In the same line, Nokia is not just selling cell phones; it is selling 'Fashion Accessories'. McDonald's is not competing in the fast food industry but in the 'Family Entertainment' business. Mercedes is not merely selling the cars but selling 'Self-esteem'.

(e) Benefits

People purchase benefits. Benefits convey strong reason to the customer that why they should go for a particular product. So, while framing the positioning strategy, benefits should be given due consideration, because they can provide the competitive advantage in the market, if not exploited by the competitors. While considering the benefits, the marketers are mostly in the situation of flux that whether to concentrate on functional/physical benefits or on emotional benefits. Like functional needs, functional benefits are more tangible and measurable. For example, Colgate helps in decay prevention, Maruti Suzuki is India's most fuel-efficient car, Tide removes tough stains and brightens the clothes etc. But the brand loyalty or the sense of belongingness cannot be achieved just by achieving the functional end. Belongingness comes with the emotions. So, the positioning strategy must be framed by ensuring that the brand is conveying functional as well as emotional benefits.

Further, Dettol kills germs. This is the functional aspect but the housewife is feeling relaxed that her family is safe is the emotional aspect of the brand. 'Fairness' by Fair & Lovely is the physical benefit, but it connects deeply with the emotions which bring the annoyed 'Lucky Girl' out of the fear that she will be rejected by the boy coming to see her. Then she feels excited by listening the word 'Lucky Boy'. In India, Fiat India talked about safety by offering crumble zones, side-impact beams for maximum passenger and driver safety, fire prevention system and anti-lock braking system. 'Safety' lies on functional end but the emotional side of this benefit is to convey the customer that he is purchasing the best car to protect his family during the journey.

Sometimes, the customers are not frequently using the physical benefit but are feeling relaxed on the emotional end. In case of the insurance companies, we are paying premium regularly for the number of years but rarely do we bother about the financial reimbursement due to any mishappening. Truly saying, in the wrap of premium, we actually are paying the price to purchase the relaxed sleep at night which is the height of emotional benefit.

(f) Perceptions

'Marketing is not the battle of products. It is the battle of perceptions' (Ries & Trout). For the marketer, it is necessary to know the consumer perceptions regarding the products that they perceive as the substitutes. This can

be known with the technique of perceptual mapping. Perceptual map is basically the two-dimensional space on which the consumer perceptions and preferences regarding your product and competitor's products are plotted. So, this technique helps the marketer to know the consumer perceptions and preferences about his own products in relation to the competitor's products. This technique also defines the similarities and dissimilarities among the products. The closely plotted points on the map convey that the products are similar whereas far situated points convey dissimilarity. The single consumer's preferred position is represented by one point but if the number of points are closely situated, it makes a cluster, which means that several consumers have same preferences. The preference is considered as an "ideal vector". The marketers analyze that whether their products comes in ideal vector category or not. If yes, positioning is strong, but if not, then how much is the difference between perception and preference and how can it be minimized? So the major concern of the strategist is to bring the consumer perception close to the ideal point or bring the ideal position close to the perception. No doubt, the second mode is difficult but the first can be achieved by re-positioning the brands by changing advertisement and modifying products in accordance with consumer preferences.

(g) Brand Personality

Brands are like individuals. Individuals can inherent some similar physical characteristics but still differ in their personalities. Personality is the perception of individual in totality i.e. his physical characteristics, values, beliefs, attitude, lifestyle, potential to perform and emotional associations. Similarly, though brands can be similar in terms of physical attributes or functions performed, yet they differ in terms of personality. According to David Ogilvy, "The personality of a product is an amalgam of many things- its name, its packaging, its price, the style of its advertising and above all the nature of the product itself." No two brands can be similar in personality/character, as no two individuals can be. For example, one brand can be considered as youthful, upper-class, trendy and perfectionist while a similar brand, on the other end, can be considered as middle-aged, mature, sophisticated, and graceful .So while framing a positioning strategy, the crucial aspect taken into consideration is to create the brand character/personality that keeps it distinct from other brands. Personality creation is the responsibility of advertising agencies, marketers or sometimes the head of an organization. It can be articulated by thinking the brands in terms of human-beings and then visualizing that if it were a person then how old would it be? How would it be dressed up? In what profession would it be? What would be his likes or dislikes? What attitudes would it have and how emotionally would it be associated? Whatever personality is created by the marketers should be consistent with the perception of that personality that the consumer carries. The symbolic imprints of a brand impression should be the same in the marketer's as well as in the consumer's mind.

PUZZLES AND ADVANCEMENTS IN BRAND POSITIONING

In theoretical, as well as in practical field, brand positioning is given the utmost importance, but, at the floor of implementation, some doubts remain in the mind of the marketer when he indulges in the market loaded with the competition which leads to change. So when everything is changing, the customer perceptions, preferences, and expectations also change. Then it becomes difficult for the companies staying with constant positioning. Further, it is very difficult to measure the space owned by a product in the customer's mind. Again, one strong recommendation in literature regarding positioning is to position the product in top category or by creating powerful category, but again, if it is already grabbed by the competitors, then what's the way? Today even when the stability is at stake, all these things become extremely difficult.

But where there is a will, there is a way. This tough competition conceived the idea of brand wikization. Actually, the irony with the organizations is that they still engrave positioning as the corporate exercise and companies keep on doing the experiments by selling the products according to their wish, not in the way the consumers seek to purchase. But now the companies have started to move towards wikization. Wiki is actually the common judgment. Today the companies are not defining brands and markets, the consumers do this through word-of-mouth and personal experiences. Brand Wikization is derived by customers and also emphasizes on building healthy and long-term relationships with customers which in turn, means low cost and higher profits. Being customer driven, brand wikization forces the companies to identify and fulfill the customer requirements and also respond to their dissatisfaction. Unlike the positioning, brand wikization is measurable by identifying what customer's value and delivering according to their benchmarks.

CONCLUSION

The concept of positioning emerged in 1969 when used by Al Ries and Jack Trout in the paper *Positioning is a game people play in today's me-too market place* in the publication *Industrial Marketing*. It became the vital

opportunity in this situation. It found that many times, consumers do not require the product in larger quantity. Therefore, they buy the paint in a larger quantity and share that paint especially in the rural area. In order to trap this target segment, it started providing products in smaller packages- in 200ml, 100ml and 50 ml packs. This also increased the product depth of the APL.

GOING TO INDIVIDUAL CONSUMERS WITH WIDE PRODUCT RANGE

In order to meet the needs of various customers, offering the widest range of the products in different pack sizes under the umbrella brand of "Asian Paints" is one of the most successful strategies adopted by Asian Paints. It has around 1600 SKU's to fulfill the customer needs.

ENTERING INTO SEMI-URBAN AND RURAL MARKET

In order to enter into semi-urban and rural markets along with the existing urban market, APL has adopted decentralized distribution network rather than keeping its distribution network simple and centralized. It therefore follows the field focused distribution network in which it has depots located all over the country/ marketing territory.

TIME FRAME IN THE STUDY

This paper is an overview of the Asian paints distribution system which evolved since 1942 with the experience and strategy of being a market leader by giving differentiation, thus gaining a competitive edge over its competitors.

This paper raises the following questions that can be useful for other researchers:

1. What are the distribution strategies adopted by APL?
2. Enlist the various issues related to Distribution Management of Indian Paint Industry.
3. How the challenges in the paint industry could be overcome?

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process in identifying the space in the mind of consumer and then fitting the image of brand in that space. A strongly positioned brand assumes more survival and competitive advantage for the company. No doubt, it is quite a tough job but can be achieved by indulging in extensive research regarding consumer behaviour, which again made the marketers gripped with the number of positioning strategies. Whatever the strategy is opted by the organization to position the brand must be unique, pertinent, reliable, evident, convincing and communicable. Moreover patience should be there, because positioning is not a one night game. It takes years to position the brand. So, in the competitive world, the only way to survive in the market is to build a strong positioning for the brands. It is substantiated from the number of examples available in literature that nobody could beat those companies, which had sharpened their positioning edges and hence, for decades the strong positioning walked with grace by wearing the crown of "unbeatable weapon" in the market place.

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