BRAND POSITIONING: THE KEY TO BRAND STRENGTH

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ABSTRACT

No company can win if its products and services resemble every other offering and product. Each offering must represent a compelling, distinctive big idea in the mind of the target market. It is vivid that for a successful product in the market, good quality and well known brand are not enough. the product must occupy an explicit, distinct and proper place in the minds of existing and potential consumers Reaching that desirable position in the minds of consumers is the result of successful positioning. Positioning is achieved mostly through a brand’s marketing communication, although its pricing, packaging, distribution and actual product characteristics also play a major role.

Key words: branding, positioning, STP model, perceptual mapping.

INTRODUCTION

Branding is centuries old. Brand names, however, first appeared in the early sixteenth century. In the sixteenth century, distillers used branding in their own way. They branded their names on the wooden containers so that the whisky of one distiller could be easily identified from that of others.

Consumer Identification with the product and protection continues to guide branding practices even today. The brand concept evolved further in the 18th century, with a purpose to strengthen the association of the brand name with a product. A brand is a product or service whose dimension differentiate it in some way from other products and services. These differences may be rational, functional or tangible. They may also be more emotional, symbolic or intangible. Brand signal a certain level of quality so that the satisfied consumers can easily choose the product again.
Branding is about everything. The process by which a product is branded is called branding. In any product strategy, the crucial decision is about branding. Branding a product means a long-term investment in building that brand by spending on promotion, packaging, and advertising. There are manufacturers who produce a product but leave the branding decision to the marketers. But the fact is that, brand name gives power to the firm. The outcome of manufacturing is physical but the outcome of branding is both physical and symbolic.

Branding pushes the product into a perceptual realm by integrating what it is and what the consumer wants. Branding gives reasons to customers to buy and use the product. It is a connecting device, as customers connect with brands they identify with.

The core component of brand strategy is brand positioning. Ogilvy felt that results of an advertising campaign rely less on how the advertisements were written but on how the brands were positioned. Every successful brand must go through positioning exercises to develop a sound brand positioning strategy. Al Ries and Jack Trout wrote about this necessity in the early 1980's in the book: "The battle for your Mind". According to them positioning starts with a product, a piece of merchandise, a service, a company, an institution or even a person. But positioning is not what you do to a product but what you do to the mind of the prospect, that is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect.

Brand positioning is the process of creating a brand offer in the minds of consumers. For instance KOTAK Mahindra positions itself in the customer's mind as one entity—"KOTAK" - which can provide customized and one-stop solution for all their financial services needs. It intends to stay with the proposition of "Think Investments, Think KOTAK".

Kotler defined positioning as the act of designing the company's offering, an image to occupy a distinct place in the mind of the target market. Brand positioning is a platform for the brand as it facilitates the brand to get through the target customers. It is the key of marketing strategy. Brand positioning refers to target market. Brand positioning is a platform for the brand to get through the target customers. It is the key of marketing strategy. Brand positioning refers to 'target customer's reason to buy a brand in preference to others. It creates a relationship between the brand and the consumer and gives a reason for this relationship. When reason for this relationship. When positioning a brand aggressively avoid becoming a "me too" by assertively "who else"? (crystal Davis). Successful brands always put themselves in the shoes of their consumers and talk about what is important to them.

Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema categorized positioning into three main headings (which they call 'merit disciplines'): product leadership, operational superiority and customer intimacy. They recommend companies to have a leader position in one of the merits and to have a sufficient level for the other two. Berman and Gilson(1987) argues that positioning is beyond a simple concept which highlights certain benefits of the product. The most successful the product. The most successful positioning can be seen on companies positioning can be seen on companies who have the knowledge to be unique and which are very difficult to be imitate IKEA, Southwest airlines, Harley Davidson or neutrogena. These companies have
developed hundreds of custom processes. It is easy to imitate their external images but their internal functioning cannot be imitated.

Brand positioning becomes very much relevant. Apple and windows both are well known brands. Apple stands for style, cool quotient, I pod etc. and windows stands for world class operating system, quality etc. It is easy for the consumers to identify point of parity and points of difference between these two brands. Brand positioning is the process of creating pop and pod in the consumer's mind.

FRAMEWORK OF POSITIONING

According to the CBBE model, deciding on a positioning requires determining a frame of reference i.e. identifying the target market and nature of competition and the ideal points of parity and points of difference brand associations. Points of parity brand associations are those attributes that are not necessarily unique but may be shared with other brands. These attributes do not differentiate but a brand which do not possess these, will be badly hurt. On the other hand, points-of-difference are those associations which makes a brand unique. Associations which make up points of difference may be based on any type of benefit or attribute for instance-Apple(design), Nike (performance) etc.

- Developing Positioning Strategy

Effective brand positioning is contingent upon identifying and communicating a brand's uniqueness and verifiable value generally process of brand positioning involves:

1) Identifying business direct competition: It would seem a simple task for a company to identify its competitors. Pepsico knows that coca Cola's Dasani is the major bottled-water competitor for its Aquafina brand, Citigroup knows that Bank of America is a major banking competitor. However the range of a company's actual and potential competitors can be much broader than the obvious.

2) Identification of current position of the product: According to Pranulis (1998) the survey techniques like Likert scale, Stapel scale, value grading scale, pair picking scale can be used for indentifying the current position of the product.

3) Composition of Perceptual Map: A perceptual map is a multidimensional image of the perceived similarities and dissimilarities among brands. Managers may use perceptual maps at a variety of levels such as for brand, product and corporate positioning. once maps are drawn, marketers may use clustering procedures to group similar products and brands.

4) Determinations of desired product's position: An ideal point is the place on the positioning map which represents the combination of attributes desired by the consumer. J. Baker (2001) is of the opinion that marketers have to take two maps decisions while determining the desired position of a product — selection of target market and identification of positions of competitive products.

5) Selection of positioning strategy: Positioning strategy is the choice of target market segments, which determines where the business compete, and the choice of differential advantage, which dictates how it competes. It may include:

- Attribute positioning: Colgate's Active salt positioned as a brand that contains salt for effective teeth cleaning and gum protection.
• User Positioning: Amul lean milk is positioned as the milk for young, figure conscious women.
• Price Positioning: Taiwan's Acer positions itself as offering innovative products without jacking up the price.

6) Developing Positioning Statement: Scholars, Capon, Hulbert (2001) define the creation of positioning statement as a complex, creative and highly interactive process, often involving many cut and try attempts before the satisfactory result is achieved. Positioning statement plays a vital role in guiding the firm's efforts in the market place.

POSITIONING STRATEGIES

1. Attribute Positioning: The brand is associated with a product features, attributes or benefit. For example - Colgate's Active Salt positioned as a brand which contains salt for effective teeth cleaning and gum protection.

2. Application Positioning: It involves building clear connections between the product and the use it is to be put to. The Forbidden City in Beijing can be positioning as a tourist spot for those who want to spend an hour.

3. User Positioning: It involves developing connections between the brand and the user. For instance, Sonu's walkman series has different models for different users ranging from amateurs to professionals. Amul lean milk is positioned as the milk for young, figure conscious women.

4. Competitor Positioning: This strategy involves making direct or indirect reference of competition. This allows the brand to exploit the competitor's image. One often cited example is that of Pepsi engages in comparative advertising against Coke.

5. Product Category Positioning: Some marketers position their brand with respect to a product class by developing class related associations. Nescafe is positioned as instant coffee (product class) and Bru brand is related with filter coffee (product class).

6. Price / Quality Positioning: A brand can be positioned as 'high price, high quality' while others may take the low price, low quality position. For instance, Taiwan's Acer positions itself as offering innovative products without jacking up the price.

COMMUNICATING POSITIONING STRATEGY

Positioning requires that similarities and dissimilarities between brands be defined and communicated. The antiseptic lotion market in India has been dominated by Dettol traditionally, a flagship brand from Reckitt Benckiser India Ltd. Attributes of the Dettol liquid such as strong smell, turning cloudy when poured on water and the stinging sensation produced on touching a wound, become the category properties of liquid antiseptic lotions. It is in this market that Savlon do not possess any of these properties: It did not give the stinging sensation and the liquid did not turn cloudy in water. So, in order to obtain consumer's acceptance, Savlon had to counter the category perception through communication.

Another case is of Paras Pharmaceuticals limited who launched their brand 'Moov' as a balm for relieving joint pains which trouble older people. Subsequently, on the basis of consumer research, the company
repositioned the brand as the 'backache specialist'. The brand communicates the pain relieving promise of "ek minute Moov ki malish " in advertisements that go with the tag line "Aah se Aaha tak ".

BRAND REPOSITIONING

Repositioning is changing the position of a brand. In some cases, even products that are faring well are repositioned. This is mainly done to enlarge the reach of the product offer and to increase the sales of the product by appealing to a wider target market.

For instance, Dettol toilet soap was positioned as a beauty soap initially. This was not in line with its core values. Dettol (antiseptic liquid) was known for its ability to heal cuts and gashes. So, the soap had to be repositioned as a 'germ kill' soap and it worked extremely well after repositioning.

Milkmaid is also a good example of repositioning. When the product was introduced in the sixties, it was positioned as a convenient form of milk for use in coffee and tea. When the sales reached a plateau in the 1980s, the company studied the situation in detail and decided to reposition it as a product for all uses involving milk. A well-planned advertising campaign was launched and milkmaid was repositioned as an ideal ingredient for a variety of sweets and other preparations, in addition to daily use in tea and coffee.

REASONS FOR REPOSITIONING

- **Increasing relevance to the consumer**: It is quite possible that a brand is fundamentally sound but not in sympathy with the consumer's current concerns. Such a situation calls for a change in positioning. Lipton yellow label tea was positioning initially as a sophisticated and premium tea for the global citizen. The advertisements. Also echoed this theme. The repositioning addressed specially the Indian consumer through an Indian idiom.

- **Visa card had to change its positioning to make itself relevant to customers under changed situations. Initially it asked the customer to "pay the way the world does". As more and more cards were launched on the same theme, it positioned itself as the 'world's most preferred card'**

- **Increasing occasions for use**: one of the methods of increasing use is by increasing the usage rate. It is done by increasing the number of occasions available for use. Monaco biscuits were positioned as the 'perfect salted biscuits' initially. To increase the occasions for use it repositioned itself as "excellent plain, terrific with toppings".

- **Making the brand serious**: Repositioning can also be done to make the brand serious. Saffola was positioned as the edible oil "good for heart". To make the positioning more serious, the pitch "Heart is not safe without Saffola was adopted.

- **Falling sales**: In order to improve the level of sales, repositioning may be sought. Brook band’s red label is a typical example of how falling sales can precipitate repositioning. Red label is an age- old brand
with a franchise of its own. Initially its positioning was that red label was one of its kind (piyo to jano). When this was seen as outdated, a new positioning statement involving patriotism was developed. But this also did not bring the expected volumes. Finally it was repositioned as something that invites the old generation and new generation to consume red label ("Jiyo -mere -laal"-long live my son", there is a pun on the word 'laal' which means son as well as red )

Repositioning is done to make the brand more attractive and contemporary. Keo Karpin was positioned as a hair oil that assisted styling the hair' Hence it was endorsed by celebrities. But in the recent years, hair oil came to be seen as something which makes the hair sticky. Keo Karpin was repositioned as 'non-sticky hair oil' to make it acceptable in the changing circumstances.

Similarly Femina- a magazine that addressed women's issues was packaged conservatively in the past. It faced competition from several other women's magazines which were more attractive. As a result, Femina repositioned itself as a magazine for "today's women" and completely changed everything from packaging to content in the process.

- **Differentiate from other brands**: Repositioning helps a firm to differentiate its brand from that of competitors. For instance-Mint 0's position was 'adult candy' in 1990. But these could not helped the brand to stand out. In 1995, a position that directly aimed at competition (Nestle’s polo) was configured. Polo positioned itself as “the mint with the hole". Mint-0 positioned itself as "All mint- no hole". We can also consider the case of vamicol. The initial positioning of vamicol depends on the properties of a reliable adhesive. It showed a man getting stick to everything he touched as the objects had vamicol on them. It repositioned itself to make vamicol "modern" (samay-k- saath- chalo).

- **Changed market conditions**: Business environment is dynamic. Repositioning helps a firm to suit to the changing market conditions. A classic illustration of repositioning is Nestle’s Milkmaid. It started as a whitener for coffee and tea. Again like Horlicks, when the milk scarcity eased, it changed its positioning to ‘topping for cakes and puddings and use in dessert recipes. Consider the example of horlicks when initially it was both a substitute and on additive to milk. This positioning served it well till the scarcity of milk was overcome in many parts of the country. Then horlicks shifted its positioning to 'energy giver and health provider.

**CONCLUSION**

Brand positioning is an inseparable and most important element of STP model. It is the act of designing the company's offer an image so that the target market appreciates what the company stands for in relation to its competitors. It is a complex process. No positioning will last forever. As long as there is a change in competitors, consumers, technology etc., companies have to re-evaluate their brand's positioning.

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