

Brand Positioning and Brand Salience:

Comparison and Contrast Paper

Name of the Author

Name of the Institute

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Introduction

In the present world, the marketplace is filled with numerous brands in any product category and consumers are spoilt for choices. A visit to the supermarket confirms this notion. In such a competitive world, marketing professionals need to understand every aspect of consumers' buying behaviour which can influence their brand management exercise. The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast two important features of branding: brand positioning and brand salience which impact consumers' buying behaviour.

Discussion and Analysis

A comparison between the two concepts can be started by defining them. Keller defines Brand Positioning as a methodology to meaningfully differentiate one's brands from competing brands in the consumers' mind (2007). It helps the potential consumers in gauging product attributes, quality and the value it adds to the user. On the other hand, Brand Salience is defined as the awareness of the brands in the minds of the consumers especially during buying stage (Keller, 1993). It determines how easily the brand is evoked in the minds of consumers under various situations. This is slightly different from the concept of brand recall which is just the ability of consumers to recall a brand when asked to remember brands within a category (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004).

In the buyer behaviour model, a sound differentiation strategy impacts a buyer during the stages of information search and evaluation of alternatives. However, this does not guarantee an actual purchase. A well crafted brand salience strategy, on the other hand, influences a buyer during the actual purchase. In the buying decision making process, brand positioning can be termed as *qualifier* (which every brand must have to be considered) while brand salience can be termed as

winner (which results in actual purchase). In another words, in low-involvement purchase decisions, it is brand salience which impacts the final buying decision and makes the difference. This is especially true if the customer loyalty for the brands in a particular product category is not very high.

Intuitively the two concepts of brand positioning and brand salience appear to be closely related. It may appear that one can influence the other. However, the research has shown that the correlation or causal effect of one concept on the other is very low (Sujan & Bettman, 1989). They can be almost mutually exclusive in categories where loyalty is very low. Marketers need to adopt different strategies while designing their brand positioning statements or increasing brand salience. The way these two exercises are carried out outlines the difference in two concepts. Marketers adopt a multi-dimensional approach to segmentation where they divide markets according to their strengths. Using a perceptual map, they identify an empty space and chose a segment which they find most profitable. In brand positioning exercise, they come up with brand positioning statements to capture the attention of their target segment which enhances their value in the minds of consumers. However, it is the memory structures in these communication exercises which influence the final buying decision of consumers.

Brand positioning can be said to have a long-term effect while brand salience is likely to have a short-term impact on consumers. An example of McDonalds is used to highlight the difference between the two concepts. McDonalds prides itself on its operational efficiency and low cost of food. Customers are convinced that they will get consistent and high quality of food every time they will visit McDonalds. This has been achieved through its positioning exercise which has put the stress on efficiency and quality. However, when the consumers make a decision on visiting a fast-food restaurant, they are likely to be influenced by catchy statements or punch lines such as

Big Mac or *\$5 burger*. These are memory structures which get triggered during final purchase decision. Over a time, though, the brand positioning can help in achieving brand loyalty which will reduce the impact of brand salience of competitors (Pike, 2007).

Implications

Analysis of Customers

Brand positioning can be improved by a prior analysis of customers. Marketers need to know the needs and aspirations of potential customers like what features they want in a product and what feature is not particularly important. This can be achieved by customer research or surveys. The brand positioning exercise can then help the marketers in identifying segments which can be the most profitable according to the needs, aspirations and spending capacity of that segment. This will help the marketers in identifying an appropriate positioning exercise.

Analysis of Competitors

Brand positioning can also be improved by a prior analysis of competitors. Knowledge of differentiation strategies can help the brand manager to identify the gaps in perceptual maps which they can profitably exploit. Knowledge of product attributes and pricing of competitors can also help marketers to determine the value addition that their own products can do to the customers. Thus, a competitor analysis is essential before developing positioning statement.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to compare and contrast two branding concepts: brand positioning and brand salience. It was observed that brand positioning helps in long term development of the brand by increasing customer loyalty through a well defined differentiation

strategy. However, in a competitive market space especially where customer loyalty cannot be taken for granted, a well-defined brand salience exercise is also essential. It evokes the brands in the minds of consumers especially during purchase decision. This is achieved by catchy phrases and punch lines which trigger the memory structure of consumers during purchase decision. It was also observed that a prior analysis of customers and competitors can help the brand managers in coming up with a unique positioning statement which can help the brand in the long run.

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