



## International Journal of Advance Research, IJOAR .org

Volume 5, Issue 6, June 2017 Edition, Online: ISSN 2320-9186

### **EXPLANATION OF BRAND POSITIONING AND ITS APPLICATION CHALLENGES IN GLOBAL CROSS – CULTURAL CONTEXT LITERATURE BASED REVIEW**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper has focused on reviewing brand positioning and its application challenges in global cross cultural context. Branding and Brand concepts have been reviewed and linked with positioning in global markets is studied with the literature sources in this paper. Author followed an approach as literature review along with what has been practiced in the global brand positioning and relevant theories and models. It's also discussed the six E challenges in global positioning and local relevance where even multinational giants have failed in positing their brands. As concluding remarks it is suggested that Global marketers need to make a sustainable brand strategy which lists the character traits intended for brand positioning.

#### **KeyWords**

Branding, Cross - culture, Consumer Behaviour, Globle strategy, positioning,

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

It has been reviewed that global brands carry out different positioning strategies in entering international markets. Different countries have different cross-cultural markets where standardized global positioning strategy does not help in the long run.

Objective of the study is to review and discuss theoretical contribution and practical implications of brand positioning in cross-cultural markets.

For every brand positioning remains inevitable if it wants to succeed in the market. According to Kapferer (1997) brand consists of six main factors that are: physical personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image. According to Kotler (2005), —Positioning is the act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinct place in the mind of the target market.

In general, research in cross-cultural marketing has discovered that culture might motivate corporate decision makers to deliberately choose a different brand positioning in different countries. (Ivana First, 2008) However, even if identical positioning is applied across nations, the same brand might be perceived differently in different cultures (Foscht et al. 2008). The difference may be caused due to: the adaptation of advertising to better adjust to cultural traditions and norms; and different understandings of applied communication.

## **2.00 METHODOLOGY**

This paper consists of literature review and theoretical background in explaining concept related to the Global brand positioning and challenges in cross-cultural context and in order to identify different brand strategies executed by Global brands. Secondary sources are used to build up the paper.

## **3.00 THEORETICAL REVIEW ON BRAND POSITIONING IN GLOBAL CROSS CULTURAL CONTEXT**

### **3.01 Brand as a concept.**

When the question is asked what is a brand? We get different answers and can be explained as one or more attributes of a product such as name, logo or packaging.

Therefore general acceptance of a brand is can be explained as a combination of product a name, a trademarked, logo, packaging, a colour or any other design feature.

When we look at different definitions and studies the brand is what puts the focus on the brand itself, which encompasses much more than just the product. Such a definition views the brand as “a promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and that provides satisfaction” (Ambler and Styles, 1997).

If we look at the definition given by the American Marketing Association in their dictionary a brand is recognized as a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.

### **3.02 Positioning a Brand**

To create a clear and unique advantageous position in the mind of a consumer a brand or product has to be influential. An effort to influence consumer perception of a brand or product relative to the perception of competing brands or products is commonly known as positioning.

For every brand positioning remains inevitable if it wants to succeed in the market. According to Kapferer (1997) brand consists of six main factors that are: physical personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image. According to Kotler (2005), —Positioning

is the act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinct place in the mind of the target market. Brand positioning remains highly crucial to face the cut throat competition in the highly volatile and dynamic markets. A brand can only succeed if it is able to capture a unique and specific image and position in relation to its competitors. The main dimensions of branding are brand positioning and brand image. Both are the psychological attributes but play a crucial role when it comes to success or failure of a brand in market. According to Ries and Trout (1969), positioning is a marketing method for creating the perception of product, brand or identity. Positioning is where your product's image is placed in relation to image of your competitor's products. Brand positioning is the sum of all activities that position the brand in the mind of the customer relative to its competition. Positioning is not about creating something new or different, but to manipulate the mind set and existing connections (Ries & Trout, 1981). The product can be a leader in the market, when the product attributes are coupled with marketing efforts.

### **3.03 Branding as a Global strategy**

Having looked at the definitions of brand and brand positioning, focus is on brand strategies which can be employed for global brands. There are four broad brand strategy areas that can be identified. (Sandeep, 2012)

#### **3.03.01 Brand Domain**

As a global brand it's always necessary to be a specialist or expert in one or more of the domain aspects such as product, services, distribution. Experts always refer Cheetah as an example, Cheetah is considered as hunter with superior speed to chase, and the claws and teeth to kill these animals. The cheetah is also very familiar with the habits of its prey. It finds ways of approaching, singling out and capturing its prey. The success rate of Cheetah is over 70%. That's what is expected from a global brand to expertise in their domain aspects.

#### **3.03.02 Brand Reputation**

For Global brands to be competitive in the in different cross cultural markets they need to maintain authenticity, credibility and reliability. When a brand is established in a way the consumer is convinced reputation is automatically associated with that brand. This comes with the history and stories associated with the brand. Brand specialist has to identify which stories will convince consumers. Most of the time global brands have tried to achieve reputation by appointing celebrities as brand ambassadors.

#### **3.03.03 Brand Affinity**

Brand affinity is all about building relationships with consumers, they need to have a definite appeal towards the consumer. As explained in some literature it's considered as a pet dog.

Brand affinity specialist needs to have a distinct appeal to consumers, be able to communicate with them affectively, and provide an experience that reinforces the bonding process. A brand affinity specialist is like a pet dog. A dog is generally considered to be man's best friend, due to its affection, its obedience, its loyalty, the status and the protection it provides to its owners. Different kinds of dogs will command a different form of affection. (Challenges and Strategies of Global Branding In Indian Market Sandeep Saxena )

#### **3.03.04 Brand Recognition**

Brand recognition is determined by how best you raise profiles above competition. Global brands distinguish their brands in different markets by creating unbeatable level of awareness and build up loyalty. In leman terms this is called a well-known brand where a brand is recognised and known among consumers very much above competition.

### **3.04 Role of Culture on Brand Meaning in cross cultural context.**

This section of literature review is extracted from the research study carried out by Ivan on cultural influence on Brand meaning. In general, research in cross-cultural marketing has discovered that culture might motivate corporate decision makers to deliberately choose a different brand positioning in different countries. (Ivana First,2008) However, even if identical positioning is applied

across nations, the same brand might be perceived differently in different cultures (Foscht et al. 2008). The difference may be caused due to: the adaptation of advertising to better adjust to cultural traditions and norms; and different understandings of applied communication.

When we look at most of the global brands how they have entered or penetrated into different countries and different markets we feel that it's the same product but different marketing communication adopted. For consumers from different socioeconomic backgrounds, it is likely that the same stimuli do not necessarily build equivalent symbolic associations (Khalid and Helander 2004), but rather very different sets of metaphors, personal meanings, and cultural traditions of meanings (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994). This is because the messages, events and experiences that consumers find the most meaningful are those which are the most connected to their core values (Dilts and DeLozier 2000).

Due to differences in culturally based traditions, religions, and histories, individuals in distinct cultures tend to hold different sets of values and preferences (Aaker 2000). Hence, altering beliefs and values can immediately change the meaning of transmitted messages, events and experiences (Dilts and DeLozier 2000). The same experience or incident takes on different meanings to different individuals depending on their internal mind maps and embedded previous knowledge (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell 2008). In their study of the variations in consumer interpretation of visually complex advertising, Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver (2006) explain that the interpretation of visual stimuli in advertising is linked to literary and cultural traditions that differ from cultural group to cultural group. Monga and John (2007) conducted a study in which they hypothesise and then confirm through empirical research that consumers from Eastern cultures, who tend to be holistic thinkers, perceive a higher brand extension fit and evaluate brand extensions more favourably than their more analytical Western counterparts do. In another study, Costa and Pavia (1992) speak of numbers and their meanings, and confirm with an experiment that brands consisting of numbers have an extra meaning that is understood only by some societies (in their study American), due to the "excess meaning" of certain numbers in those cultures. Bjerke and Polegato (2006), in a cross country investigation of beauty and health visual representations, confirmed that different cultures do not interpret beauty and health symbols equally. The same authors in another research (Polegato and Bjerke 2006) studied the understanding and appeal of controversial Benetton advertisements across cultures and again revealed inconsistencies. To summarise, culture acts as a "stringent screener" (Jun and Lee 2007) that greatly influences the meaning of advertising messages. Based on the three exposed theoretical pillars, three propositions can be constructed. Firstly, meaning is a product of personal values and beliefs; secondly, personal values and beliefs are different in different cultures and consequently; thirdly, brand meaning is different in different cultures. These propositions directed the empirical part of the research in which it was the aim to discover to which extent the meanings of global brands are associated to symbolic or functional meanings in the culturally different countries.

### 3.05 The Hofstede model Applications to global branding

Marieke de Mooij and Geert Hofstede elaborates on Hofstede model which explains the differences of the concepts of self, personality and identity, which in turn explain variations in branding strategy and communications.

The study of culture for understanding global advertising results from the global-local dilemma: whether to standardise advertising for efficiency reasons or to adapt to local habits and consumer motives to be effective. Only recently have studies included performance criteria and several have demonstrated that an adaptation strategy is more effective (Dow 2005; Calantone et al. 2006; Okazaki et al. 2006; Wong & Merrilees 2007). As a result, understanding culture will be viewed as increasingly important. In the past decades, various models have emerged of which the Hofstede model has been applied most to global marketing and advertising. Geert Hofstede's dimensional model of national culture has been applied to various areas of global branding and advertising, and the underlying theories of consumer behaviour.

Referring to several issues from Taylor's (2005, 2007) research agenda, we not only cover advertising research, but also questions concerning global brand image, brand equity, advertising and consumer behaviour theories in cross-cultural contexts.

Cultural values as an integrated part of the consumer's self, not as an environmental factor. For developing effective advertising the consumer must be central. Cultural values define the self and personality of consumers. Mental processes are mostly internal processes, how people think, learn, perceive, categorise and process information. Social processes are about how we relate to other people, including motivation and emotions. Both processes affect interpersonal and mass communication, which in turn affect advertising appeals and advertising style. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural communication. It describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior, using a structure

derived from factor analysis.

All elements must be taken into account when researching how advertising works across cultures. Cultural models help to analyse culture's consequences for the self and personality, mental and social processes, and how these influence global branding positioning and advertising strategy.

#### 4.00 GLOBAL BRAND POSITIONING IN CROSS CULTURAL CONTEXT

Brand positioning strategies in cross-cultural markets is well explained in Alden in his writing They call these strategies global consumer culture positioning (GCCP), foreign consumer culture positioning (FCCP) and local consumer culture positioning (LCCP). GCCP is defined as a strategy that 'identifies the brand as a symbol of a given global culture' (Alden et al. 1999, p. 77).

In this study he emphasizes that consumers around the world use a particular product or brand, as well as those ads that reflect universal values such as peace, other example is that they talk about youth.

The difference between GCCP and FCCP is that FCCP is positioned a brand as symbolic of a specific foreign consumer culture, and LCCP, which associates the brand with local cultural meanings (Alden et al. 1999).

Melissa Archpru Akaka and Dana L. Alden has carried out a literature review in their study of Global brand positioning and perceptions in International advertising and global consumer culture. Global consumer culture is recognised as a collection of common signs and symbols (e.g. brands) that are understood by significant numbers of consumers in urban markets around the world. International advertising is a powerful driving force of this evolving phenomenon. However, scholars have suggested that more comprehensive theoretical frameworks are needed to better understand international advertising in the global environment. Global consumer culture positioning (GCCP) and perceived brand globalness (PBG) represent two important constructs for studying international advertising in the context of global consumer culture. This review of GCCP and PBG highlights their past application and future potential for advancing international advertising theory, research and practice. It also sheds light on the long-standing standardisation versus adaptation debate. (Melissa Archpru Akaka and Dana L. Alden, 2010)

Styles and story themes in television advertising from seven countries using indigenous coders to identify the extent of GCCP, FCCP and LCCP in their large multinational ad sample. Their analysis provides evidence that globally common consumption-orientated signs exist, and that firms make specific efforts to feature these symbols and appeal to consumers' associations with GCC. The results of the original GCCP study (Alden et al. 1999) suggest that a distinct global positioning strategy, which differs from foreign and local positioning, is employed by firms. For example, firms used a globally common language (English), as well as global aesthetic styles (e.g. global spokesperson - someone who is well recognised in multiple countries) and story themes (e.g. membership in the global culture - such as use of the latest worldwide technology) to reach certain segments in multiple countries. In addition, GCCP emphasised soft-selling techniques (indirect, image-orientated content), rather than hard-selling techniques (direct, strong message argument appeals). Certain product types (durable high. tech goods) were more likely to be positioned globally. GCCP contributes to the understanding of international advertising and GCC by highlighting firms' efforts to use widely understood symbols to communicate similar meanings across different countries and cultures. Importantly, this study not only suggests that GCC exists, but also points towards specific signs and symbols that firms use to connect their brands with consumers across the globe. However, while this framework identifies common symbols in the global market, it does not delve into the meanings associated with these signs. Moreover, the framework recognises commonly shared global symbols among certain consumer segments (e.g. middle- to upper-class urban or teens) that associate with a specific GCC, but it does not suggest that these symbols are understood or shared among the global population as a whole.

There are enough of examples in international business context where multinationals, giant global brands have even failed to position their brands in cross cultural business environments. Marketing experts have looked at this and have proposed few strategies. Marketers have to Understand brand meaning and market appropriate product in an appropriate manner and position the product, Providing superior delivery of desired benefit is also important in today's competitive markets, Another supporting strategy is to have complementary brand elements, Pricing has to be decided after measuring consumer perception value. Establish credibility and appropriate brand personality and imagery by constant innovations . Designing and practicing brand hierarchy and brand portfolio throughout. Having discussed all above it's also important to implement a brand equity management system to ensure that market-

ing actions properly reflect the brand equity concept

When looking at the challenges in brand positioning in international and cross cultural context India can be considered as a battle field as it is a highly competitive market. India has fast growing markets where international brands enter and exit very often

Although so many global brands visible in Indian markets most of them have failed to understand the customer needs. There are few brands that are successful in identifying customer needs, characteristics and have positioned their brands.

Most of these brands have misunderstood and have entered Indian markets with a standardized product keeping in line with standardized global strategy.

Kellogg's, McDonald's, LG, Reebok and Coca-Cola are few of those brands who initially introduced standard products and later they have modified their product or services as per the needs of Indian consumers and became successful. Global brands

In today's fast growing competitive business world companies need to change their focus from global strategies to create local brands suitable for local market conditions. Multinational companies have taken different strategies to will the hearts of local consumers. As per (Challenges and Strategies of Global Branding In Indian Market Sandeep Saxena )

Companies can achieve these objectives, either by using local manufacturing, producing, products to take care of local consumers tastes, to use local celebrities as brand ambassadors,

In case of positioning global brands in Indian markets how they have penetrated is clearly explained in an article titled "Made In India, Only For India" published in "The Strategist" stated that 'Now for most of the successful MNCs operating in India, exclusively for India has become an integral part of their overall product development strategy. Through this paper, it is attempted to highlight that MNCs must introduce the products or services matching to the needs of Indian markets in order to be successful. For instance, Honda Motorcycles recently launched bike Dream Yuga to tap the entry level segment to take on its competitor and erstwhile joint venture partner, Hero Moto Corps' that holds leading market share in this segment. Similarly, GE Healthcare launched an Electrocardiogram (ECG) machine especially to be used by rural markets where the clinics do not have much space to operate those complex ECG machines which also runs on battery to overcome the electricity problem caused by the frequent power-cuts in Indian rural markets. Even Korean automobile company launched Hyundai Eon in the Indian market after conducting a research which revealed to them a slight change in preferences of Indian consumers i.e. they now valued mileage, then styling, space, interiors and then finally pricing while purchasing a care, while it earlier used to be mileage.

price, styling and interior space, and it was based on this research only that Hyundai Eon was launched in the Indian markets. So this new mantra of being global but acting locally is being adopted by most of the MNCs to succeed in the Indian market. The MNCs' and their brands that are successful in Indian markets are switching to this strategy of presenting themselves as a local company so that people can identify themselves with these firms as their own, (Saxena,2012 )

Following are few examples in similar strategies implemented by multinational companies to either enter in to Srilankan market market or retain. KFC introducing Biriyani (Rice) , Mcdonalds Mc rice and HSBC tag line as worlds local bank.

When we study the behavior of multinationals that are carrying global brands, they concentrate more on local promotional campaigns, localized products, local pricing strategies, local distribution methods rather than trying to execute their global marketing communication mix. This has resulted negotiating and capturing a considerable market share and growing their product portfolio in cross cultural markets by offering more and more regional flavors and tastes which are pushing these brands forward.

## 5.00 CHALLENGES IN GLOBAL BRANDING (6ES)

### 5.01 Economic Assistance

The main challenge faced by the brand leaders is to focus on the short term returns. Brand is a long term asset, introduction of

price, discount or freebie promotion for initial acceptance of the product may lead to brand dilution and failure in the long run.

### **5.02 Effect of Approving**

There must be consistency in quality/performance, if not betterment so as to sustain the growing complexity of International market in terms of Consumer's changing tastes and multiplying competition. The company must continuously innovate and maintain good customer relations through their consumer touch points, so as to create brand loyalty among existing users.

### **5.03 Emotional Appeal**

Emotional appeal is essential to communicate the Brand message. Consider the number of media options available to consumers- 200 or more television channels, Internet, Newspaper, magazines.

### **5.04 Effective Culture**

Culture refers to how people in a society interact, what they believe. How they make decisions and what meanings they attach to certain representations. Cultures are not static, but develop through intergenerational and interpersonal learning and experience.

### **5.05 Economic, Legal and Political conditions**

Condition implies the Economic, Legal and Political conditions prevailing in a foreign market. Law related to Advertising content, product specifications, distribution options, etc vary from one country to another. The Economic condition in UK made LG play down its tagline 'Life is Good' in Advertisements due to recent credit crunch.

### **5.06 Efficient distribution channel**

Formation of distribution channel alliances in a foreign market. A distribution channel decision is vital and rigid, that it expensive to change, once decision is made.

## **6.00 GLOBAL POSITIONING AND LOCAL RELEVANCE**

A major challenge with understanding GCC is that while some signs (e.g. brands) may be positioned consistently across cultures, their relevance and/ or meaning across those cultures may vary (Tobin 1992). Kates and Goh (2003) provide an example of Kraft's Philadelphia Cream Cheese, which markets itself globally using a consistent brand position as an 'indulgent, heavenly experience'. They explain that, because heaven is viewed differently in various cultures (e.g. Muslim vs Christian cultures), angels were used to represent heaven in some cultures but not in others. This is a clear example of how different cultures may use culturally unique signifiers to represent various meanings (Tobin 1992), and how a globally positioned brand or commonly shared symbol can be made locally relevant. The discussion of both GCCP and PBG encourages consideration of the firm's global positioning as well as changing consumer perceptions of what represents global versus local. As discussed, taking into account both sets of perspectives establishes a more comprehensive approach to understanding GCC. This is important because in some cases what is positioned as global by the firm is not considered global in the eyes of consumers (Mazarella 2003). Furthermore, what is thought of as global in a given culture today may not be considered as such tomorrow (Tobin 1992). Additionally, although there is evidence to suggest that PBG leads to more positive brand perceptions (Steenkamp et al. 2003), negative perceptions have also been associated with globalness and globalisation (Zhou & Belk 2004). More recently, research has shown that individual differences influence consumer preferences for not only local and global offerings, but hybrid options as well (Alden et al. 2006).

The Positioning Failure of Tata Nano is a classic example where international brand failed on their own soil. Following section is extracted from the study "A Positioning Disaster" study done by Dr. Neelam Kalla Assistant Professor Department of Management Studies Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

The failure of Tata Nano present with a great lesson for all the marketers the car was positioned as a symbol of social liberty and equality. It was positioned as dream car of common man of India. It was targeting the laymen who want to have a car and it got suc-

cessful to some extent but only till a functional level. The Nano made sense in terms of a social mission, on a purely functional level. Good quality engineering focused on the task of making something reliable and safe as cheap as possible. Sell it to people with not much money. But it has been criticized all around as the one to the greatest positioning blunder as even the most cost effective producers do not label their products as cheap. Here the cheap has a great social connotation and the social tag because nobody aspires to buy the cheapest thing on the market, and driving around in a car is as big a statement as you get to make. Human psychology is that the motivation behind buying isn't to have a car, or a shampoo, or whatever the product is. If a product is positioned as poor's product then poor people will definitely avoid it because they don't want to be viewed as poor yet. The marketer just need to place their product right in the minds of customer and the brands like Giorgio Armani, Raymond's, Toyota and even other brands of Tata are examples of that. So positioning remains the main mantra behind the success of any product. **(Neelam Kalla,2015)**

## 7.00 KEY LESSONS LEARNED

7.01 It's greatly observed and discussed for the failures in brand positioning is mainly due to not addressing the six E challenges discussed earlier in detail (Economic Assistance, Effect of Approving, Emotional Appeal, Effective Culture ,Economic, Legal and Political conditions Efficient distribution channel)

7.02 In low context cultures individuals have narrower, functionally-oriented associations with the brands and in high context cultures individuals have broader and situational or symbolic associations, but on the national level those associations are not shared, and therefore again the most basic functional associations dominate the collective national brand association.

7.03 In light of the findings from other research work (Evana, 2008) practitioners are advised to become aware of the cultural specifics in the target countries, so that their communication is better targeted on functional, symbolic or experiential benefits, depending on the type of association most prevalent in a given culture.

7.04 Practitioners are advised to direct their creative energy in creating as many experiences for their consumers and potential consumers, as possible, so that in turn consumers can expand their brand associations' networks and so become more related to the brand and use it more often with great passion.

7.05 Marketing research practitioners should focus on investigating not only rational, but also emotional associations as those although more difficult to discover might be more influential in forming brand attitude.

7.06 Brand Managers are advised to analyze the results of their marketing research in a more analytic manner so that the responses be analyzed based on more criteria. This is because in this research it was shown that when only images (representing the first association) are analyzed they yield different results that when the whole answers are added to the analysis. (Evana, 2008)

## Conclusion

The marketing implementation may make or break a brand and is most vital as consumers actually experience the brand through advertising, promotions, purchase and after-sales service Multinational companies seek to be major players in global markets, one of the key challenges they face is building global brands. Building brands is important — as wages rise with economic development, competing on cost alone may not be sustainable. While brands may not necessarily translate into premium prices, they help companies gain higher market share in a crowded market place as they convey an assurance of quality and reliability. The brand strength depends on the perception of customers. Satisfied and loyal customers indicate positive perceptions of brand. In time when competition is getting powerful, it is imperative for the firm to seriously evaluate factors that are not only important in creating strong brand equity but also assist them in achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Branding is a major issue in product strategy. Branding is expensive and time-consuming, and can make or broke a product. The most valuable brands have a brand equity that is considered an important company asset. The best brand name suggest something about the product's benefits; suggest products qualities; are easy to pronounce, recognize, and remember; are distinctive; and do not carry negative meanings or connotations in other countries or languages. The marketing implementation may make or break a brand and is most vital as consumers actually experience the brand through advertising, promotions, purchase and after-sales service. Global marketers need to make a sustainable brand strategy which lists the character traits intended for the brand.

**For further research works** and strengthen dialog on brand positioning in cross cultural context the research should carryout in different countries different cultural segments as the literature provided evidence that people in different cultures do not process information in the same way. Since brand meaning is to a great extent the result of human interpretation it is thus predicted that brand meanings differ in different countries. The cross-cultural panel of interviews is one area should be considered. It would also be interesting to conduct the study in native languages of the respondents and analyse whether it causes a difference in results. more qualitative type of analysis will have to be performed in order to understand the full scope of the differences in brand meanings among cultures.

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