

BRAND POSITIONING IN SERVICE INDUSTRY: A SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF LITERATURES

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ABSTRACT: *This research examines how brand positioning strategy is influenced by various factors. The extent of research discusses several key characteristics of a brand positioning strategy. Previous studies have demonstrated the conceptual and empirical determinants of brand positioning strategy. The analysis of literature is regarded as essential to determine overall evaluations of brand positioning. The recommended framework from the study can serve as a leverage for the service provider to establish brand positioning initiatives in their organization.*

Keywords: Brand, Brand Positioning, Green Behavior, Systematic-Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the need to advance its global competitiveness have made it crucial for Malaysia to adjust its previous paradigm of economic development [1]. As a prospering hub in Asia for people in business and holidaymakers alike, the Malaysian hotel industry could maintain its competitive edge by partaking of responsibilities on the sustainable development of the industry [2]. The brand is known as the most valuable asset of a company [3]. Through a brand, people can differentiate the goods or service and also signify the firm in the marketplace [4]. Because there are so many products or service that provide a similar offering. Kotler [5] mentioned a brand is as an offering from a known source, and all companies struggled very hard to create a strong brand image. A brand's name is a vital component that consumers apply to attach brand associations in their memory, enabling them to distinguish and react to a brand they chose [6].

The increased significance of branding is also notable in the academic literature, where research has been presented from several disciplines which may be acceptable in other industries or contexts [7]. A brand is known as much more than just a component of attraction which it is inclusive of all perceptions, designs, and associations about a product or a service that is being formed in consumers' heads. It is a means to create emotional responses in consumers every time they consume a specific product or service which carries the name of the brand [8]. Without brands, firms would find it nearly complicated to distinguish themselves from competitors and connect with their customers [4]. People also tend to use a brand that they are familiar with.

The positioning strategy can be one of the competitive advantages used by the firm [9]. Previous studies found that positioning involved an effort to change the physical characteristics and the intangible perceptions of a marketable offering in relation to the competition [9]. Based on previous research, brand positioning is an important strategic decision, and it can be defined as "the act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market" [10]. Brand positioning communicates to how brands are perceived by consumers, relative to the competition [11]. Based on the previous study, to distinguish their brand from players, firms need to position their brand and communicate

clearly selected brand associations to their customers [10]. Marketers attempt to define the position of their brand using positioning statements that implicitly identify not only the key associations that are relevant to brand comparisons but also the key differentiating factors that set the brand apart from its competition [11]. The most crucial element of any brand positioning is, however, the decision criterion by which customers decide which brand they want to purchase [12]. The position of the brand varies on the way the consumers distinguish quality, advantages as well as disadvantages, price, value, and also the image of the brand [8].

The services division denotes about 50 percent of the GDP of Malaysia, and yet, there is a scarce study about the competing priorities of service industries in Malaysia even though the service sector and contributes significantly to the Malaysian economy [13]. The Malaysian government has engaged several steps to give a boost to the service sector together with enthusiastic schemes to promote the service sector targeting such as educations and training services, health tourism, financial services, creative services, information and communication technology, and telecommunications [13]. The hotel industry is known as one of the essential for tourism in many countries around the world including Malaysia. It is also crucial to enhance the economic constancy of the whole nation [14]. Hospitality and tourism industry worldwide has established into a truly global industry in which both consumers and producers are spread worldwide, and the hotel industry has been one of the subsection of contributors to strengthen the business [15].

Revenue from the tourism industry has become a crucial source of economic growth in Malaysia, with the hotel industry showing a significant profit [16]. In the year 2017, as being reported in the [17], Malaysia had received a total of 25,948,459 international tourists and has recorded a 0.1% growth in tourist receipts, thus providing RM82.2 billion to the country's revenue. A successful hotel business should focus on understanding the significant determinants of their guest's satisfaction [16]. It is critical for hotel operators to adhered the current and upcoming need to advance inside the enterprise and to react toward the requirements and wants of hotel guests [15]. The hotel brands perform as essential quality cues for consumers, and strong hotel brands improve a hotel's average daily rate, occupancy rate, and consumers' willingness to pay a premium price [18].

Hotel managers must recognize their brands, position products in the right markets, and design brand elements to embrace their market’s expectations [19]. According to Vukasovič [8], a strong brand has a high value. The local hotel industry is undergoing a challenging time because of competition from other hospitality service providers [20] as well with the number of hotels in Malaysia have progressively increased over the past ten years till 2017 [21]. The hotelier should think the best strategy to promote their hotel brand among the competitors through the best practice positioning. The precise brand positioning can influence customers to choose a particular brand offered by the service provider.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research followed a systematic approach to the literature search. The initial phase was completed through a massive search by using Google Scholar. This search had generated a total of 3950 journal articles. The keywords that had been used for this research involved “brand positioning” and “brand strategy.” By focusing on the initial search of journal articles from the year, 2008 to 2018 has yielded to a total of 3190 journal articles. To find a more acceptable journal article, the researcher also performed a manual search through references. To identify the most related journal articles in the field, the search involved keywords “brand positioning” in the Emerald insight (<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/>), ScienceDirect (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/>) and ProQuest (<http://www.proquest.com/>) databases.

The second phase was to choose the most relatable journal articles for the systematic analysis by assessing the title and the abstract of the articles. With the intention of analyzed the most recently published academic literature construct, scholarly publications are written in English and published from the year 2008– 2018 are focused in the search protocol. Journals articles were reviewed and analyzed in the areas of branding and marketing. After implementing the inclusion and the exclusion criteria, the final sample consisted of 22 journal articles as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Exclusion Criteria

No.	Criteria	Reasons for exclusion
1	Pre 2010	Consider the recent articles on the topic
2	Abstract	Too simple and subjective

Table 2: Inclusion Criteria

No.	Criteria	Reasons for exclusion
1	Academic publication	Peer-reviewed journal articles
2	Articles in English	Most relevant journals in the area of research are written in this language
3	Quantitative/qualitative/conceptual	To reproduce empirical evidence and literature reviews
4	Brand positioning	Area of research
5	Brand perception	Similar to brand positioning

The figure below showed the process involved in extracting literature related to brand positioning.

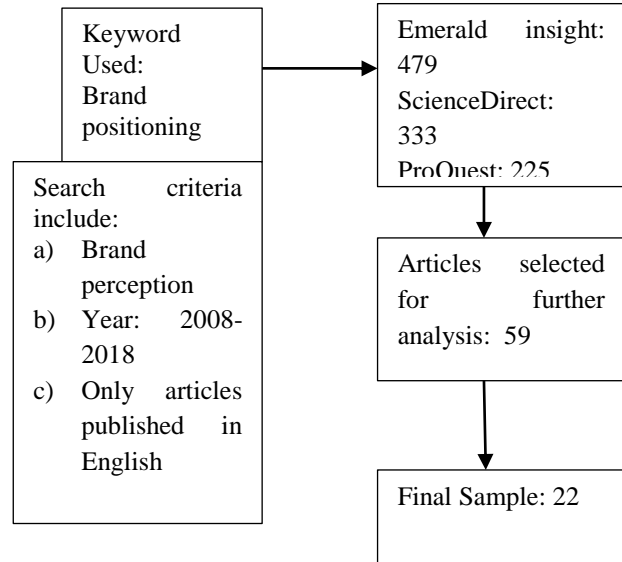


Figure 1: Process of searching literature related to brand positioning.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

There are few previous studies has discussed on brand positioning. Brand positioning assists firms to recognize customer preferences and changes in customer behavior, which demand modifications to strategic planning and service designs [22]. From the previous literature, it is argued that brand familiarity additionally includes as a covariate which is expected to control for consumer greatness of existing relationship with the brand and has been appealed to direct the perceptions of positioning strategy [23]. Singh, Kalafatis, and Ledden [24] mentioned that product fit, brand fit and pre-alliance positioning would lead to brand positioning and consumer evaluation of a brand. In contrast, Park, Rajagopal, Dillon, Chaivy, and Desarbo [25], emphasize goals, individual differences and contextual factors in brand positioning. Therefore, in this study, the researcher will determine the variables that would relate to brand positioning. Table 3 identifies several relevant key characteristics of brand positioning in the journal articles selected.

Table 3: Relevant key characteristics of brand positioning strategy

Author(s)	Key Characteristics
Chew and Osborne [26]	External environment factors
	Competitors Influence
	Governmental Influence
Butt, Kumar and Kumar [27]	Customer Orientation
	Competitors Orientation
	Marketing Capability
	Innovation Orientation
	Environmental Dynamism
	Organizational performance
	Product Life Cycle and Industrial Environment
Fuchs and Diamantopoulos	Advertising creativity

[23]	Brand Attitude
	Brand Familiarity
	Involvement
	Knowledge
Banytė, Stonkienė, and Piligrimienė [28]	Celebrity Endorsement
Blankson, Kalafatis, Coffie, and Tsogas [29]	Media Types
Singh, Kalafatis, and Ledden [24]	Product Fit
	Brand Fit
	Pre Alliance-positioning
Malik and Sudhakar [30]	Celebrity Endorsement
Kachersky and Carnevale [31]	Brand Attitude
Park, Rajagopal, Dillon, Chaiy, and Desarbo[25]	Goal
	Individual Differences
	Contextual Factors
Jun and Park [32]	Consumer Web Search Information

The table above displays numerous characteristics of brand positioning from the review of the literature. The researcher theorizes that the attributes of brand positioning fall into four related variables. Various component of brand positioning has been found to clarify to explain brand positionings such as perceived marketing capabilities, consumer characteristics, competitors orientation, and environmental factors. However, the researcher proposed that all these different variables may be categorized into four main concepts within the context of brand positioning strategy literature.

Perceived Marketing Capabilities

The types of media used in brand positioning strategies are significant, and there are three main media types studied in the brand positioning which are newspaper; television; and billboards, pamphlets, leaflets and brochures [29]. Based on previous research findings [29], marketers should use more massive integrated marketing communication strategy once they have determined the positioning strategy and not only focusing on the communication objectives. Blankson and Kalafatis [9], reveals that managers should proactively highlight the positioning strategies that they presume they are following in their media communications whereas confirming that their efforts are reliable with perceptions of their target markets.

Blankson and Kalafatis [9] proposed that marketer can use the plans in advertising tactics including television, print, radio, billboards, and internet, including pamphlets, leaflets, brochures, and point of sales also public relations within the context of impacting target audiences’ perceptions. Another factor that would influence brand positioning strategy is the influence of endorsement especially celebrities endorsement. This is because the celebrity’s big names are getting to be marked in their very own right, with their very personal qualities in the minds of their audience correspondingly to corporate and customer brands [33]. Recognizing the right celebrity endorser is one of the most vital decisions that can be taken for a brand because celebrities need to maintain the reliability and credibility in their relationships with brands and advertising campaigns[34]. Celebrities would also benefit from viewing endorsements as a [34]. There is some study which partially and directly linked brand positioning through

celebrity endorsement [30]. Celebrity endorsement is a standout among the most mainstream types of marketing used to promote a scope of consumer products and service [34].

Consumer Characteristics

Recognizing and studying customer needs is an essential component of positioning development process [35]. Zaichkowsky [36], defined consumer involvement as a person’s perceived importance of the object based on individual needs, values, and interests. Marketers should be careful consuming positioning strategy in their advertising for a high-involvement product category [23]. A positive attitude concerning a brand resulting from customer’s evaluation can result in continuous preference of the consumer toward those brands [37]. Marketers should try to make their consumers aware of their sustainability efforts, with the intention of consumers can be positively exposed to the information and have positive attitudes toward the brand [38]. The decision of positioning measurements would be impacted by customer characteristics [27].

Competitors Orientation

A firm can shield itself from the dynamic pressures of different firms if they are clearly defining their competitors and clearly stating its positioning [27]. Reid, Luxton, and Mavondo [39] mentioned that competitors orientation is the routine checking of competitors action, the accumulation, and utilization of market data on competitors to create marketing plans and to utilize the business sales to screen and report competitors movement. Hinson, Abdul Hamid, and Osabutye argue that service providers should collect intelligence on competitors and their activities. Therefore, a dependable positioning strategy can be adopted. Monitoring and understanding competitors activities would include improved positioning strategy.

Environment factors

Bierly and Daly [40] defined environment factors as "rate of natural change and eccentrics of that change." It is necessary for firms to regularly screen their condition for changes in customer inclinations, fast ecological changes, and expanded rivalry because through these changes it could make the firm's current positioning obsolete as well as it can offer new development opportunities [27].

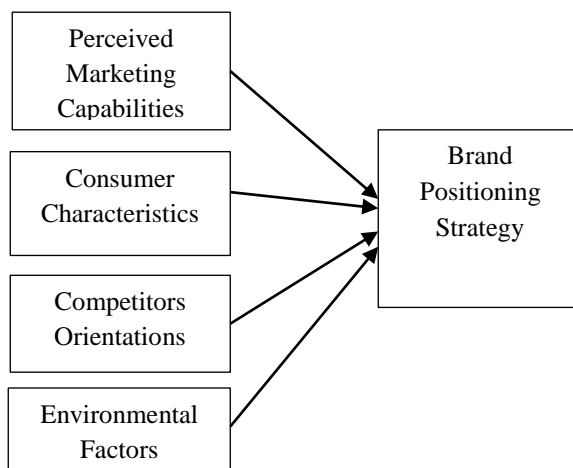


Figure 2: a proposed conceptual framework of brand positioning strategy

Environment factors were outside the direct control of its organization which includes economic situations, technological and also sociodemographic deviations [26]. Based on the review of the earlier literature, this research finally suggested four important antecedents accepting from the various literature of brand positioning.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study is pursued to provide an overview of brand positioning strategy in the service industry which is relatively scarce. At the same time, through this review, it also can help to identify a set of common characteristics that influence brand positioning. A vital trait of a brands position in a product grouping is how alike or distinguished the brand is perceived to be in dissimilarity with the other brands offered in the market and in evaluation with the product category [41]. Based on the literature review, further discussion can be used by marketers so that it can help them as one of the tools in marketing goods or service towards their consumer and maximize the effects of brand positioning and identify the potential opportunity since consumers are the vital resources to the company.

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