

Branding and Brand Positioning: A Conceptual Conflict Perspective in Product and Corporate Strategies

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Abstract: There has often been confusion among academics and practitioners about the use of some business concepts so much, again, with branding, which has generated a breed of ‘corruptive’ learners and users of such concepts. This paper criticizes the abuse of branding and provides simplified, logical sequential process to the appreciation of the development of branding as well as how it should be applied as a strategic tool in business. The study was based on relevant literature, observations and interviews. The major finding is that effort made at ‘positioning’ and / or ‘repositioning’ a brand, has most times been misconstrued as branding. For instance, the sponsorship, colorization and colonization of an event using a brand and / or corporate identity, is not in itself branding, but positioning or repositioning. The recommendation is that scholars and practitioners should carefully study the root of a concept from which other business tactics are derived before applying it to particular situations, the failure of which further wrongly educate fresh learners and give more credibility to and even stronger acceptance of the concept, by the general business world.

Keywords: *Branding, brand positioning, brand repositioning, event colorization, event colonization, corruptive learners, wrongly educate, oncoming learners, concept conflicts.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, one unique unarguable fact both in the business world and personal adventures that has appreciatively received recognition and smoothen the cognitive learning of academics and professionals is strategy. This thinking and practice except no human and societal endeavor. Thus, the dynamism of global competition among corporate enterprises and products is secreted in this single phenomenon. In the recognition of the value and strength of business strategy managers develop different products, brand them and position not only the product brands but even the corporate organization in order to remain ever relevant and more competitive and leading; revenue wise, market domineering, visibility, reputation, and industry control among others. Hence, the elasticity of the concept and construct of strategy knows no bound in every aspect of its application – such as brand strategy, corporate strategy, positioning strategy, etc.

This paper is critical about how most academics and practitioners conflict branding and brand positioning concepts applicatory, to both products and corporate organizations. This has not only wrongly educated oncoming learners about the use of concept, but provides misguidance and propagation of wrongly used terminology by (some business scholars and practitioners) to the business world. The objectives of this study, therefore, are to examine the use of branding against brand positioning and provide a simplified, logical sequential process to the true appreciation of the development of the concepts as well as how they should be applied as strategic business tools.

II. THE CONCEPT PROCESS

Branding and brand positioning are philosophically rooted in product design, which is the process of thinking about how to give birth to something people would require, desire, accept, and be committed to - a product. Designing a product is both cognitive and specific. Cognitive: at the level of deep mental imaginations, conception, vague visual thinking and, hypothetical planning. Specific: when all the mental troubles are beginning to transform, emerge and manifest, through psychomotor effects into tangible, physical product. The design of a product consists of all its ingredient compounds, shape, style, coloration, and packaging among other elements. Essentially, cognitive product thinking addresses the generic issues about the product. A generic product is one with universal or general description that can provide solution to a common human problem. Examples of generic products are motorcars, houses, meat, food, company, ministry, government, town, village, city, state, and every such thing with a common name. They remain so generic until they are selected, treated, differentiated and presented to attract a user group, who now pay for all the efforts,

to derive their own pleasure and satisfaction. This process of turning a generic product into a specific one gives birth to the idea of owning a brand and/or branding.

Branding the Product

A product is said to be branded when it has been extracted from generic group and processed into its specific form. The branding process consists of selecting one name, (either in one word or combination of two or more words - Pepsi, panadol Extra, Guinness Extra Smooth etc. - to describe its specificity to the market it is meant to serve) color, size, package, style, among others. This process is carried out bearing in mind some basic principles, including the ability to recall or remember, pronounce with ease, recognize or identify, and differentiate – with the sole aim of customizing (Edema, 2013) or getting the user/customer friendly, loyal and committed to the brand.

The Brand

A brand is an entity with uniquely differentiated identity, separating it from another notwithstanding any similarities. It is a term, symbol, design, or combination of these which identifies the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and differentiates them from those of other sellers (Cannon,1980). Although, a brand may be passed-off upon (Adesanya and Oloyede, 1972) when it is imitated, its uniqueness remains. Again, the identity of a brand lives with its symbol, graphics, content composition, name, and prestige, which commands the brand's personality, giving it the desired positioning.

Brand Positioning

Brand positioning plays a vital role in keeping a brand on track towards its destination (*Retrieved from <http://www.xpflow.com>*). A brand becomes positioned when it is recognized by buyers and users in the marketplace. The basic goal is to achieve brand image (Belch and Belch, 2001). This means that the brand is enjoying vantage status with customers/users remembering it, remaining loyal to it, addicted to it, and continuously patronizing it. Positioning is a systematic process or set of strategic steps adopted by marketers to conspicuously attract attention, catch and seize the eyes, and implant the brand in the minds of buyers and users. This process in itself is a concoction (Edema, 2012) or a mix of flavorings to woo customers. There are many brand positioning strategies, which include the following few:

- i. ***Positioning by price:*** Here, there are two price offer types – low and high. Using the low price option, the seller offers and emphasizes reduced price opportunities, and expects customers to take advantage of it. Such pricing strategies may include penetration pricing, buy-three-for-the-price-of-two, cash and trade discounts, and seasonal or festive price cut. Conversely, a seller may opt for high price offer in which case, he strategically selects the crème of the market, targeting only the consumer or customer groups with the economic power or financial ability to afford the product. Tactically, this approach seeks largely the high income consumer bracket and / or those who are quick to associate with, or demonstrate ambition for, status or ego. This pricing technique describes recuperation and skimming the market.
- ii. ***Positioning by quality:*** This serves as both inward and outward marketing strategy. The inward view of this strategy demonstrates the degree of technological inputs the producer claims to have infused into the brand to make it available for, and presumes such to be satisfactory to customers. This is a clear demonstration of product orientation, flagging the producer's erroneous attitude that the product can sell itself because it's of a high quality. On the other hand, the outward emphasis of quality describes the positive psychological, psychical, or emotional dispositions of consumers towards a brand and become proud of using the brand. In the final analysis, what makes a quality brand is measured by both the core and aesthetic functions of the product, and judgment in this direction is most measurable by consumers' pool.
- iii. ***Positioning by quantity:*** A brand positioned by quantity is one, which the producer lay emphasis either on its numeral or weight strength, compared to others of its type. For instance, if the standard packet of cube sugar is 120 pieces, and a particular producer attaches an extra pack of 30 pieces of sugar to the standard packet, this can be vehemently emphasized to attract buyers to the special offer.

- iv. **Positioning by sizes:** A brand can be said to be positioned by sizes when it offers various packages by kilograms and packs, which priced differently in order to either attract various consumer income groups or provide consumers with the psychology of scheduling their purchase and use of the product from-time to-time.
- v. **Positioning by strong corporate name:** A particular brand may be positioned in the market when the name of a renowned, very popular organization is emphasized as the carrier of that brand. This situation may be experienced when there is a takeover, merger, or joint venture (co-branding) among other reasons. For instance, Goldberg beer brand, which used to be housed by Sona Breweries, is positioned in Nigerian market with the name of Nigerian Breweries Plc. “From the stable of its former brewer, Sona breweries, Goldberg was crawling in terms of patronage until NB (Nigerian Breweries) took it over and gave it a facelift that is making it a sought-after brand by its lovers, particularly in the western region of Nigeria, with pockets of presence in Lagos and some states” (Ekwujuru, 2012).
- vi. **Positioning by color and graphics:** A brand is conspicuously positioned by color and graphics when it is given visual visibility using different captivating colors, alphabets or letters, pictograms, designs and styles to attract customers. Example of such brands includes Blue Band Margarine, Milo, Burnvita.
- vii. **Positioning by events:** A brand can often times be positioned by events when the brand is used as sponsorship platform, seizing the opportunity to colorize (and even colonize) an event programs, venue and sometimes, the personalities or ushers with the brand’s color and graphics. This exercise is very common and most people using it describe it erroneously as branding? This thinking or strategy calls for much re-examination by practitioners and academicians in the fields of advertising, marketing and public relations with arising questions: is it the sponsor brand that the concept “branding” in this instance, is referring to? Is it the event? Doesn’t the event have a brand or a primary description before the decision to colorize it with a manufacturer’s product/ corporate brand?
- ix. **Positioning by personality / celebrity:** A brand can be positioned by personality or celebrity when a famous or very popular and cherished person or group is associated with presentation and/or consumption of the brand.
- x. **Positioning by visibility:** A brand can be positioned visibly when it is often made available demonstrably with all its paraphernalia at shelves, exhibitions, fairs, personality programs, talk shows, dances, bazaars, etc.

Brand Modification

Quite, a brand is an entity that can be accepted or rejected by its publics, users or customers. A brand continues to enjoy acceptance when it’s still meeting its primary and secondary obligations to the consumer community or target group. The primary duty a brand owes its customers is its ability to perform functionally, that is, doing what the producer says it does – removing the agony of deprivation from any user who can afford it and making him/her better active and useful to himself and his environments. The secondary duty of a brand is to add aesthetic value for the user. If in any case, the brand fails to meet these obligations, the demand for it diminishes and the brand gradually dies off from the market. Before a brand experiences serious decline or death the brand owner has the choice of modifying it, after conducting survey to determine what is wrong with it? There could be major or minor wrongs. Major wrongs may include: taste deficiency, adulteration, faking, functional deficiency, and / or quality control fault. Minor wrongs may include: pricing, distribution, consumer segmentation, timing, and / or planning. This is where the product life cycles – PLC - (brand life cycles - BLC) comes into play:

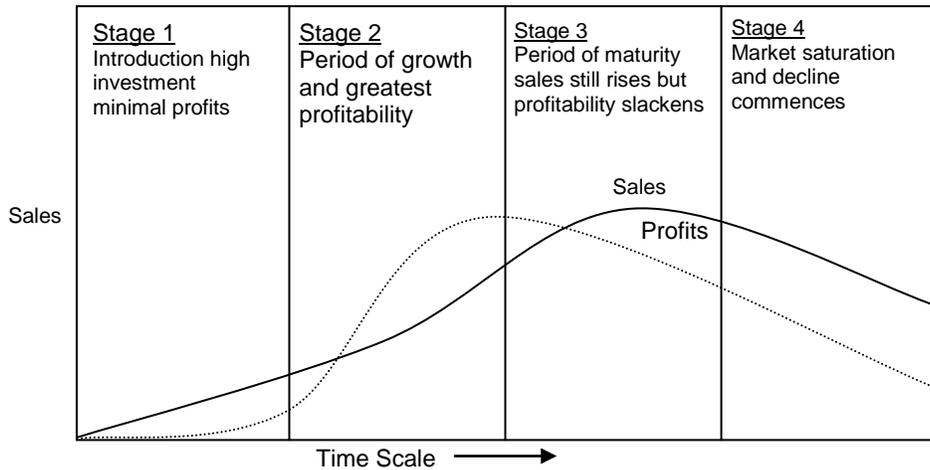


Figure 1: The Product Life
 Source: Elvy B. H (1982) Marketing Made Simple London:
 William Heinemann Limited

This model recognizes that every product experiences life tenure through the stages of introduction, growth, maturity, decline, and death. However, the theory lacks consensus among researchers as to the number of stages a product (brand) life should transcend (Edema, 2009). For example, some scholars propose four stages (shown in figure 1) while others propose six stages of the PLC, (figure 2).

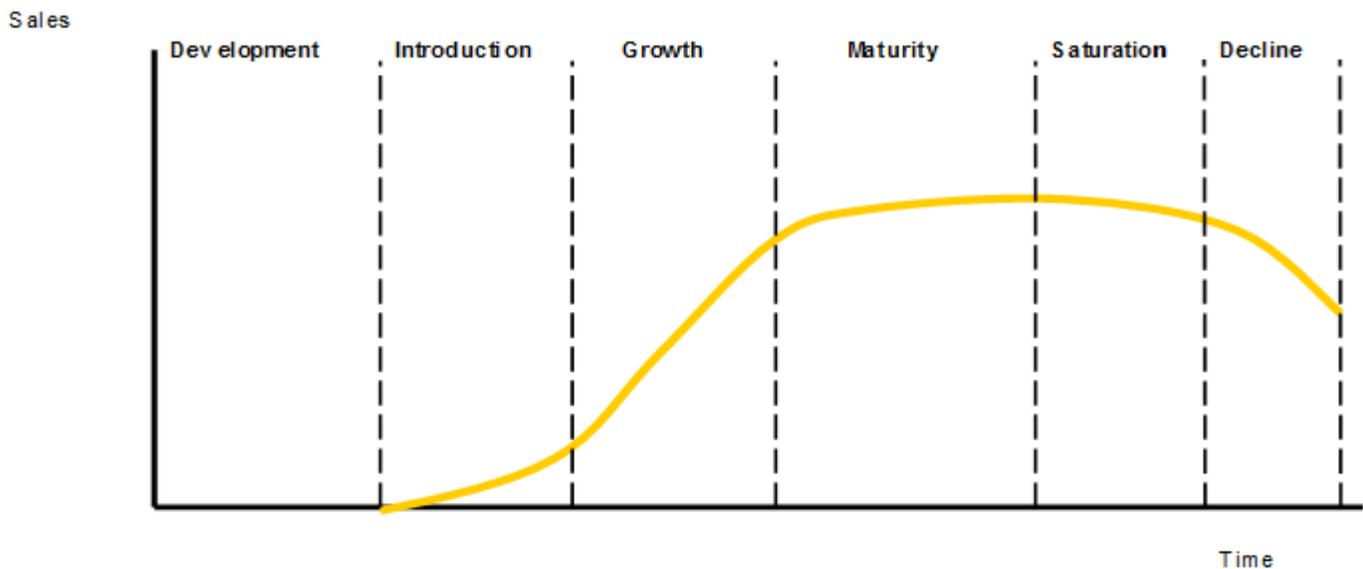


Figure 2. Standard Product Life Cycles
 Source: Jenkins, F (1982) Introduction to Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations
 London: The MacMillan Press Limited.

However, the idea of the product-life-cycles is based on the supposition, that a newly introduced product enjoys some unique feature until it is duplicated by other manufacturers (Lipson and Darling, 1971).

Consequently, when all major faults that made a brand performed poorly in the market have been identified and adequately addressed, the brand can then be said to have attained new status and is ready to be communicated to the stakeholder communities, emphasizing the new features and strong attributes, leading to its repositioning.

Brand Repositioning

Brand repositioning conceptually derives its meaning from brand positioning that is, seeking and taking a new chance, place or life. A brand can be repositioned only when it has suffered or is suffering from some experiences that have made it lost its conspicuousness and values in the marketplace, occasioned by its life cycle experiences due largely to competition. Hence, such brand can be repositioned using any or combination the strategies and tactics available at the positioning level in addition to any or combination of the following:

- i. **Repositioning by strong differentiation:** A brand can be differentiated when its features are clearly marked out to separate or distinguish it from others of its type. Such features, again, among others include shape, wrapper, color, size, logo (Toyota, BMW, Mercedes, Mitsubishi), other graphics, trade mark, license or registration number, watermark, signature (Arthur Guinness), alphabet (NOKIA, SAMSUNG, HP, IBM etc.), model, version, batch, and series.
- ii. **Repositioning by usage:** When a brand appears to have dropped in acceptance, patronage, market share, and demand due to lack in consumers knowledge of how to apply the brand, its repositioning is better emphasized by usage, taking consumers through a step-by-step learning on how to achieve the brand's efficacy and effectiveness. Brand efficacy describes what a brand is functionally claimed to be able to do, while brand effectiveness is a function of how well the brand really acts. For instance, every wristwatch is meant to read the time 24-hour circle (functionality - efficacy), but how well does a particular brand of wristwatch do that (accuracy - effectiveness)?
- iii. **Repositioning by authenticity:** A brand is authentically emphasized to the consumer and stakeholder community when it is embossed with new symbol, again, to differentiate it either from other known brands or fakes and adulterations. For instance, STAR beer, Gulder beer, DELL computer.
- iv. **Repositioning by emotion:** Emotional repositioning (even positioning) of a brand addresses the consumer's innermost senses of how the brand can help save his life or the life of others, which is the major reason the brand is important and should be patronized. The issue of emotion in brand management is dimensional and varies with consumers, environment and culture. Again this tactic could be rooted in a brand design, style, color, shape, size, graphic and package, communication and / or consumer segmentation among others. Emotional angle to brand positioning or repositioning is very important, because companies that are successful at creation of emotional connections benefit from stronger results, not only in cash flow and profit, but in market share (McEwen, 2004).

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Branding and brand positioning and / or brand repositioning are two different business concepts often used in marketing, advertising and public relations. While branding is rooted in product design and development, brand positioning or repositioning aligns with product and corporate promotion. The latter only hinges on the former to achieve effectiveness. To avoid concept conflicts, misguide and wrongly educate oncoming learners, business scholars and practitioners should carefully study the root of basic concepts like branding more, before applying them to tactical business situations.

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