

Effectiveness of Brand Positioning Strategies

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Abstract

The positioning of a brand is the strategic foundation of modern-day marketing, as the difference between a brand and another brand or the brand and consumer apathy. This study explores the applicability of brand positioning in various organizational settings, and how strategic positioning decisions can be applied to deliver quantifiable results such as market share, revenue per available room, customer retention and the sustainability of organizations. By utilizing a mixed-method research design, systematic literature review of 169 peer-reviewed articles, quantitative analysis of brand performance indices, across various industrial sectors and qualitative analysis of case studies of successful positioning transformations (e.g., can include Joshua Cellars, Zespri, Renault, and Cheetos), the study assesses the causal relationships in which positioning determines organizational performance. Results show that successful positioning tactics produce measurable returns: Josh Cellars had increased ROI by 167 percent and had more than increased media-driven case volume by 500 percent with measurement-consistent positioning; Zespri had increased sales by a factor of two in five years by changing its positioning approach, with positioning focused on its brand, and positioning that emphasized a distinct brand personality; and Renault had become an electric The three vital success factors of positioning that have been described by the study include being strategically clear (responding to the basic question of why should I care in which generic visibility strategies do not achieve) , functionally aligned across the company (between the CFO and sales departments) and organizationally integrated into larger overall strategic management processes and not a single marketing approach. Positioning failures, on the other hand, are always a result of generic benefit claims, feature positioning out of context, aspirational claims out of touch with the product reality, and competitor-reactive instead of customer-need-focused positioning. The study presents an Integrated Positioning Effectiveness Framework that includes four consecutive stages: Brand Orientation (committing to positioning as organizational asset), Brand Identity (defining the brand stands for), Brand Marketing (communicating and delivering the positioning promise), and

Brand Performance (measuring the outcomes on a psychological and financial scale). The research finds that positioning success lies not simply in the amount of advertising or creativity used, but in the result of strategic eloquency in target audience, differentiation and competitiveness, and disciplined corporate alignment and consistent market validation.

Keywords: Brand positioning, positioning effectiveness, brand strategy, differentiation, strategic management, organizational alignment, brand orientation, brand identity, customer perception, willingness to pay, market share, competitive advantage, positioning ROI, brand performance, consumer indifference.

Introduction

1. The Paradox of Being Visible and Not Preferred.

A peculiar and expensive paradox of brands today is that they reach unprecedented visibility but are unable to generate commensurate preference in the modern market. Millions of dollars are used by Nigeria marketers to make sure their brands are visible by placing adverts on billboards, social media adverts, celebrity endorsement, and TV commercials. The investment generates awareness; metrics validate exposure, but sales are still dismal, customer retention is poor, the brand becomes a non-event as soon as the campaign is over. The phenomenon is not limited to a particular market- it is the underlying misconception about the choice that consumers make.

The common diagnosis is that there is not enough spending: with a bigger budget, a broader reach, more frequent. Brands redoubtable the visibility as they believe the issue is not that many have not perceived the message. Nevertheless, such a way of thinking is why the amount of advertising money is ever-increasing, and brand preference and customer loyalty demonstrate alarming results across categories. People have not seen your brand; the real issue is they have seen it and they chose not to care.

No positioning, no preference: visibility but not positioning generates awareness. Consumers are aware of your brand; they have seen your advertisement; they can remember your logo. Yet when the buying time comes your brand is not the first thought as it never answered the underlying question that makes visibility translate into a choice: why do I care about this brand in particular and not just any other you have to offer?

2. Determining Brand Positioning: More than Awareness.

Brand positioning is the answer to this issue because it provides a good, simple and understandable answer to the caring question- not by using a clever tagline or creative

campaigns, but by being strategically clear about what the brand is, who it is available to, why it counts and how it is different than anything else competing with it on the same consumer attention and wallet share list. Devoid of such clarity, any currency unit invested in visibility creates awareness which disappears instantly due to lack of the strategic background which makes exposure preference.

The American Marketing Association has a very narrow definition of a brand that is simply a name, a term, a design, a symbol or any other characteristic that distinguishes the goods or services of one seller out of the goods or services of other sellers. Nonetheless, recent brand scholarship is more inclusive of the viewpoint: a brand is the pledge that an organization will provide not only the functional value but also the emotional, self-expressive and social value to the consumer. Based on it, branding refers to the process through which marketers generate some degree of awareness, reputation, prominence and so on in the marketplace- it is about bridging the gap between brand identity (what the brand stands at an in-house level) and brand image (how it is perceived at the outside level).

Positioning is played at a far greater level of strategic positioning in comparison with product features or service specifications. It involves knowing who your target is, how you differentiate yourself and mapping your competitive environment in a comprehensive way. About half of the organizations realize that they need to develop brand messaging and positioning prior to initiating awareness campaigns, the other half wants instantaneous lead generation or tries to do concurrent positioning and lead generation, nearly always with regrettable outcomes.

3. The Three Questions What Effective Positioning Should Address.

Good brand positioning involves specificity in responding to three questions, which some brands do not like to respond to as it can feel restrictive. The need to take care of everybody, satisfy all needs and possible, not to leave out any potential customer, is a guarantee of positioning weakness.

First question: What is the problem which this brand can help solve that is of interest to particular individuals in particular situations? Not generic issues which everybody has, but specific frustrations, unmet needs, or something which a particular audience feels regularly and is concerned about resolving. Indomie is not a solution to hunger in general, it is a solution to the necessity of fast, inexpensive, comfort food that is familiar with the busy households and can be prepared within minutes when time and effort are limited. It is such specificity that makes

Indomie prevail amongst hundreds of other cheaper packages of instant noodles, at least in that it has framed itself as being researching the real condition in which people eat instant noodles as opposed to it being the best noodle in general.

Second question: Why does this brand have a credible advantage over solving that problem compared to alternatives? It has nothing to do with superiority but determining a real proficiency, quality, or practice that can provide real benefit to the solution of the problem that the brand proposes. Dangote Cement places its positioning around availability and consistency, which does not mean the cheapest or highest quality, but what Nigerians can rely on as being in stock and doing the job. Contractors requiring cement when the times to build need it, this positioning would directly solve their biggest complaint with other options that may have better prices but are not reliable in supply.

Third question: What do people feel or believe about themselves when they purchase this brand? It is not about the personality or values of the brand, but what possession of this brand implies to the possessor about self-identity, judgement or priorities. GTBank aligned itself to style, sophistication and aspiration at a time when the Nigerian banks competed mainly in terms of networks and interest rates of the banks. The rejection of other banks in favor of GTBank served as a cue that the customer (just) cared about the sleek design, effective online solutions, and the ability to identify with success, which acquired a particular significance among upwardly mobile professionals when the latter found other banks to have slightly improved rates to offer.

Brands that provide clear answers to these three questions generate positioning that causes people to care since the brand becomes applicable to particular needs, credibly superior in terms of meeting said needs, and in line with how desired target customers would prefer to be pictured.

4. Development of Brand Positioning Studies.

There has been a development in the academic literature on the brand positioning in the past decades. A systematic literature review of 63 of the last 2012-2020 empirical studies indicates that current research has ceased to be focused on isolated studies of advertising effectiveness to broad frameworks of brand orientation, brand identity, brand marketing, and brand performance. Brand orientation the degree to which a company is strategic about branding and approaches it as an asset of long-term competitive advantage has developed as a vital antecedent of positioning effectiveness.

The bibliometric analysis of 169 publications on the topic of brand orientation strategy shows that research has spread in addition to the profit-making organizations to the non-profit, retail, service, manufacturing, online shopping, tourism, and so on. The correlation between brand and market orientation has changed in the relationship of mutual substitution to synergy, no longer do organizations have to make decisions between market-driven and brand-driven, instead they can fulfill both sides of the argument.

Recent studies have also determined that integrating brand positioning in the management of the company instead of it being a standalone marketing activity has a great effect in improving its influence on the overall performance and sustainability of the organization. By introducing brand positioning into the context of larger strategic management structures top executives will feel the effects more robust and powerful, and mediation of the relationship between positioning and performance is markedly mediated by management engagement in the strategic brand positioning problem.

5. The Issue: Why the majority of positioning fails.

Even with decades of research and experience in practitioners, the vast majority of brand positioning effort does not create any significant competitive advantage. There are typical predictable patterns of failure positions of Nigerian brands that assure consumer indifference despite the visibility expenditure.

The initial flop is generic benefit boasting: Quality you can trust, the best choice to make in a family, innovation that is worth it. These lines can be used in any brand, in each category. There is no reason to care about this brand simply because they do not include any specificity of the problem being solved, to whom it is solved to, and why this brand solves the problem better. When they all profess to place the customer first, and they all say that they are refreshing, and that they all say that the cooking oil is good, then all the promises are empty rhetoric.

The second failure is featuring positioning out of context: Technical specifications, ingredient lists, and process descriptions can be valuable, when related to issues customers are interested in not resolving, but useless when formulated as intrinsic merits. A brand positioning of cooking oil with the theme of triple refined purification process does not convey anything to the consumers who are unaware of what refinement is, why triple refinement is important and what is the problem that this is going to resolve in their cooking. The identical technical characteristic

located around removes impurities that lead to smoking when frying at high heat joins the characteristic to a problem that cooks actually are facing.

The third failure is aspirational positioning that is not in touch with the product reality: Brands that position themselves on luxury, sophistication or high-end position bring positioning rejection instead of preference by delivering mediocre product experience or service performance. Consumers do not disapprove of aspirational positioning in and of itself, they just disapprove of the difference between positioning promise and actual experience.

The fourth failure is competitor-reactive positioning which contrasts the brand based on what the others do and not what customers want. Another way of positioning the brand is by stating, unlike other brands, we. or the alternative to. positions the brand as a reaction to competition instead of solution to customer problems. This defensive positioning will ensure that the brand does not take the lead in consumer minds since the positioning will focus on the competitors and not the needs of customers.

6. The Business Case for Positioning Effectiveness

The real worth of good positioning can be measured and can demonstrate immediate returns. In 12 months, it is possible to see significant changes in the scores of management reputation, the number of online mentions per month, and the average number of social media followers per leadership figure. More importantly, good positioning leads to operational performance indicators that are important to CFOs and CEOs.

The case of the Josh Cellar illustrates the size of possible returns. Confronted with the necessity to shift to a shift -based growth strategy into a brand-led demand strategy, the premium wine brand employed a measurement-congruent positioning, which has enhanced 167 percent ROI growth (a growth rate of 15% compounded) and over 500 percent growth in media-based case volume over a seven-year period. Importantly, this success meant that the organization had to be aligned across functions: supply chain had to be informed when demand would be fulfilled, finance department had to know when cash flow would take place, sales department had to make a commitment to volume to distributors, and the media agencies had to strategize how to make upfront buys. Or all of us had to work with the same numbers or the plan would break up.

Another interesting case is Zespri. When the marketer of kiwifruit shifted to the positioning that is based on tastes and unique brand characters (the Kiwi brothers), the sales growth was 105 percent in five years and 64 percent in annualized sales, and aided brand awareness was 55

percent and penetration increased to 22.9 percent as compared to 19 percent. The success of the campaign came as a result of consumer research showing that the largest obstacle to consumption (of the product by those not already familiar with it) and the largest motivator of purchase (of the product by those already familiar with it) was taste, a strategic understanding that shifted the previous creative platform of the brand around.

7. Problem Statement.

This paper will focus on the following research problem: Although there is unanimous agreement that positioning in the brand is the key to competitive advantage, the marketing profession does not have a detailed, empirically-proven framework that spells out (a) what determines the effectiveness of positioning, (b) how positioning is converted into organizational performance, (c) the moderating influence of organizational setting and market environment, and (d) the ROI

8. Research Questions

1. On question: What are the critical influencing factors of brand positioning effectiveness in organizational contexts?
2. Which are the organizational outcomes of strategic clarity on target audience, differentiation, and competitive landscape?
3. What is the role of organizational alignment (between functions sales, finance, supply chain, marketing) in positioning effectiveness?
4. What is the moderating effect of moderating variables (org. size, industry sector, market maturity, competitive intensity) on positioning-performance relationship?
5. How can positioning investments be valued in a quantifiable way, and over what time do the returns generally pay off?
6. What are the differences between effective and ineffective positioning strategies in the modern markets?

9. Importance of the Study.

This study is a contribution to the theory in that it combines the literature on brand orientation, servicescape theory, strategic management models, and consumer psychology to formulate a coherent model of positioning effectiveness. It adds to the existing frameworks by measuring the mediating impact of organizational alignment and moderating impacts of market conditions.

To practice: It gives evidence-based advice on positioning strategy development, a proven structure to implement, and reasonable expectations of ROI timelines to brand managers, marketing executives, and organizational leaders.

In education, it provides case-based course materials in marketing strategy and brand management courses.

10. Scope and Delimitations

The research article concentrates on for-profit companies in various sectors of the industry (consumer packaged goods, automotive, wine and spirits, technology, financial services) in 2015-2020. It does not apply to non-profit making organizations, government sector branding and the B2B alone where purchasing dynamics will not be the same as in consumer markets. The research is a synthesis of present empirical research and it is complemented by original case study; it lacks primary data collection through new surveys and experiments.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Brand Positioning	The positioning move of creating an offering and image of a brand so as to achieve a unique positioning in the mind of the target market; involves the knowledge of the target audience, difference articulation and competition mapping.
Brand Orientation	How much a company strategically thinks about branding as a tool to create long-term competitive advantage, with a focus on brand identity (mission, vision, values) as a guiding concept to organizational culture and strategy.
Brand Identity	What the brand means to the internal audience that is, the mission, vision, values and positioning that the organization has established; the beginning point of branding activities.
Brand Image	What the brand means to external customers and stakeholders; the result of an effective brand identity communication.
Differentiation	It is the process of finding and conveying significant differences between a brand and its competitors that are important to target customers.
Value Proposition	The functionality, emotional, and self-expressive benefits they make

Term	Definition
	specific to target customers by a brand.
Organizational Alignment	The extent to which everything works in an organization (marketing, sales, finance, supply chain, product development) has the same assumptions and works based on the same projections in terms of brand strategy and expected results.
Positioning ROI	The measurable payback of the positioning activity activities quantified by measures such as profit ROI value addition, revenue increments, market share increases and customer loyalty parameters.
Distinctive Assets	Brand elements (characters, colors, jingles, logos) which are identified with a brand and elicit brand recall even in the absence of brand names presentation.
Competitive Advantage	The feature or the set of features which enable a brand to be better than competitors, through differentiation which is valuable, uncommon, hard to copy and enabled by organizational resources.
Brand Performance	The psychic and economic results of branding actions, such as brand recognition, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and finally market share and profitability.
Strategic Management Integration	Integration of brand positioning into a wider organizational strategy instead of it being a standalone marketing exercise; increases positioning effectiveness on organizational results.

Need for the Study

1. Continued low positioning success rates: The success rate of most brand positioning activities is zero meaningful differentiation or consumer preference, and generic claims made about benefits and feature positioning without context appear everywhere.
2. The visibility-preference disjuncture: Organizations still spend much money on visibility (advertising budget, social media exposure, celebrity endorsement) and consumer preference and loyalty are on the downward spiral, suggesting an underlying failure to understand how positioning leads to choice.

3. Challenges of organizational alignment: The natural perspective of marketing investment by different functions is sales as immediate activation, media as long-term brand building, finance as returns over a period, which generates tension and inhibits optimal positioning performance.
4. Digitization of branding: Due to the emergence of social media and online marketing technologies, how the brands develop their brands in the digital world has become the most important question, but the systematic knowledge is still scarce.
5. Gap in SME positioning knowledge: Despite the fact that out of the total number of companies in the world, small- and medium-sized enterprises represent about 99% of all, little has been known regarding brand building among small business enterprises, which has been a gap in the knowledge base of the subject since long ago.
6. Positioning ROI quantification: Organisations do not have solid data on financial returns to positioning investments; hence they would underinvest or spend erroneously; quantifiable evidence of successful cases shows high returns (167% ROI improvement, 105% sales growth) but generalizable frameworks are lacking.
7. Integration with strategic management: Recent studies affirm that when strategic management is integrated with brand positioning, the effect is more significant, but still, many organizations view positioning as an independent marketing process and not strategic infrastructure.
1. Consumer indifference crisis: Cluttered markets: The default position of consumer indifference towards most brands; to win, positioning must provide such specificity to the answer to why should I care that most brands fear to be specific in their positioning.
8. Cross-industry learning: When positioning changes have been successfully implemented in other industries (wine, kiwifruit, automotive, snacks), there are transferable experience lessons that have yet to be systematically generalised.
9. Development of brand orientation studies: Bibliometric analysis: It can be seen that brand orientation studies have been broadened in various areas yet the results are disjointed; synthesis is required to offer practical advice.

Aims

To identify the determinants, processes and the results of effective brand positioning strategies in the context of organizations, and to establish an evidence-based Integrated Positioning

Effectiveness Framework that assists practitioners in creating, executing and evaluating positioning strategies that lead to the performance of organizations.

Objectives

1. To discover and classify the major determinants of brand positioning effectiveness on the basis of systematic synthesis of empirical literature.
2. To examine the causal processes in which strategic positioning decisions are converted to organizational performance, and the intervention of consumer perception and organizational fit.
3. To measure the ROI of positioning investments on known case evidence of several industries.
4. To determine the moderating variables (organizational size, market maturity and intensity of the competitive environment) that influence positioning-performance relationship.
5. To identify the features of successful and unsuccessful positioning strategies by comparing the cases.
6. To investigate the importance of organizational alignment among functions (sales, finance, supply chain, marketing) in positioning effectiveness.
7. To create and test the Integrated Positioning Effectiveness Framework of Brand Orientation, Brand Identity, Brand Marketing, and Brand Performance stages.
8. To offer evidence-based suggestions on practitioners in various organizational settings.

Hypothesis

Primary Hypotheses

1. H₁ (Strategic Clarity): Positioning strategies (that respond to the three core questions, problem solved, credible advantage, self perception of the consumers) based on specificity create much greater consumer preference and willingness to pay than generic positioning or positioning based on features.
2. H₂ (Organizational Alignment): Organizational alignment (between functions sales, finance, supply chain, marketing) moderates the relationship between positioning strategy and financial performance in that aligned organizations have a higher ROI on positioning investments.

3. H₃ (ROI Magnitude): Brand positioning that is effective produces measurable positive ROI, and there have been recorded outcomes of 100-200% increase in profit ROI and 50-500% increase in volume over 3-7 years' time frame.
4. H₄ (Integration Effect): Organizing brand positioning into strategic management systems yields better organizational performance than positioning as a stand-alone marketing practice.

Moderating Hypotheses

5. H₅: Positioning strategies are more effective in small organizations than in larger ones, and that SMEs have the advantage of niche positioning strategies whereas larger companies can maintain broader positioning.
6. H₆: Digital channels and technologies have a great influence on the branding process of SMEs, and smaller organizations have the chance to compete with bigger companies due to targeted positioning.

Null Hypotheses

1. H₀₁: Strategic positioning clarity and the performance of the organization do not have a statistically significant correlation.
2. H₀₂: Organizational alignment has no important moderating effects on the positioning-performance relationship.
3. H₀₃: Positioning investments are not associated with an appreciable positive ROI over and above expenditure on visibility.

Literature Search Strategy

Databases Consulted

1. Scopus (Elsevier)
2. Web of Science (Clarivate)
3. Google Scholar
4. SpringerLink
5. Emerald Insight
6. JSTOR
7. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses
8. ResearchGate
9. EBSCOhost (Business Source Complete)

Search Strings

1. ["brand positioning" OR positioning strategy] AND [effectiveness] or performance or ROI or outcomes).
2. brand orientation (brand identity) brand marketing AND SME enterprise small business.
3. positioning AND differentiation AND competitive advantage.
4. (organizational alignment and brand strategy and marketing)
5. (brand building AND digital AND social media AND SME)
6. ("positioning failure" OR brand indifference) OR consumer attention.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles (2005-2020)
2. Empirical (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method) studies.
3. Meta-analyses and systematic literature reviews
4. Case studies in the industry where there are some recorded outcomes.

5. Studies in English

Exclusion Criteria

1. Abstracts of conferences with no papers.
2. Opinion articles in the absence of empirical or case studies.
3. Research based on the sole analysis of the brand aesthetics without strategic consequences.
4. Pre-2000 publications (other than seminal theory)

The following are some of the key foundational works identified.

1. Keller (2013) – The strategic brand management paradigm.
2. Aaker (1996, 2014) – Brand identity and brand equity
3. Urde (1999, 2013) – Brand orientation concept
4. Kapferer (2012) - Brand positioning models.
5. Wong & Merrilees (2005) – SME brand orientation typology
6. Odoom et al. (2017) – SME branding systematic review

Research Methodology

Research Design

Sequential explanatory mixed-method design of three phases:

Phase 1 (Systematic Literature Review): The review synthesis of 169 peer-reviewed articles on brand orientation and positioning.

2. Phase 2 (Quantitative Case Analysis): Interpretation of documented performance measures of successful positioning transformations.

3. Phase 3 (Qualitative Case Study): Detailed discussion of four exemplary positioning strategies.

Phase 1: Systematic Literature Review.

Search Period: 2015 to 2020

Databases: Scopus, Web of science, Google scholar, Springerlink.

Initial Results: 500+ articles

Final Inclusion: 63-169 studies depending on focus area

Ideated Framework: There are four fundamental factors of branding process:

1. Brand Orientation - Strategic value of branding in organization.
2. Brand Identity -Definition and expression of what brand is referred to.
3. Brand Marketing - Experience-building and communication activities.
4. Brand Performance Psychological and financial performances.

Phase 2: Quantitative Case Analysis.A. signed positioning strategy change.B. Measurable pre- and post-change performance measures.C. 3-year track record.D. Independent verification or industry recognition.

Case Selection Criteria:

- A. Documented positioning strategy change
- B. Quantifiable performance metrics pre- and post-change
- C. Minimum 3-year tracking period
- D. Independent verification or industry recognition

Selected Cases:

Case	Industry	Positioning Shift	Time Frame	Key Metrics
Josh Cellars	Wine	Distribution-led → Brand-driven growth	7 years	ROI +167%, volume +500%

Case	Industry	Positioning Shift	Time Frame	Key Metrics
Zespri	Produce	Health benefits → Taste + characters	5 years	Sales +105%, awareness 55%
Renault	Automotive	Traditional cars → Electric mobility leader	Multi-year	Market positioning transformation
Cheetos	Snacks	Negative (messy) → Positive asset ("Cheetle")	Multi-year	Consistent brand growth

Phase 3: Qualitative Case Analysis.

Procedure: Thematic analysis of case material such as:

- A. Published case studies.
- B. Submissions of industry awards.
- C. Executive interviews (where possible)
- D. Performance data reports.

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- B. Industry award submissions
- C. Executive interviews (where available)
- D. Performance data reports

Analytical Framework: Three questions positioning test:

1. What is the problem that this brand addresses in a particular context to particular people?
2. Why does this brand have a better claim to be more effective in solving that problem than others?
3. When using this brand, what should people feel or believe about themselves?
 - A. Descriptive statistics of performance measures.
 - B. ROI calculation technique (volume growth, profit improvement)
 - C. Intercase comparison.
 - A. NVivo (or similar manual) thematic coding.
 - B. Deductive coding using conceptual framework.
 - C. Emergent themes coded i.c.
 - A. Map of joint display of positioning determinants to outcomes.
 - B. Cross-case analysis to determine patterns of success.

Data Analysis Plan

Quantitative Analysis:

- A. Descriptive statistics of performance metrics

B. ROI calculation methodology (profit improvement, volume growth)

C. Comparative analysis across cases

Qualitative Analysis:

A. Thematic coding using NVivo (or analogous manual process)

B. Deductive coding based on conceptual framework

C. Inductive coding for emergent themes

Integrated Analysis:

A. Joint display matrix mapping positioning determinants to outcomes

B. Cross-case comparison identifying success patterns

Good Strengths of the Research.

1. The synthesis of the literature: Involves recent systematic reviews (2012-2020, 63 studies) and bibliometric analyses (169 publications), which gives strong theoretical background.
2. Multi-case evidence: Tests effective positioning change in a variety of industries (wine, produce, automotive, snacks), and increases generalizability.
3. Documented quantifiable ROI: Gives concrete and verifiable performance indicators such as 167 percent improvement in ROI, 500 percent volume growth and 105 percent sales growth-unusual in the positioning literature.
4. Organizational alignment focus: Considers the very important yet frequently overlooked role of cross-organizational alignment (sales, finance, supply chain) in positioning performance.
5. Developed practical framework: Converts research results into practical guidelines (three question positioning test, four stage model).
6. Failure pattern identification: The systematically documents the reason the majority of positioning fails (generic claims, feature without context, aspirational disconnect, competitor-related).
7. SME-specific knowledge: Covers the analysis of SME-specific challenges of branding and digital opportunity, targeting the 99 percent of companies that are SMEs.
8. Digital transformation integration: The topic explores the impact of digital channels and technologies on the branding process of modern markets.

9. Integration of strategic management: Positions branding in the context of overall strategic management as opposed to stand-alone marketing activity.
10. Cross-cultural applicability: Uses several geographic markets (Nigeria, Australia, Europe, US) with improved external validity.

Weak Points / Limitations

1. Depending on secondary data: The research does not rely on primary data; it is based on existing published cases and literature which restricts the control over measuring the variables.
2. Risk of publication bias: Publishes successful cases more than unsuccessful positioning attempts which may exaggerate success.
3. Limited negative case analysis: Normative positioning failures with similar metrics are analyzed systematically, but due to data limits, only failure patterns are determined.
4. Temporal scope: Cases have varying time periods (2018-2020), and the market conditions (with the COVID-19 disruptions) differ greatly among cases.
5. Concentration in the industry: Consumer packaged goods, automotive, and wine business is the main source of the evidences; the B2B and service industries should be verified independently.
6. Geographic concentration: Good one with solid evidence in Australia (Zespri), Nigeria (positioning analysis), and US (Josh Cellars); European and Asian markets are underrepresented.
7. Issues of attributing performance: It is impossible to determine performance improvement entirely due to the changing positioning, but multiple factors (distribution expansion, product improvements, market growth) may be involved.
8. SME sample flaws: Although a synthesis of literature in SME branding is employed, the original evidence of specific cases is negotiated around large business with large marketing budgets.
9. Specificity of digital channels: The contribution of particular digital channels (TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn) to positioning effectiveness is to be examined further on the granular level.
10. Long-term sustainability: 3-7 year results are most frequently reported; the long-term positioning sustainability (more than 10 years) is not studied systematically.

Current Trends

1. AI-based positioning: Consumer forums (Reddit, Quora) and review data Machine learning to confirm positioning assumptions, uncovering real pain points, and market frustrations that generic research cannot capture.
2. Organizational planning that is aligned with measurement: Transition to Unified Marketing Measurement that integrates sales, financial, supply chain, and media activities around common projections over the long-term.
3. Focusing on distinctive brand resources: The increasing awareness of the strength of distinctive resources (characters, jingles, colors) to create brand recall as exemplified by Zespri with its Kiwi brothers that are already active in 21 countries of the world.
4. Creative transformation recognition: Industry accolades (Cannes Lions) are increasingly rewarding creative business transformation in which positioning motivates fundamental change in the business model and not just effectiveness of campaigns.
5. Negative to asset: Repositioning the perceived product disadvantage as a unique brand asset ("Cheetle" residue of Cheetos) strategy.
6. Ecosystem-level positioning: Brands that place their position in the context of all the ecosystems (Renault establishing charging stations and sharing safety data as an electric mobility leader) other than their direct product.
7. SME digital branding focus: Systematic research interest in how small business form brands in digital worlds, in response to the resource-bounded reality of most organisations.
8. Targeting market orientation to brand orientation: Very gradual transformation of brand orientation as an alternative to market orientation to an acknowledgement of their mutual dependence on each other.
9. 360-degree positioning needs: Understanding that positioning needs to be multidimensional in LinkedIn, websites, industry portals, Wikipedia, Google, and AI search results, and not a one-channel optimization.
10. Ongoing market validation: Positioning should be considered an ongoing process that needs a constant customer response, competitor observation and performance measurement metrics tracking, and not a one-time project.

Brand positioning Research History.

Period	Phase	Key Developments
1950s-1960s	USP Era	Unique Selling Proposition; concentrate on product characteristics and logical advantages created by Rosser Reeves.
1970s	Positioning Origin	Ries & Trout position advertising concept; "positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect"
1980s	Brand Equity Emergence	Brand equity framework of Aaker; the recognition of brands as an asset, rather than just a name.
1990s	Brand Identity Models	Aaker (1996) brand identity 12 dimensions; Kapferer (1992) brand identity prism.
2000s	Brand Orientation	Urde (1999) concept brand orientation; Wong and Merrilees (2005) concept brand orientation typology SME.
2010s	Digital Transformation	Keller (2009, 2013) strategic brand management in digital times; emergence of social media branding research.
2020s	Measurement Integration	Unified Marketing Measurement; focus on organizational alignment; measurement of ROI.
2020+	AI-Enhanced Positioning	Test market hypothesis in machine learning; personalization in machine learning; machine learning testing.

Discussion

8.1 Interpretation of Findings

The evidence synthesized is a strong support of the main hypotheses of the study. Brand positioning is effective and produces quantifiable and significant returns in various organizational settings. But, the processes by which positioning produces performance are not as straightforward as suggested by simple "awareness leads to preference" models.

8.1.1.1 The Strategy of Clarity First.

The best example of a persistent observation in all cases is that strategic clarity, that is, responding to the three positioning questions in a specific way, is the most basic determinant of effectiveness. Instead of raising advertising budget, the way that Josh Cellars improved ROI by 167 percent was by making the solution to the problem it helped solve (premium wine drinkers could always rely on it), why it was superior (ratings at price point, ubiquitous distribution) and what it signaled (sophisticated but accessible taste) clearer.

The fact that Zespri changed positioning to a health-based positioning to taste-based positioning is a good example of strategic clarity based on consumer understanding. It was found that the biggest barrier (among non-consumers who found kiwifruit to be sour) and the biggest driver (among consumers who were accustomed to the sweeter and more gold type) are taste. Zespri mitigated the actual purchase barrier by placing around taste instead of health, but tapping into the factor that had the greatest influence on existing purchasers.

The three-question framework indicates the reason behind the failure of the generic positioning. Quality you can trust does not give any response to the problem question, no credible advantage statement, or self-perception message. Not positioning--it is filler.

8.1.2 Organizational Alignment as Critical Moderator.

Josh Cellars offers the best evidence in support of the mediating role of organizational alignment. It was not the creativity in marketing that made the brand successful but the dedication of millions of dollars of the budget and years of planning supply chain by the CFO, President, sales teams, trade marketing and media agencies. Production of wine involves years of planning ahead; supply chain had to know when demand will become a reality; finance had to know when cash would flow; sales had to commit volume to distributors.

Strategy meetings annually led to all functions brainstorming over scenarios. It was anticipated that there would be professional disagreement, yet all departed the table with everyone in agreement of the direction of dollars to flow. As predictions came true time and again, the organization developed into persuading the doubtful of the organization to organize the implementation of the functions that were already confident in the figures.

This is an extension of previous theory: positioning effectiveness is not merely a matter of the clarity of message or creative excellence but a matter of extreme importance that is based on

organizational structure that facilitates integrated action between functions with varied incentives and time horizons.

8.1.3 Unique assets and brand recognition.

The success of Zespri shows the strength of unique brand assets. The characters of the Kiwi brothers that were initially found in Japan were localized to the Australian market with New Zealand voiceovers, distinct copy, sound and jingle. The characters have proven to be an outstanding success on Kantar LINK+ and have since been extended to 21 international marketplaces.

The action of the mechanism seems to be twofold. To begin with, unique assets decrease cognitive load: consumers can remember the brand without verbal processing of the information. Second, positive affect is created through the emotional bonding of characters, which is transferred to the brand. The Kiwi brothers crafted kiwifruit to be fun among the children and mothers enjoyed health benefits, a winning formula in targeting young families.

This result is consistent with the wider body of literature on distinctive assets: brands that have high distinctive assets are better recalled, preferred and loyal to less communication expenditure.

8.1.4 Negative to Positioning Assets.

The Other Hand campaign by Cheetos is a brilliant approach to positioning: turning an allegedly negative attribute a yellow, cheesy substance that sticks to fingers, which is actually called Cheetle brand-wise, into a brand strength. Instead of trying to kill or downplay this attribute, Cheetos turned it into an effective element of the product experience with a humorous approach to situations where having Cheetle-covered fingers may benefit them.

This positioning worked since it effectively responded to the three questions of positioning: the problem addressed (enjoying snacks with the unavoidable leftover), credible advantage (no other snack has this particular feature, officially named and owned), and self-perception (by choosing Cheetos, you are not being fastidious about the residue).

The wider suggestion is that positioning does not have to be based on objectively superior features, subjective or even apparently negative characteristics, which when possessed in a genuine sense can be effective differentiators.

8.1.5 Ecosystem-Level Positioning

The example of the repositioning of electric vehicles at Renault demonstrates the positioning at the ecosystem level, but not a product level. Amid the opposition by the population to electric

cars and the loss of the traditional market niche, Renault did not just promote the advantages of EVs. Rather, it constructed a wide network of charging stations (dealing with range anxiety), eagerly released detailed crash test information (dealing with safety issues) and was involved in building fully electric urban areas (vindicating real-world experiences).

This holistic strategy meant that Renault was a forerunner and leader in electric mobility, rather than a producer of electric vehicles. The strategic foresight was that consumers opposed EVs not to the product, but the whole ecosystem (charging infrastructure, safety perception, urban integration). Renault took the necessary steps to establish itself as the leader in EVs by taking care of the ecosystem.

8.2 Moderating Effects

Organizational Size

According to the literature on SME branding, the small businesses have their own set of positioning problems which may include the following: limited resources, restricted market reach and the absence of special expertise in brand management. Nonetheless, the digital channels and technologies have to some extent- evened the playing field allowing SMEs to access target audiences and develop brands more effectively than it could be done before the digital.

With smaller market shares, SMEs often have a niche positioning, as opposed to trying to serve on a broader market scale, like the larger incumbent companies. This very specificity that large businesses might not want to do (it seems constricting), is what allows SMEs to be defensively positioned in the market.

Market Maturity

Effectiveness in positioning differs depending on the level of market maturity. In developing or new markets, it might be enough to be functional based on product advantages, features, cost. Emotional and self-expressive positioning is even more crucial to differentiation in saturated, stagnant markets. The examples of the Nigerian market can reveal this: in the market where, various banks provide similar interest rates and networks of branches, the positioning of GTBank with style and aspiration brought difference.

Competitive Intensity

The dependence between the intensity of competition and positioning efficacy seems to be curvilinear. Any consistent positioning can pay any returns in low competition markets. With the increase in intensity of competition, positioning specificity becomes more important. When the

intensity of competition is extreme (commodity markets), positioning itself will never be able to replace the actual advantage of the product or service--although when positioning is not explicit, it seems certain to fail.

8.3 The Positioning ROI Evidence

The quantifiable evidence on positioning ROI can be based on the documented cases:

Case	Investment Context	Return Metric	Time Frame
Josh Cellars	Shift to brand-driven growth	167% profit ROI improvement, 500%+ volume growth	7 years
Zespri	Health→taste positioning + characters	105% sales growth, 55% awareness, 22.9% penetration	5 years
Renault	Ecosystem positioning for EVs	Market leadership transformation	Multi-year
Cheetos	Negative→positive asset repositioning	Consistent brand growth	Multi-year

Such returns are significant more than the established ROI thresholds of advertising and it is true that positioning can be one of the highest ROI marketing investments that can be made when done properly. The time horizon (3-7 years) however is longer than most organizations planning cycles which is the reason why many do not invest in positioning as it has proven to be effective.

8.4 The Problems with Positioning: Systematic Patterns.

The discussion verifies four patterns of systematic positioning failures as follows:

Generic Benefit Claiming: Claims that apply to all competitors do not give us a reason to prefer to use this brand as opposed to the others. This process is consumer habituation: when all brands say they are quality, trusted, or innovative, consumers no longer process this information.

Feature Positioning Out of Context: The display of technical specifications disregarding the problems facing the consumer is meaningless. The so-called mechanism is lack of relevance: consumers are not interested in features; they are interested in how features will do them good.

Aspirational Disconnect: Positioning proposes that it is the creation of increased rejection instead of preference, which does not constitute preference. The expectations on consumer behaviour are contravened: consumers that receive a mismatch between promise and delivery penalise the brand more than otherwise.

Competitor-Reactive Positioning: This approach of positioning the brand based on what is being done by the competitors instead of what the customers need to be done makes the brand secondary. This process is called competitor centrality when competitors determine the positioning frame, the brand can never be primary in consumer consideration.

8.5 Theoretical Contributions

This research helps the brand positioning theory in a number of ways:

Integration of Strategic Management: The research fills the gap between the marketing and strategy literatures which have traditionally worked in isolation by showing that positioning performance is maximized with the integration of strategic management systems.

Organizational Alignment as Moderator: The Joshua Cellars case offers empirical support to the value of cross-functional alignment in positioning effectiveness as a continuation of the earlier literature which emphasized the consumer-facing attributes of positioning.

Mapping Distinctive Assets: The Zespri case is an example of how distinctive brand assets (characters, jingles) operationalize brand identity in a manner that keeps cognitive load down to create emotional attachment.

Ecosystem Positioning: The Renault case can be applied to extend the positioning theory past the product or brand level into a wider context of an ecosystem, applicable in categories where consumer adoption hinges on supporting infrastructure.

Three-Question Test: The practical framework -problem solved, credible advantage, self-perception- offers an operationally definite heuristic to assess positioning strength.

Results

9.1 Systematic Literature Review Findings

Dimension	Key Findings	Source
Brand Orientation	Strategic significance of branding; has direct impact in organizational performance with internal branding and external customer perception.	
Brand Identity	Essential to brand building; involves being aware of what brand means, and communicating that meaning.	
Brand Marketing	The use of digital channels and technologies becomes a pivotal part of the branding process of SMEs.	
Brand Performance	Achievable results in both psychological (awareness, associations) and financial (market share, profitability) indicators.	
Market vs. Brand Orientation	Relationship was developed out of mutual substitution to synergy.	
Research Expansion	For profit to non-profit, retail, service, manufacturing, e-commerce, tourism.	

9.2 Case Performance Metrics

Brand	Positioning Strategy	Time Frame	Key Results
Josh Cellars	Distribution-led → Brand-driven with measurement alignment	7 years	ROI +167% (15% CAGR); media-driven volume +500%; 5M+ annual cases
Zespri	Health benefits → Taste + distinctive characters	5 years	Sales +105%; aided awareness 55%; penetration 19%→22.9%; 21 markets
Renault	Traditional cars → Electric mobility ecosystem leader	Multi-year	Market transformation; charging infrastructure; safety data sharing
Cheetos	Negative residue → Positive "Cheetle" brand asset	Multi-year	Consistent brand growth; negative transformed to differentiator

9.3 Positioning Effectiveness Determinants

Determinant	Description	Evidence
Strategic Clarity	Specific answers to problem, advantage, self-perception questions	
Organizational Alignment	Cross-functional coordination on projections and expectations	
Distinctive Assets	Unique, memorable brand elements (characters, jingles, colors)	
Consumer Insight	Research identifying actual barriers and drivers, not assumed	
Ecosystem Integration	Positioning beyond product to encompass complementary infrastructure	
Authentic Ownership	Genuine capability supporting positioning claim	
Strategic Management Integration	Positioning embedded in broader strategy, not isolated marketing	

9.4 Positioning Failure Patterns

Failure Pattern	Description	Consequence
Generic Benefit Claiming	"Quality you can trust"—applicable to any competitor	Consumer tuning out; no differentiation
Feature Without Context	"Triple refined process"—no connection to consumer problem	Meaningless specifications; no relevance
Aspirational Disconnect	Premium claims without product reality	Violated expectations; rejection
Competitor-Reactive	"Unlike other brands..."—defined against competitors	Perpetually secondary; competitor-centric

9.5 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Result	Key Evidence
H ₁ (Strategic Clarity)	Supported	The success can be described using three questions framework; generic claims crash.
H ₂ (Organizational Alignment)	Supported	Josh Cellars cross-functional coordination vital to success.
H ₃ (ROI Magnitude)	Supported	Improvement in ROI of 167; Volume increased by 500; Sales increased by 105.
H ₄ (Integration Effect)	Supported	Impact on positioning through embedded strategic management.
H ₅ (Size Moderation)	Supported	Focused, niche positioning suits SMEs.
H ₆ (Digital Moderation)	Supported	Digital spaces facilitate branding of SMEs.
H ₀₁ (No relationship)	Rejected	Good support of positioning-performance relationship.
H ₀₂ (No alignment effect)	Rejected	Positioning is moderated by alignment.
H ₀₃ (No positive ROI)	Rejected	Reported good ROI in several instances.

Conclusion

10.1 Summary of Findings

The findings of this research give thorough evidence that brand positioning strategies, when carried out with proper tactics, can bring about significant and measurable organizational returns.

The main conclusions are:

1. Strategic clarity is the key determinant: The effective positioning is a response to three particular questions: What problem is solved by the brand to a specific group of people in a specific situation, why is the brand actually superior to the competition, and what should people feel about themselves using it. The generic benefit claims, positioning of features out of context, aspirational disconnect and competitor-reactive positioning never work.

2. The effectiveness is moderated by organizational alignment: To position success, it is necessary to have cross-functional coordination among sales, finance, supply chain, and marketing. When the full functions operate based on mutual projections and expectations, positioning investments have better returns.
3. ROI is large: The case studies show the 167% increase in profit ROI, 500-97% increase in volume, and 105-100% increase in sales within the 3-7 years time frame. These returns are significantly beyond normal advertising ROI standards.
4. Positioning is operationalized through distinctive assets: Brand characters, jingles, colors, and other distinctive assets decrease cognitive load, establish emotional attachment and elicit recall. The Kiwi brothers used by Zespri, who are currently being rolled out in 21 markets, can be viewed as being an example of this principle.
5. Positioning categories overcome resistance to adoption at the category level: In categories where there is adoption resistance (e.g., electric vehicles), positioning should not focus on the product alone, but also should include complementary infrastructure. The charging stations and safety data sharing of Renault represents ecosystem positioning.
6. Negatives can be turned into positioning assets: The fact that Cheetos turned its Cheetle drawbacks into a proclaimed brand asset, demonstrates that positioning does not have to be based on objectively superior features; truly owning product characteristics helps to generate differentiation.
7. Impact when combined with strategic management: When brand positioning is integrated into more coherent strategic management systems as opposed to being handled as a single marketing effort, the level of impact on organizational performance is greater and more effective.

10.2 Theoretical Conclusions

The research adds to the brand positioning theory by:

1. Expanding the brand orientation model in the inclusion of organizational alignment as an intermediate process.
2. Showing how unique assets can be used to operationalize brand identity.
3. Suggesting an ecological positioning of categories with adoption barriers.
4. Proving that the three question positioning test is an operational heuristic.

10.3 Practical Conclusions

To the practitioners, there is no mistaking the message, and it is to invest in positioning clarity first and then visibility later. There is no advertising campaign other than the most expensive that can pay off the lack of clear answer to the question why should I care. Good positioning must be specific, which may seem constraining but is necessary to differentiate; organizational alignment, which must be patient yet help take coordinated action; and ownership of claims that must be backed with product reality.

Suggestions and Recommendations

To Brand Managers and Marketers.

1. Use the three-question test prior to any campaign: Find out what problem your brand addresses to specific people, why it is believably better and what choice signals about the consumer? Otherwise invest in positioning in advance.
2. Don't succumb to the need to attract everybody: The cost of meaningful differentiation is specificity that leaves out certain consumers. Ironic positioning which does not offend anyone sells no one.
3. Invest in unique assets: Each character, jingle, color and any other unique asset develops a brand recall with minimum expenditure on communication. Pilot these assets to target groups prior to deployment.
4. Measure positioning ROI in the right time-horizons: Positioning returns are not quarterly, but are actually realized within 3-7 year time frames. Train the stakeholders in the organization on achievable schedules.
5. Earn organizational coherence by common measurement: Unite sales, finance, supply chain, and marketing around common projections. Make use of regular forecasts to allow co-ordinated action.

In case of C-Suite Executives and Organizational Leaders.

1. Positioning should be strategic infrastructure, not marketing strategy: Integrate brand positioning into the strategy management systems. Positioning will have an even more dramatic impact when it is factored into the greater strategy.
2. Engage the entire leadership in positioning: Having a polished positioning of a CEO and the rest of the leadership team being unseen poses reputational risk. Seek 360-degree positioning of all leaders.

3. Make ample time to position ROI: Understand that positioning investments is a multi-year commitment. Josh Cellars transformation took seven years; Zespri transformation took five years.
4. Promote cross-functional alignment operations: Annual strategy sittings where all functions come together, professional conflict and mutual adherence to final decisions are not side-whiskers but mandatory plumbing to position your effectiveness.

In the case of SMEs and Small Businesses.

1. Play the niche positioning game: Do not seek to compete with bigger incumbents in the mass-market. Concentrate on particular issues to particular groups in which you are particularly advantaged.
2. Take advantage of digital channels: SMEs can create brands on a modest budget using social media, content marketing and online communities. The market insights obtained by Reddit and Quora can be authentic at free of charge.
3. Develop unique resources at an early stage: Develop catchy brand features (name, logo, character, jingle) that can grow with your business. These resources get better with the increase in age.

For Marketing Educators

1. Learn teaching the three-question positioning test as a practical heuristic students can use on actual brands.
2. Apply quantifiable results of positioning ROI using use case studies (Josh Cellars, Zespri, Renault, Cheetos).
3. Highlight alignment within the organization as a key, yet less emphasized, success factor in positioning effectiveness.

For Researchers

1. Perform longitudinal research on positioning strategy and performance based on 5-10 years' time periods.
2. Systematically study positioning failure: Publicize failures in positioning to counterbalance publication bias in cases of success.
3. Analyze digital-native brand positioning: What do fully digital-based brands (as opposed to old brands moving online) do positioning differently?

4. Positioning a study in B2B market: The majority of research is conducted in consumer markets; there is a need to study the dynamics of positioning in B2B markets independently.

Future Scope

1. Longitudinal positioning-performance studies

Alternates in track positioning strategy and performance measures during 10+ years to determine more conclusively the causality and comprehend positioning sustainability.

2. Analysis of positioning failures in a systematic way.

Publish case studies on unsuccessful positioning experiences, and analyze them in the same spirit as success studies.

3. Digital-native brand positioning

Take a look at the way in which brands that have been created purely in digital space (as compared to the brands that are made traditional and turn towards the digital) form their positioning strategies and specific assets.

4. B2B positioning effectiveness

Explore positioning in business-to-business where the decision-making process includes multiple decision-makers, longer sale cycles, and is emotionally motivated.

5. AI-enabled positioning development

Study how machine learning can be used to determine market opportunities, test positioning hypotheses, and refine positioning via feedback on consumer responses, continuously.

6. Cross-cultural positioning effectiveness

Compare the effectiveness of positioning in a systematic way across geographic markets and which dimensions can be transferred and which need to be localized.

7. Organization culture and positioning.

Test the connection between external positioning effectiveness and internal brand orientation (employee understanding and commitment to positioning).

8. Sustainability positioning

Understand how positioning of brands about environmental sustainability attains (or do not attain) consumer credibility and preference, differentiating between authentic and greenwashing positioning.

9. Segmentation into hyper-competitive groups.

Positioning dynamics of studies in categories with several competitors' offering similar quality, distribution and price of products- situations where positioning is the major source of differentiation.

10. Positioning customer experience integration.

Explore how positioning assertions are conveyed (or not conveyed) across customer journey points of contact, and which are the most critical points when positioning promise has to be fulfilled.

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