

The Hypothesised Relationship between Store Positioning and its Determinants

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to study the relationship between store positioning and its determinants viz. store attributes, product attributes and individual psychographic characteristics in organised apparel retailing. Store positioning is important to study because it may have an adverse influence on retailer performance. This paper is an attempt to better understand how shoppers behave in the market and what factors influence them. Secondary data collected from several authentic resources to generate hypotheses of the study. The developed hypotheses on the bases of literature are, Ho1: Store attributes do not positively influence apparel store positioning; Ho2: Product attributes do not positively influence apparel store positioning; Ho3: Individual psychographic characteristics do not positively influence apparel store positioning. The discussion of the study indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between store positioning and its determinants, however, it is important to understand that these influencing attributes are very hard to achieve. Besides this, there are many other variables that also affect store positioning such as demographic characteristics and others. These reasons indicate that retailers should work hard because positioning is a fleeting issue, today's favourable positioning would not be tomorrow's favourable positioning.

Keywords: Positioning, Store, Product, Individual, Attributes.

INTRODUCTION

Positioning is the act of designing a firm's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market with concomitant effect of creating a customer-focused value proposition that would facilitate store loyalty (Kotler, 2003); Position in the minds of consumers and maximize the potential benefit to the firm (Keller, 2006); Positioning is the process of distinguishing itself from competitors for certain market segments. Store positioning is established in the minds of targeted customers by marketing communications and promotional activity. The position that a store occupies is shaped by existing stores in the market. This position is usually the standard against which other stores are compared (Dibb, Simkin, Pride & Ferrell, 2011).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have been of the view that store positioning is highly influenced by various factors that satisfy the physical and psychological needs of a buyer. In this connection it has been established that determinants relating to stores, products and individual psychographic factors play a significant role to develop favourable position of a store in the mind of customer. Customers have a tendency to create a perception of a store on the basis of the utility they derive by shopping at a particular store either in terms of better services, better products or psychological satisfaction.

In the retail industry, high-quality store service is delivered to shoppers for the survival of stores. Store attributes are an evaluative criterion that influences store positioning (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1992) and consumers in deciding where to shop. Store attributes influence store's competitive advantage, which leads to increased market share and profitability (Park & Robinson, 2004). A store will lead the market if it offers superior quality services related to its competitors; therefore stores must understand their relative competitive advantages in this respect (Chang & Yeh, 2002).

Shoppers evaluate retailer offering by combining all the concerned attributes in order to decide their degree of satisfaction. Finn and Louviere, (1996) conducted a study on the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction at discount stores in India and it was found that all the dimensions of RSQS were positively related to customer satisfaction. In this framework, it comprised of the linkages between store attributes and store positioning.

Previous researchers have identified store attributes as a multi-dimensional constructs that influences consumer. Researchers investigated store factors which influence store positioning like store's physical environment, various procedures and operations, personnel and the core offer of the retailer (Morschett, et al., 2005) It also includes store promotional offers, sales personnel, physical aspects, convenience

(Miranda, Konya and Havrila, 2005) assortment, return policy and reliability.

New retail formats of organized retailers always find a way to retain shoppers (Uusitalo, 2001). Product i.e., apparel attributes is one of the ways to make an effective and positive influence. Fast changing consumer attitudes towards products have encouraged retailers to develop favourable positioning. It is found that consumers who possess strong apparel attributes may have store positioning.

According to Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2002), merchandise is considered as the most important factor contributing to consumer store preference. This view is supported by Birtwistle and Shearer (2000) and North et al. (2003), who found that merchandise has a significant influence on brand perception and store choice across consumer segments. Geistfield (2003) has remarked that "Stores losing touch with their customers through inappropriate merchandising selections will lose customers". Indian shoppers have become more sensitive to quality, variety, design and status. Shopper is ready to pay, sometimes, astronomical sums, provided their needs are satisfied (Pathak and Tripathi, 2009).

Empirical studies were also executed on the influence of personal values. It has been identified in earlier research studies that personal values are one of the factors affecting store positioning as well as demonstrations of the link between personal values and store choice (Goldsmith et al., 1991). Sharma & Goldsmith's studies indicate that consumers' perception related to store is influenced by personal values of fun and enjoyment. Moreover, consumers' personal values structures were found to be linked with store choice in University of South Carolina (Pitts & Woodside, 1983). There is another study of detergent & car brands showing significant effects of personal values on consumers' choice (Rokeach, 1973). It was shown that consumers with different personal values have different store choice criteria in picking products, while similar values would possess similar store choice criteria. Personal value structure was strongly related to product, brand and store in

both durable and non durable stores. Personal value includes (a) self directed instrumental values; (b) Terminal i.e. belongings; & (c) Social directed instrumental values items. In pertinent literature, the influence of personal values on store positioning has been recognized; however rare studies have investigated the influence of personal values on store choice.

The literature suggests that a store can add value to its image only when it visualises its standing in the market in comparison to its competitors in the industry and the specific needs it addresses concerning the customers in a particular market segment. More so, given the changing business panorama, the store needs have flexibility to assimilate the changes dictated by the market from time to time to make itself relevant to the changing needs of a customer.

ESSENCE OF POSITIONING COMPONENTS

Retailers need to see, how they can best position their stores in the competitive market. For this, retailers first: segment the market, second: establish target markets and finally try to understand related determinant attributes of store and product (i.e. apparel in this paper). The essence of good components of store positioning follows four principles.

1. A store must establish a position in the minds of its targeted customers.
2. A store cannot be all things to all people- It must focus on its efforts.
3. The position must set a store apart from its competitors.
4. The position should provide one simple and consistent message.

There are 'four C diamonds' criterion, these are customer, company (store), competitor & change to determine the positioning (Kertajaya, 2005). Thus, the essence of good positioning should pursue following:

1. *Customer* - Positions are determined not by the image that a service provider seeks to

convey, but rather by how this image is perceived in the minds of stakeholders. Customers make their decision based on their individual perceptions of reality, rather than on (the marketer's) definition of that reality. Store can amend its set of offerings and reposition in order to understand shopper issues.

2. *Store* - Store's offering i.e. store and product (apparel) attributes- Stores require understanding of those attributes which are considered important by shoppers for successful positioning. The store differentiates itself among shoppers on the basis of attributes, qualities and other distinctive features.
3. *Competitor* - Position is considered by shoppers not in isolation, but rather it is perceived in relation to competitors. Every store has its own position related to similar competitive stores. Shoppers have a limited capacity for managing the excessive amounts of information they encounter. To simplify their choices, stores are ranked based on attributes (e.g., store, product etc.) relevant to the buying decision. Shoppers use the analogy of ladders in the mind to choose particular store. Each ladder represents a different service category and each step on the ladder.
4. *Change* - Positioning requires consistency and tight focusing of a selected message over a long time period, often many years. A strong position can take many years to solidify in shoppers' minds. Therefore, so consistency and tight focusing of a selected message is a key over this time period.

In the light of the above review, it comes to the fore that researchers and the store owners have the understanding that different determinants like SA, PA, IC have strong inter-se bearing on the store positioning while taken individually. However, not much has been established to study the composite effect of all the factors once aligned and studied as a whole. Particularly, in the Indian context, no significant work has been done to understand a holistic impact of all the factors viz-a-viz retail stores.

RESEARCH GAPS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In the past, significant studies have been conducted and examined by researchers about the scenario of 'positioning' globally and in western markets. However, relatively little attention has been paid in developing countries like India, which has its own unique set of cultural differences & retail dimensions. Whatever little work has been done towards store positioning of multi-brand retail stores in India, it seems that the organized apparel retail stores such as Pantaloons, Shoppers Stop, Lifestyle, Planet Fashion, Fashion@BigBazaar and Reliance Trends have not been studied exclusively in so far. It also revealed that link of all three predictors was also untouched by earlier researcher.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Store attributes, apparel attributes, individual characteristics and store positioning concepts are considered among the most researched variables in marketing literature hence, studied in order to ascertain store positioning from practical perspective. In addition to the above, consumers' demographic characteristics were also studied. The use of Null hypothesis is deemed more appropriate as null hypotheses are more exact and convenient for statistical analysis (Shahjahan 2004). It is also easier to reject the contrary of a hypothesis than confirm it with complete certainty.

Hypothesizing Store attributes and Store Positioning

Earlier research suggests that the *store layout* is an important determinant of consumers' behavioral responses (Bellenger et al., 1980; Finn, McQuitty, and Rigby, 1994; McGoldrick & Thompson, 1992). Layout is defined as a division of selling area, space utilized and arrangement of products. The layout and ambiances includes interior architecture and décor, lighting, music, aromas and cleanliness (Baker, 1986; Yun & Good, 2007). Several store-level studies have examined the effect of a single environmental element, such as music (Dube, Chebat, & Morin, 1995; color (Crowley, 1993)

and scent (Spangenberg, Crowley, and Henderson, 1996). In addition, it found that general perceptions of the store interior influence sales time spent in the store (Akhter, Andrews and Durvasula, 1994). Unplanned purchases were higher when consumers have lower knowledge of store layout/design and no time pressure conditions (Iyer, 1989). Products in the retail chain outlets should be displayed in such a way that it attracts the consumers. Product display in the retail outlets is a stimulus to attract the consumers to make impulse buying (Abratt, Russell, Goodey, & Stephen, 1990). Empirical studies were executed on the influence of store ambiances like storefront, entrances, display windows, building architecture, surrounding area, store design (Ward, Bitner, and Barnes 1992), exterior window displays (Edwards and Shackley, 1992) etc. It identified that external variables have an influence on retail consumers' behavior. Store ambience factors were general interior variables, which include design factors such as flooring, lighting, cleanliness, color usage, and ambient factors (e.g., scents, sounds, and temperature). It found that interior influence position of store in marketplace (Akhter, Andrews, and Durvasula, 1994), Donovan and Rossiter, 1982), and Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn and Newdale, 1994). Consumers shop those stores that provide the proper environment (Holman and Wilson, 1982). The physical environment creates an image of a retail store and its services. If consumers do not enjoy shopping with a particular retailer, they locate a more congenial store for future purchases. Thus, it is important for retailers to identify and satisfy consumer needs. Retailers should identify those store attributes that will result in positive responses from their target markets.

Sales personnel influence customer's perceptions and thus there is a need to understand the importance of sales personnel in building store image (Baker et al., 2002). Stores provide good service through sales personnel leave their shoppers with more favourable perception (Thang and Tan, 2003). Shoppers are uncovered of large amount of information from promotional offers and discounts. Although they are attracted through advertising to stimulate interest and

create store awareness. It is viewed as a positive stimulus by management, a study of apparel purchase patterns found that special events/exhibits and promotions were among the least mentioned motives for product purchase, and were therefore indicated as less important than other store attributes (Yavas, 2011). Effect of store attributes like promotional offers on store positioning have significant influence on favourable store image. Promotional offers & discounts have a significant influence on consumer preference (Thang and Tan, 2003). Auxiliary (Supportive) *Service* promotes repeat visits and has a positive impact on consumer purchase behavior. Consumers do shop for enjoyment, socialization, as well as for economic reasons (Lumpkin, 1985). It is found that effective supportiveservices contribute toward forming a positive store positioning. Chang and Tu (2005) found that convenience has a direct relationship with customer satisfaction as well as indirect relationship with store loyalty. Therefore, retailers should consider convenience and its represented statements carefully to build a consumer base and consumer loyalty. Problem solving and return policy addresses handling of returns, exchanges and complaints. The problem solving dimensions of retailers includes: willingness of retailers to handle returns and exchanges, sincere interest in problem and handling customer complaints directly and immediately. This dimension may positively influence store positioning. Several western authors studied the impact of store attributes like reliability service on apparel store positioning. The result reveals that reliability has no significant influence on the purchasing behavior of shoppers towards readymade apparels.

It is hypothesized that organized retail store attributes do not positively influence store positioning. In this study, store attributes are measured by using variables like store layout & ambiances, sales personnel services, promotional offers and discounts, auxiliary (supportive) service, convenience facilities, problem solving and return policy, and reliability. Thus, there is a need to explore such influences. This discussion leads to the development of following hypothesis-

H₀1: Store attributes do not positively influence apparel store positioning.

H₀1_a: Store layout & ambiances have no influence on store positioning.

H₀1_b: Sales personnel services of store have no influence on store positioning.

H₀1_c: Store promotional offers & discounts have no influence on store positioning.

H₀1_d: Auxiliary (supportive) services of store have no influence on store positioning.

H₀1_e: Convenience facilities of store have no influence on store positioning.

H₀1_f: Problem solving has no influence on store positioning.

H₀1_g: Reliability has no influence on store positioning.

Hypothesizing Apparel Attributes and Store Positioning

Earlier research in western countries on apparel attributes like quality, price, availability of new products, product value, design, durability, eco-friendly nature shows positive and significant relationship with store positioning. Researchers scrutinized the attributes of readymade apparel stores and found shoppers' eagerness to pay by consideration in four areas such as physical comfort, appearance, representation and functionality of apparels that leads towards the store positioning. In this study, product (apparel) attributes is measured through perfect stitching, fitting, color choice, latest design, trendy & fashionable, high status symbol, brand name, eco-friendly (organic clothing), wide price ranges, durability & fabric quality etc.

Therefore, a need is felt to study all apparel attributes in Indian context and find whether they contribute to the growth of apparel retailers. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₀2: Product attributes dimensions do not positively influence apparel store positioning.

H₀2_a: Physical comforts of apparels have no influence on store positioning.

H_{02b}: Exotic appearance and appeal of apparels haveno influence on store positioning.

H_{02c}: Representation and functionality of apparels haveno influence on store positioning.

Hypothesizing Individual (Psychological) Differences and Store Positioning

Individual characteristics and psychological aspects are one of the ways to have an influence on store positioning. Different personal characteristics have encouraged retailers to develop their positioning. It found that consumers' individual psychological aspects like personal values, lifestyle and fashion involvement are regarded as influencing factors on store positioning. These are the criteria for an individual to make preferential judgments.

With the importance of store positioning, lifestyle characteristics such as satisfaction with life, traditional, price conscious, information seeking, travelling and spending, mobile/ impulse shopping were also promoted as a useful tool in the apparel market (Kim, 1988). Lifestyle characteristics (sophisticated independents, active fashion leaders, price/ value conscious shoppers, fashion conscious practicals, value conscious indifferent and fashion followers) differ with respect to demographic in the Koran apparel market (Kim, 1988). The AIO measurement variables (a) Shopping & working activities (b) Interest related to apparels (c) Opinion about themselves & products (d) Apparels as self-representation have been adopted in many international studies on consumers' lifestyle and their relationship with consumer behaviour (Gutman and Mils (1982); Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1992; Kamakura and Wedel, 1995; Tai and Tam, 1997; Kim, 2000). All the dimensions of lifestyle were found interrelated with store positioning criteria in western countries. However, due to the unique characteristics of Indian culture, lifestyle items need to be modified.

Perceived product and store characteristics having dominant effect on consumer are suggested to integrate into *fashion involvement*

research while examining store positioning. Moreover, the direct effect of fashion involvement on consumer behavior was also explored and identified. Interestingly, some studies even provide evidence to the relationship between fashion involvement and positioning of store. The link between fashion involvement and store positioning criteria was also addressed in earlier studies and supported the relationship between fashion involvement and apparel store positioning.

In the research of Fairhurst et al. (1989) positive link between fashion involvement and store positioning was found. Shoppers with a high level of fashion involvement would have higher level of care when it came to their clothing. Fashion involvement is believed to influence the apparel store position. However, the investigation in Indian organized apparel store positioning is lacking. Thus this study investigates the relationship between fashion involvement (i.e. product involvement, purchase decision involvement and advertising involvement) and store positioning.

Finally, in order to establish the overall relationship of individual characteristics with store positioning, the below hypothesis is formulated as follows

H₀₃: Individual characteristics do not positively influence apparel store positioning.

H_{03a}: Personal values of individual have no influence on store positioning.

H_{03b}: Individuals' lifestyles have no influence on store positioning.

H_{03c}: Individuals' fashion involvement has no influence on store positioning.

Alignment of all the attributes was brought about to study the composite effect of these attributes on store positioning as revealed by the following table:

Demographic Factors and their Relevance for the Study

Table 1: Hypothesized Relationships

Hypothesized Relationships	Hypotheses and sub-hypotheses (Null)
<i>Store Attributes → Store Positioning</i>	H1
Store layout & ambiences → Store positioning	H1 _a
Sales personnel services → Store positioning	H1 _b
Promotional offers → Store positioning	H1 _c
Auxiliary services → Store positioning	H1 _d
Convenience facilities → Store positioning	H1 _e
Problem solving → Store positioning	H1 _f
Reliability → Store positioning	H1 _g
<i>Apparel Attributes → Store positioning</i>	H2
Physical comfort of apparel → Store positioning	H2 _a
Exotic appearance and appeal → Store positioning	H2 _b
Representation and functionality → Store positioning	H2 _c
<i>Individual (Psychographic) Characteristics → Store positioning</i>	H3
Personal values → Store positioning	H3 _a
Lifestyles → Store positioning	H3 _b
Fashion involvement → Store positioning	H3 _c

Demographics are objective and measurable characteristics, therefore likely to be used in consumer descriptions. It includes characteristics such as educational level, occupation, income, age, geographic location, family structure, marital status and gender (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007).

Demographic in isolation cannot provide a complete picture of the consumers, although it influences consumer behaviour (Hyllegard, Eckman, Descals & Borja, 2005). Furthermore, education influences people's occupations and their occupations greatly determine their income. Consumers' occupation and education influence preferences in products, while income provides the necessary means for consumption behaviour (Hawkins et al., 2007; Vakratsas, 1998). Elderly or mature consumers and their findings concluded that age groups within the elderly market differed regarding their preference (Lumpkin, 1985; Visser and Du Preez, 1996).

IMPLICATIONS

On the basis of above set of hypothesis, the study was conducted in NCR of India with primary sample of six organised multi-brand stores comprising of Pantaloons, Shoppers Stop, Life Style, Reliance Trends, Fashion@BigBazar and Planet Fashion. The findings of the study based on the testing of devised composite hypotheses suggested greater implications for apparel industry and academia as well. Besides, the information could also be used for the development of a theoretical model towards understanding consumer towards position of select stores. Further, these findings can be employed by organised apparel retailers to provide opportunities to develop and examine new construction.

Academic Implications

From a theoretical perspective, the present study shall contribute insights in literature and theory

by identifying a number of influencing factors that are important for ready-to-wear apparel shoppers. The exploration of influencing factors in the study shall give further insights into why consumers may take diverge decisions and choose different apparel retail stores. Empirical evidence is provided to support recent theoretical contributions about the influence of product attributes, store attributes and individual psychographic factors on store positioning. The research not only provides a basis for investigating store positioning determinants, but also offers a new direction on which future research may be focused. The findings of this study can serve as a good knowledge base for the academic community in obtaining a better understanding of ready-to-wear consumers. The study has significantly added to the knowledge domain in the area of consumer behaviour by identifying priorities/preferences of consumers in developing economies like India and particularly the elite class living in capital and in metropolitan. The study has created a space for academicians to carry out such works in underdeveloped countries and differently circumstanced areas.

Managerial Implications for Organised Apparel Retailers

Furthermore, the results found in this research also provide important information for apparel

marketers in developing suitable strategies at their respective levels so that the priorities of different consumers are addressed. In particular, it is suggested that apparel marketers put more effort into creating favourable store image. By devising suitable strategies, apparel retailers could enhance the market share. As India is moving from a controlled system to a free system and regulation of monopolies is replaced by promoting of fair competition, so the retail stores are faced with numerous challenges on account of attraction and retention marketing. More particularly, as retail sector has been thrown open for FDI, the competition has drastically increased threatening the home market. Therefore, the study carried out on the basis of identified hypothesis and modification of RSQS in Indian context, it is hoped that the findings of the study shall be an eye opener for the domestic organised retail market to evolve strategies for offering more satisfaction and utility to the customers. This shall help the local retail stores to withstand the pressure of increased competition from foreign players. In particular, the study carried out through development of composite set of hypothesis to determine the effect of various attributes on store positioning has revealed that product attributes and psychographic factors are more influential to effect store positioning while as store attributes do not affect much.

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