



Superior Customer Experience through Brand Positioning – Empirical Study on Branded Shirts

M. Prasanna Mohan Raj¹
P.T.VijayaRajkumar
G.Bhuvaneswari

Abstract

Brand success depends upon understanding the way consumers' experience with the brand. In the era of proliferation of brands and bombardment of advertisements, positioning becomes the weapon for the marketers to create the unique customer experience. Brand positioning sets the direction for all marketing programs about what the brand should and not to do with its marketing. The concept of considering the human mind as perceptual space will be helpful in understanding the concept of positioning and develops the theoretical basis for brand positioning. Perceptual mapping is a visualization technique used by the marketers that attempts to visually display the perceptions of customers. The focus of this paper is to explore the perceptions of customers through perceptual mapping with special reference to branded apparel gents' shirts category. This Research paper comes out with a perceptual map by using correspondence analysis which illustrates the positions occupied by the branded apparel based on the attributes

Key words: Customer Experience, Brand Positioning, Perceptual Mapping, Branded Apparel and Correspondence Analysis

Introduction

Brand success depends upon understanding the way consumers' experience with the brand. Creating a superior customer experience requires understanding the customer's point of view. In the era of proliferation of brands and bombardment of advertisements,

¹ Assistant Professor,
Alliance Business School
Bangalore – 562106
Email: prasannasaai@gmail.com

positioning becomes the weapon for the marketers to create the unique customer experience. According to Philip Kotler, "Once the core product concept is chosen, it defines the character of the product space in which the new product has to be positioned". Positioning is less what to do with the product and more what to with consumer's perception of the product.

Significance of Customer Experience

The concept of customer experience was first introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1998). The customer experience gets more significance as good and services become commoditized. Authors urge that transition should happen from selling products/services to selling experiences. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible and experiences memorable.

Authors establish that successful brands influence people through engaging, authentic experiences that render personal value to the customers.

Thompson and Kolsky (2003) define customer experience as the sum of conscious events encountered by the customers with the brand. The *Study* confirms that customer experience is defined by every touch point between a company and its customers.

In designing propositions for specific segments, marketers focus on the customer experience. They recognize that customers interact with different parts of the organization across a number of touch points, A company can't turn its customers into satisfied, loyal advocates unless it takes their experiences at all these touch points into account . James Allen (2005) reveals how companies misread the market. According to the survey of 362 firms and it was found that 80 percent of firms believed they delivered a "superior experience" to their customers. But the customers rated only 8 percent of companies are truly delivering a superior customer experience. What sets those 8 percent superior among the clutter? Author also identifies the 3 D's which will make the firm to deliver superior customer experience.

- ✓ **Designing** the unique offers and experiences for the right customers.
- ✓ **Delivering** these unique propositions by focusing the entire company on them with an emphasis on cross-functional collaboration.
- ✓ **Developing** the capabilities of the firm to please the customers consistently.

Researchers agree that a positive customer experience can result in increased share of wallet and repeat business. In addition, Keller and Lehmann (2003) propose that the customers' overall experience (e.g., awareness, associations, attitude, attachment and activity) is the key driver of brand performance (e.g., price premiums, price elasticities, market share, and expansion success).

According to the report on Customer Experience Maturity Monitor (Martha Rogers 2009), the basis for executing a strong customer experience strategy is an iterative process focused on three I's

- i) Deepening customer **Insight**,
- ii) Strengthening customer **Interactions**
- iii) Improving marketing performance

Research studies on customer experience reveals that crafting the unique and sustainable position in the minds of customer is the effective mean in achieving the superior customer experience.

Brand Positioning -Theoretical Foundation:

Positioning is the heart of marketing strategy. Brand positioning sets the direction for all marketing programs about what the brand should and not to do with its marketing. Crawford (1987) says "positioning is meant to drive entire marketing program". Aaker (1996) describes the significance of positioning as "product positioning is so central and critical that it should be considered at the level of mission statement and it comes to represent the essence of a business." A comprehensible positioning strategy can ensure that the elements of marketing program are consistent and supportive. Wind (1976) writes that product positioning serves as an integral part of situation analysis as well as cornerstone of the firm's marketing strategy". Researchers

regard positioning as the sources from which marketing and advertising decisions will flow.

Positioning appears to be both debatable and interesting topic and there are almost many definitions. According to Aaker (1996) brand position is the part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates competitive advantage over competing brands. He suggests that a brand position has to be built on five parameters: 1. look to the core identity, 2. identify the points of leverage, 3. create the value propositions, 4. target audience and 5. active communication. Rosser Reeves (1986) reports that positioning is an art of selecting, out of number of unique selling propositions, the one which will get you maximum sales. Ennis (1986) defines the theory of positioning is the identification of an exclusive niche in the market or the creation of unique perception of the product that satisfies an unfulfilled consumer need and that serves to distinguish the product from competing alternatives. Positioning is the way to zip the brand inside a consumers' mind. Day (1981) defines the brand positioning in simpler terms as the customer's perceptions of the product/brand occupies in a given market. Hardy (1986) defines positioning in terms of benefits as "the package of benefits relative to competition that will be offered to particular target segments". Aaker and Shansby (1982) propose six approaches to positioning strategy as follows: 1) Attributes 2) Price – quality 3) Use or applications 4) Product-user 5) Product class and 6) competitor.

According to Kevin lane Keller (2002), brand positioning starts with establishing a frame of reference, which signals to consumers the goal they can expect to achieve by using a brand. Choosing the proper frame is important because it dictates the types of associations that will function as points of parity and points of difference. Author classifies three types of brand differences: a) brand performance associations b) brand imagery associations and c) consumer insight associations. By considering each of these kinds of differences, Marketers can better target the message. Consumers always remember the points of differentiation. They tend to associate the brands with benefits or attributes. The author says even the established brands need to pay

close attention to the points of differentiation in order to preempt the competition.

In summary, “Positioning can be defined as the distinctive position that a brand adopts in its competitive environment to ensure that individuals in its target market can tell the brand apart from others”¹.

The concept of considering the human mind as perceptual space will be helpful in understanding the concept of positioning and develops the theoretical basis for brand positioning. Perceptual space is already cluttered with numerous brand names for various categories. So marketers will be very keen to find a position for its brand in the perceptual space of consumers’ mind and place their brand at the most lucrative point.

The successful positioning should adopt the 4D positioning principles. The positioning should be **Desirable** by customers, **Distinctive** from the competition, **Deliverable** by the company and **Durable** over time.

When marketers realize the positioning deals with perception of the customers, they are interested to measure those perceptions. Perceptual mapping is a visualization technique used by the marketers that attempts to visually display the perceptions of customers. The position of a product, product line, brand, or company is displayed relative to their competitor brands. Perceptual maps can have any number of dimensions but the most common is two dimensions so that the manager can readily see where his own brand is positioned in the minds of his customer in relation to other brands According to Urban (1987) Perceptual mapping techniques identify the underlying dimensions that differentiate consumer perceptions of products and the positions of existing products on the dimensions.

The focus of this paper is to explore the perceptions of customers through perceptual mapping with special reference to brand apparel of gents’ shirts category. This Research paper comes out with a perceptual map by using correspondence analysis which illustrates the positions occupied by the branded apparels based on the attributes.

Review of Branded Apparel Market

Global textile market possesses a worth of more than \$400 billions present. It is predicted that Global textile production will grow by 25

percent between 2002 and 2010 and Asian region will largely contribute in this regardⁱⁱ. In 1974, the Multi Fibre Arrangement (MFA) began to govern world trade in textiles and clothing. Under the MFA, many industrial countries fixed quotas of imports of textiles and clothing from developing countries. In 1987, the scope of MFA was expanded further to include vegetable fibres and silk blend productsⁱⁱⁱ. In the year 1995, WTO had renewed its MFA and adopted Agreement on Textiles and clothing (ATC), which states that all quotas on textile and clothing will be removed among WTO member countries^{iv}. However the level of exports in textiles from developing countries is increasing even if in the presence of high tariffs and quantitative restrictions by economically developed countries.

The textile and apparel industry is one of the leading segments of the Indian economy and the largest source of foreign exchange earnings for India. This industry accounts for 4 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), 20 percent of industrial output, and slightly more than 30 percent of export making it the largest source of industrial employment in India^v.

Indian textile industry currently generates employment to more than 35 million people. It is also estimated that, the industry will generate 12 million new jobs by the year 2010^{vi}. It not only generates jobs in its own industry, but also opens up scopes for the other ancillary sectors. Indian textile industry is the second largest in the world, second only to China. The textile export of the country was around US\$ 19.14 billion in 2006-07, which saw a stiff rise to reach US\$ 22.13 in 2007-08. Currently Indian textile industry is estimated to be around US\$ 34.6 billion and it is projected to be around US\$ 115 billion by the year 2012^{vii}. It is estimated that Indian Market share in World textiles trade to grow from 3% to 8% by the year 2012. The share of exports is also expected to increase from 4% to 7% within 2012^{viii}.

The branded apparel market in India has been making the transition of moving from a cluster of product brands to wardrobe and lifestyle brands. The emergence of IT/ITES and services sector leads for the shift from traditional formal attire to a more relaxed clothing culture. Customarily Indians preferred dresses stitched by their local tailors, who catered exclusively to their demand. The growth of ready made

garments had started in 1980s due to increase in fashion consciousness and the convenience offered by readymade garments.^{ix}

The growth of the apparel business is closely linked to growth of organised retail but there is also the argument that there are not enough brands to fuel an explosive growth in apparel retailing.^x Any apparel which is having brand on its label cannot be called as branded apparel. The availability of the brands in nationwide will be considered for naming into the Branded apparel.

The Growth of major retail chains had become trend in all the major cities and they were increasingly being preferred by youth. The significant change in the mindset and lifestyle of Indian customers were the major factor that played a positive role in the growth of the branded apparel industry. Due to greater awareness of fashion trends, there was a demand for new merchandise at short intervals. To cater to the requirements of their customers, branded apparel players started offering a greater variety of products with better quality, in line with international trends.

The Branded apparel market is having three distinct segments of Men, women and children. The Men's segment registered maximum growth among these segments. The western wear is an emerging segment with large potential in India. The men's ready-to-wear market in India is estimated at Rs 5,000 crore and growing at 25-30 per cent per annum^{xi}.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

Descriptive Research is the type of research design of this study. This is so because the information collected is going to describe the existing preference level of the customers and association of attributes with brands.

Sampling Technique

Convenient sampling has been adopted. Samples have been collected from Bangalore.

Sample Size

The Total sample size is 120 and all the respondents are male with the age group of 21-27.

Data Collection

Both Primary and secondary data were collected for this study. Primary data collected from Bangalore. Secondary data collected from various journals, Magazines and Websites.

Objective of the Study

To develop the perceptual map that depicts the positioning of branded shirts in association with attributes.

Analysis and Discussion

Brand managers can use multiple techniques based on need and convenience. Here, Correspondence analysis has been used to develop a perceptual map. Correspondence analysis is one of the MDS techniques used for scaling qualitative data that scales the rows and columns of the input contingency table in corresponding units so that each can be displayed in the same low-dimensional space. Correspondence analysis is a descriptive technique designed to analyze simple two-way and multi-way tables containing some measure of correspondence between the rows and columns.

Correspondence analysis results in the grouping of categories (attributes, brands, etc) found within the contingency table.

The following eight leading brands were taken for the study.

1. Arrow
2. Louis Philips
3. Color Plus
4. Excalibur
5. Peter England
6. Van Heusen
7. Allan solly
8. Park Avenue

The respondents were asked whether or not they thought that each of 8 brands could be well associated with following significant attributes:

- a) Variety of colors
- b) Variety of design
- c) Quality of cloth
- d) Brand image

- e) Comfort
- f) Exact fitting
- g) Trendy.

The result was 7 x 8 grid with each cell showing the proportion of respondents who believed that a specific attribute applied to a specific brand more than the other brands.

A set of attributes are asked to respondents, who are then asked to rate on a scale on each of the statements made on those particular brands. An analysis carried out with this information determines which brands are more likely to be associated with specific types of attributes than others. The output is a map where points representing brands and

Brands Attributes	Arrow	Louis Philip pe	Color plus	Excalibur	Peter England	Van heusen	Allen solly	Park avenu e
Variety of colors								
Variety of designs								
Cloth quality								
Brand image								
Comfort								
Exact fitting								
Trendy								

attributes are plotted, such that those brands which correspond to specific type of attributes are found in the same space. Correspondence Analysis can be used to position a brand with certain attributes. The correspondence analysis evidently shows the perception of customers about the association of brands with specific dimensions. The following attributes and brands are taken as input to draw a perceptual map

Table: 1 Input Attributes*Brands matrix

Brands could be well associated with such possible attributes as variety of

colors, variety of design, quality of cloth, brand image, Comfort , exact fitting and trendy. The result was 7 x 8 grid with each cell showing the proportion of respondents who believe that a specific attribute applied to a specific brand more than the other brands.

The cell shows the proportion of respondents who have strongly perceived the association of the concerned dimensions with the brands. 68 respondents perceive Arrow shirts have variety of designs followed by 30 respondents for Park Avenue. Similarly for remaining brands, attributes can be associated.

Brands Attributes	Arrow	Louis Philippe	Color plus	Excalibur	Peter England	Van heusen	Allen solly	Park avenue
Variety of Colors	0	5	45	40	2	0	0	5
Variety of designs	68	2	0	0	20	0	0	30
Cloth quality	0	0	0	50	65	0	0	5
Brand Image	0	0	10		0	46	44	20
Comfort	45	70	0	0	0	0	0	5
Exact fitting	0	40	0		0	47	33	
Trendy	7	3	0	30	0	16	18	46

Fit Of The Model

The Chi-square test is computed to test if the rows and columns are independent. As the p-value is lower than the significance level (0.05) we conclude that the rows and columns are not independent, which means there is relationship between the rows and the columns

Table 3: Chi-square test

Chi-square (Observed value)	1852.267
Chi-square (Critical value)	66.339
DF	49
p-value	< 0.0001
Alpha	0.05

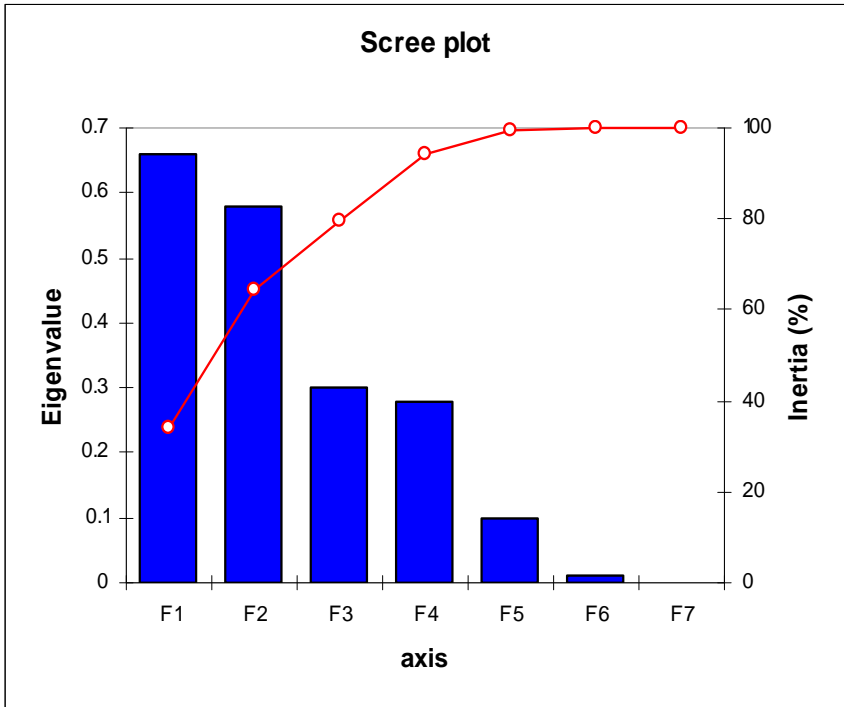
The quality of the analysis can be evaluated by consulting the table of the eigenvalues or the corresponding scree plot. If the sum of the two (or a few) first Eigen values is close to the total represented, then the quality of the analysis is very high.

Table 4: Eigen Values

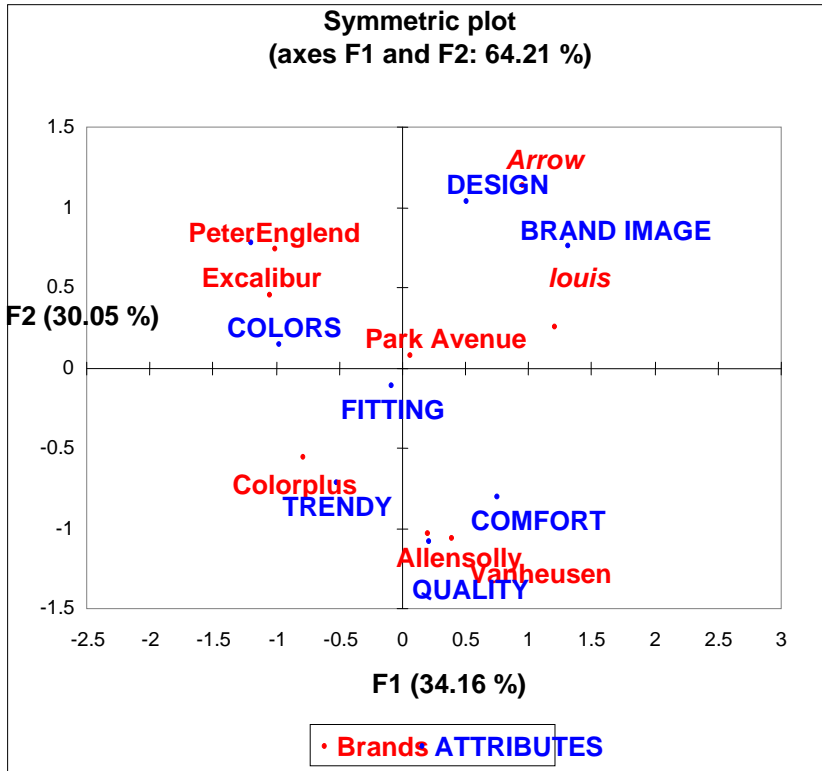
Eigen values							
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7
Eigenvalue	0.659	0.580	0.300	0.280	0.100	0.010	0.001
Rows depend on columns (%)	34.163	30.046	15.541	14.492	5.206	0.524	0.028
Cumulative %	34.163	64.209	79.749	94.241	99.448	99.972	100.000

The correspondence analysis in this example is of good quality as the sum of the first two Eigen values adds up to 64% of the total.

Fig 1: Scree plot showing quality of the analysis



A correspondence analysis was carried out on the obtained grid, using statistical package XLSTAT and the results are as shown in Fig. 2

Fig: 2 Correspondence Chart of Branded Shirts

In the right upper quadrant, the points relate to the brand image and variety of designs. In the left upper quadrants, the points relate to the availability of cloths in different colors. In the right lower quadrant, the points relate to the comfort of wearing and quality of the cloth. Here, the attribute that is closely associated with some other branded apparel may also form part but the most important attribute as far as that particular brand is considered.

Managerial Implications

This study investigated customers' preference of brands on various attributes. The result gives the perceptual map of brands positioned based on eight product attributes of variety of colors, variety of designs, cloth quality, brand image, comfort, exact fitting and trendy. Positioning a brand consists of firmly fixing it in the minds of consumers using relevant attributes as the binder. It can be inferred from the study brands strongly tied with specific attributes. The Park Avenue brand is positioned based the "fitting" attribute. Excalibur brand and Peter England brand are positioning based on having variety of colors in their categories

The Arrow Brand has strongly positioned based on variety of designs and also with brand image. Louis Philippe is strongly positioned based on Brand image. The Park Avenue brand is positioned based the "fitting" attribute. Excalibur brand and Peter England brand are positioning based on having variety of colors in their categories. "Allen solely" and "Van heusen" are competing for the positioning platform for quality of cloths. Color plus brand is strongly positioned based on "Trendy".

This study reveals the brand positioning platform and also informs the brand managers of what other potential areas are left to reposition it. If the brand decides to reposition itself, this study identifies the potential competitor for the brand. For example, if "Color Plus" wants reposition on comfort of wearing, it should target "Allan solely" and "Van heusen" who are strongly positioned on 'comfort' attribute.

This study not only reveals the current positioning platform but also the nearing competitor for that positioning platform. From this study, "Allen solely" and "Van heusen" are competing for the positioning platform for quality of cloths and "Arrow" and "Louis Philippe" are close competitors. Thus this study reveals the brand's positioning platform and also informs nearest competitors and the other potential areas are left to be tapped.

References

- Aaker , D (1996), “Building Strong Brands, The Free press, Newyork
- Aaker,A. David and Shansby, Gary (1982), “positioning your product, Business Horizons, May-June, 56-62
- Crawford, Merle C (1987), New Products Management, Irwin, p.400
- Day, George S. (1969), A two dimensional concept of brand loyalty, Journal of Advertising Research., 9(3), 29–36
- James Allen, Frederick F. Reichheld, Barney Hamilton and Rob Markey (2005), “Closing the delivery Gap”, Bain &Company, report
- Kevin Lane Keller, Brian Sternthal, and Alice Tybout (2002), “Three Questions You Need to Ask About Your Brand”, Harvard Business Review, September 2002.
- Kevin Lane Keller and Don Lehmann (2003), “How Do Brands Create Value,” Marketing Management, May/June, 26-31
- Hardy, Kenneth G (1986), Business Quarterly, November
- Ennis and F.Beaven (1986), “Handbook of Modern Marketing”, McGraw-Hill
- Martha Rogers, Ph.D. and Jeff Gilleland (2009), “Customer Experience Maturity Monitor”, Peppers and Rogers & SAS, April 29.
- Pine, B. Joseph II, Gilmore, James (1998), "Welcome to the Experience Economy", Harvard Business Review, July-August.
- Rosser Reeves and Sacco Joe (1986) , “ Lost Chapter”, Advertising Age, , P.13
- Thompson with Stuart Roberts (2003) , “ How to Tell How Much Your Business Will Benefit From CRM”, April , Gartner G2 series.

Urban, Glen L, John, Hauser and Nikihilesh Dholkia (1987), “Essentials of New Product Management, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey. Wind, Yoram and Henry (1976), “Planning Product line strategy : A matrix approach “, Journal of Marketing, 40,pp 2-9

End Notes

ⁱ http://brandchannel.com/education_glossary.asp

ⁱⁱ www.isreview.org/issues/43/china.shtml

ⁱⁱⁱ www.cleanclothes.org/legal/01-10_mfa.htm

^{iv} <http://www.economywatch.com/world-industries/textile-industry.html>

^v <http://www.indiantextileobserver.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=660>

^{vi} http://pib.nic.in/release/rel_print_page1.asp?relid=2097

^{vii} Talent in textiles, The Tribune , March 17, 2010, Chandigarh edition , India

^{viii} http://www.imsme.org/Uploads/MediaTypes/Documents/Sectoral_Overview_Apperal_feb2009_final.pdf

^{ix} www.icmr.icfai.org/casestudies/catalogue/Business%20Reports/BREP018.htm - 14k

^x www.thehindubusinessline.com/iw/2004/.../2004111400211300.htm

^{xi} <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/catalyst/2009/07/30/stories/2009073050020100.htm>