IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)
e-ISSN:2278-487X, p-ISSN: 2319-7668. Volume 27, Issue 3. Ser. 3 (March. 2025), PP 13-16
www.iosrjournals.org

Understanding Disruptive Market Positioning For Brand's Success

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Abstract:
Brand positioning is crucial for differentiating a brand and shaping consumer perceptions in a competitive market. Disruptive market positioning, through strategies like Stealth, Reverse, and Breakaway Positioning, enables brands to stand out by redefining consumer expectations. These strategies can be effective at different stages of the Product Life Cycle (PLC). Air India and Vistara merged on November 12, 2024, creating a single full-service airline under the Air India brand. The merger makes Air India the only full-service carrier in India. This merger exemplifies Breakaway Positioning, creating a unique market identity by blending luxury and affordability. Successful brand positioning requires focusing on unmet needs and untapped markets, broadening appeal beyond competitors for long-term success. Disruptive brand positioning is a marketing strategy that challenges traditional marketing methods to differentiate a brand from competitors. It involves reconfiguring existing attributes to create a disruptive thought in consumers' minds.

Keywords: *Disruptive Strategies, Breakaway Positioning, Product Life Cycle, Marketing Positioning, Unique identity, Stealth Positioning, Reverse Positioning, Breakaway Positioning*

Date of Submission: 25-02-2025 Date of Acceptance: 05-03-2025

This paper talks about disruptive brand positioning which is a marketing strategy that challenges traditional marketing methods to differentiate a brand from competitors. It involves reconfiguring existing attributes to create a disruptive thought in consumers' minds. Disruptive brands challenge the status quo and traditional category conventions. They use innovative, unexpected, and attention-grabbing tactics, they don't shy away from risking controversy.

While brand positioning is the process of establishing a unique and compelling identity for a brand in the minds of consumers, setting it apart from competitors. It focuses on creating a distinct perception that aligns with the target audience's needs, aspirations, and values, ensuring the brand holds a meaningful and differentiated place in the market. By clearly communicating the brand's value and relevance, effective positioning shapes consumer preferences, drives purchase decisions, and builds loyalty. It also enables brands to justify premium pricing and achieve long-term success. Successful brand positioning is grounded in a deep understanding of the market, consumer insights, and the competitive landscape.

Disruptive Market Positioning help in today's highly customer-centric world, the market is saturated with numerous competitors and brands, all vying to fulfil basic consumer needs. Even if the firm has a superior product that meets those needs better, standing out in such a competitive landscape can be challenging. This is where Disruptive Market Positioning becomes a game-changer.

By breaking conventional norms and redefining market expectations, disruptive positioning allows a product to capture consumer attention and carve out a unique space. It's not just about being better—it's about being different in a way that resonates deeply with marketer's audience.

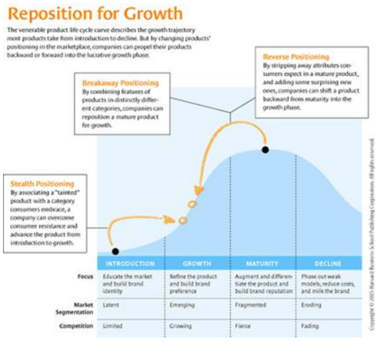

Image taken from Harvard Business School

Disruptive Market Positioning is best utilized in different phases of the Product Life Cycle (PLC) to spark curiosity and drive consumer engagement. It targets markets that are: underserved but have future potential or thriving with competition but not fully catering to all segments or addressing necessities with better solutions. Let's look at few types of disruptive marketing positioning strategies.

I. Stealth Positioning:

Stealth means sneaking, secretive strategy where a product is introduced discreetly or disguised in a way that makes it seem less threatening, unfamiliar, or complicated to the target market. It doesn't challenge existing categories but takes a fresh approach in the introductory phase. This strategy is often employed after previous product failures or when there's resistance to more overt market strategies. The goal is to gain gradual traction without attracting immediate attention or competition. The aim is to move the product from Introduction to Growth stage. In 2015, Starbucks started what turned out to be a nationwide controversy with the design of its traditional Christmas cups. Each year, the coffee brand releases a unique design for its holiday cups, but the 2015 design was thought by some to be very understated, too plain, and not festive enough! Pundits, consumers, and critics voiced their opinions about the design. The whole ordeal sparked a massive media buzz about the product worldwide. It later turned out the controversy was fake: very few people hated the cup, but the stir caused Starbucks' sales to soar. We describe this example as Stealth Positioning.

Another example is Tom Hanks' powerful portrayal of a survivor stranded on a deserted island in "Cast Away" also featured stealth marketing. He played a FedEx delivery man who finds himself in a life-and-death situation. Throughout the movie, FedEx branding and packages are featured prominently, in which Hanks' character keeps his sanity by vowing to find his way back home to deliver a letter. The movie's underlying message was, come hell or high water, FedEx will deliver and get the job done.

II. Reverse Positioning:

Stripping a product to its baseline, removing non-essential features, and reintroducing it with selectively added attributes to create a unique competitive position. It moves the product from the Maturity Phase back to the Growth Phase in its PLC. The best example we give here is of the brand "Dove," which instead of solely focusing on the hygiene aspect of soap, actively promotes body positivity and self-acceptance through campaigns that celebrate women's natural beauty, effectively creating a deeper emotional connection with consumers beyond just the product itself.

Another example is of reverse positioning in India is IKEA, which entered the furniture market by focusing on offering affordable, self-assembly furniture, going against the traditional model of high-end, fully assembled pieces offered by other furniture stores, thereby attracting a large customer base who were looking for value and design without the high price tag; essentially "reversing" the expected experience in the furniture buying process. The low-cost, flat-pack design unlike competitors who emphasize on high-quality, pre-assembled furniture, IKEA focused on providing accessible, flat-pack furniture that customers could assemble themselves, lowering costs significantly. IKEA stores are designed to be interactive, allowing customers to explore and build their own furniture, creating a unique shopping experience.

III. Breakaway Positioning:

This strategy allows a product to break free from its current category and position itself within a new one. This shift influences how the product is perceived and consumed by the consumer, creating a fresh identity and appeal. It moves the product from the Maturity Phase back to the Growth Phase in its PLC. A major example of breakaway positioning in India is "Swatch watches," which positioned themselves as a fashion accessory rather than a high-end luxury timepiece, effectively separating themselves from the traditional Swiss watch market and creating a new category for affordable, stylish watches in the Indian market; essentially "breaking away" from the established perception of expensive watches. A breakaway campaign stands out, as it can connect with the consumer at a different level. The brands which follow breakaway strategy always try and maintain their niche. They create their own image in the mind of consumers which can't be associated with any other brand. This helps the brand in retaining their consumers. Brands create their niche by introducing such features which are not available in any other product, or the pricing is such that no other brand can match it, etc. Once the brand establishes itself in this type of strategy, consumers also get interested in other products from the same brand.

Nestle's breakaway was a brand of chocolate-covered digestive biscuit from Nestlé called Kit Kat, which started production in 1970 in the United Kingdom, manufactured by Rowntree Mackintosh Confectionery. Nestlé acquired the brand in 1988. This somewhat simple name was derived from the Kit Kat Club, an exclusive 18th-century club for the elite in London. The name was chosen to add a hint of sophistication and grandness to this sweet and smooth snack.

IV. Positioning Strategies And Product Life Cycle Stages:

Disruptive positioning" is used by marketers at distinctive Product Life Cycle (PLC). This refers to a marketing strategy where a company purposely challenges the established norms within a market by introducing a product or service that disrupts the existing competition, often by targeting underserved segments or offering a fundamentally different value proposition, which can be particularly effective during the growth or maturity stages of the PLC when the market becomes saturated with similar offerings.

Strategy	PLC	Purpose	Example
Reverse Positioning	Maturity	Differentiates in saturated markets to extend product life.	IKEA
Breakaway Positioning	Maturity to Growth or Introduction	Escapes competition by redefining categories.	Swatch
Stealth Positioning	Introduction	Introduces disruptive products subtly to gain acceptance.	Tata Nano

V. Conclusion:

A prominent example of a disruptive strategy in India is Flipkart's entry into the e-commerce market, where they successfully challenged established players by offering a convenient online platform with a robust delivery system, targeting a previously underserved market segment in India, ultimately becoming a major player in the Indian retail landscape; effectively disrupting the traditional brick-and-mortar retail model. To successfully implement brand positioning strategies, brands must shift focus from industry competition to alternatives and non-customers, broadening the scope of how customer needs can be met.

A disruptive strategy can benefit a firm by allowing them to tap into new market segments, gain a competitive advantage by offering innovative products or services at a lower price point, potentially disrupting established players in the industry, and driving significant growth by creating new customer bases; essentially, it can open up new opportunities and challenge the status quo, forcing a company to adapt and innovate further.

This paper is written by authors as an empirical study based on secondary data. Both authors are of opinion that in todays minute-to minute changing market, disruptive positioning strategies can work to the benefit of the marketers.

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