

A framework for brand positioning strategies

What positioning strategies should be used to build an effective and efficient brand portfolio?

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Management Summary

Most mass marketing markets are dead. Today's consumers need variety and choice and organizations need to use more than one brand to serve a certain market share. As a result, there are several brands available on most markets. Each of these brands is usually meant for a specific target audience, a so-called market segment. Organizations should establish and communicate the offering's distinctive benefits to each market segment by using market positioning. Market positioning could be based on several brand properties. This research shows that most brands are positioned on values, target audience, emotional benefits, as prototype brand and on price. Based on the most used positioning strategies of existing brands, fifteen more concrete strategies were defined. Eight of those positioning strategies were considered to be appealing. Overall, positioning strategies based on the price, quality, knowledge and experience, simplicity, giving a comfort feeling, sustainability, attention for the individual customer and the possibility to customize the product or service seemed to be appealing. Brands positioned on target audience and positioned as prototype brand were popular in terms of recall, recognition and purchase intention. But, respondents didn't answer that they prefer a brand meant for their target audience, a brand which matches their personality, the best brand or the most innovative brand. Therefore, it's expected that consumers prefer these brands more conscious.

The product category's entity (product or service) and price level seemed to have influence on whether positioning strategies were considered to be appealing. In general, more positioning strategies were considered to be appealing for services and higher priced product categories. The positioning strategy "sustainability" was also influenced by personal characteristics. Moreover, the involvement in the product category and purchase frequency had influence on the degree to which positioning strategies were considered to be appealing.

To build an effective and efficient brand portfolio, organizations should market multiple brands which all fulfill a specific role in the minds of the target audience. To do so, brands should use a prototype brand and brands distinguished based on other benefits. Those benefits should include the price/quality ratio, sustainability and the market approach (mass approach or a more individualistic approach). All brands should simply offer the product or service and give a comfort feeling by meeting the segment's demands. Of course, the product category's entity, the price level and the characteristics of the target audience should be taken into consideration when choosing a positioning strategy.

Dutch summary

Massa marketing markten bestaan eigenlijk niet meer. Consumenten zijn steeds gevarieerder geworden en organisaties hebben meer dan één merk nodig om een gewenst marktaandeel te veroveren. Hierdoor zijn er op de meeste markten vaak veel verschillende merken verkrijgbaar. Elk van deze merken is bedoeld voor een specifieke doelgroep, een zogenoemd segment. Om de doelgroep te laten weten wat het merk onderscheidt van andere merken om de markt wordt het merk gepositioneerd. Dit positioneren kan op verschillende manieren gebeuren. Dit onderzoek laat zien dat de meeste merken gepositioneerd zijn op basis van waarden, de doelgroep, emotionele voordelen, als prototype of op prijs. Gebaseerd op de positioneringstrategieën van de bestaande merken werden 15 concretere strategieën gedefinieerd. Acht van deze strategieën kunnen als aantrekkelijk worden beschouwd. Over het algemeen zijn de strategieën gebaseerd op prijs, kwaliteit, kennis en ervaring, simpelheid, het creëren van een geruststellend gevoel, duurzaamheid, aandacht voor de individuele klant de mogelijkheid om het product aan te passen aantrekkelijk. Daarnaast werden merken gepositioneerd als prototype of op doelgroep vaak genoemd, herkend en overwogen. Respondenten antwoordden echter niet dat zij een voorkeur hebben voor een merk dat bedoeld is voor hun doelgroep, dat aansluit bij hun persoonlijkheid, het beste merk op de markt is of het meest innovatieve merk is. Daarom wordt verwacht dat consumenten onbewust een voorkeur voor deze merken hebben.

De aard van het product (product of dienst) en de prijsklasse bleken invloed te hebben op de mate waarin een positioneringstrategie aantrekkelijk is. Over het algemeen waren meer strategieën aantrekkelijk voor diensten en voor een hogere prijsklasse. Demografische eigenschappen bleken invloed te hebben op de voorkeur voor duurzaamheid.

Om een effectief en efficiënt merkportfolio te bouwen zou een organisatie meerdere merken op de markt moeten hebben. Al deze merken moeten als uniek worden beschouwd door de doelgroep. Daarbij zou een organisatie gebruik moeten maken van zowel een merk gepositioneerd als prototype als merken gepositioneerd op andere eigenschappen. Deze eigenschappen hebben onder andere betrekking op de prijs/kwaliteit verhouding, duurzaamheid en de marktbenadering (wel of géén aandacht voor de individuele klant). Al deze merken moeten het product zo simpel mogelijk aanbieden en de consument een geruststellend gevoel geven door te voldoen aan diens wensen. Uiteraard moet een organisatie daarbij rekening houden met eigenschappen van zowel het product als de doelgroep.

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Introduction

Most large firms operating in consumer markets own and market more than one brand; they have a brand portfolio (Morgan & Rego, 2009). For example, Unilever markets the detergent brands Neutral, OMO, Robijn and Sunil. Achmea markets the health insurance brands Agis, Avéro, DVZ/ Prolife, FBTO, Interpolis, OZF Achmea and Zilveren Kruis Achmea and Volkswagen markets the car brands Audi, Seat, Skoda and Volkswagen. Since in general no single brand can cover a market on its own, an organization needs to use several brands if it wants to gain a certain market share (Kapferer, 2012; Kekre & Srinivasan, 1990). The natural tendency during the growth of firms has been to add new brands each time the organization wants to penetrate new market segments or new distribution channels (Kapferer, 2012). In general, most firms begin with a single product or brand and become multi-product firms over time (Rao, Agarwal, Dahlhoff, 2004).

To distinguish a brand from competitors and to create brand value, an organization uses a brand positioning strategy. This brand positioning strategy is defined as "a company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market" (Kotler & Keller, 2012). If an organization markets multiple brands, these brands should be different from each other in some way. The use of positioning strategies might help an organization to differentiate those brands. The positioning strategy could be classified according to several theories and approaches (see for example Kapferer (2012), Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders & Wong (2003), Maathuis (2006) and Floor & Van Raaij (2006)). Since every product category is unique, positioning strategies could be quite appealing for some product categories whereas they are inefficient for other product categories. The aim of this research project is to develop a framework for the use of positioning strategies. It describes which positioning strategies an organization should use to create an effective and efficient portfolio. The main research question of this project is:

- **What positioning strategies should be used to build an effective and efficient brand portfolio?**

Theoretical framework

What is a brand?

Each product, service or benefit is developed to fulfill a certain basic need (Kotler et al., 2003). A brand adds dimensions that differentiate the offering in some way from the offerings designed to satisfy the same need (Kotler and Keller, 2012). According to the federal Trademark Act of 1946, a brand is "any word, name, symbol, or device, or any combination thereof, adopted and used by manufacturers or merchants to identify their goods" (Cohen, 1986). The definition of the American Marketing Association is more comprehensive. According to this institute, a brand is "a name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Aaker, 1991).

A brand has several properties. A brand is an intangible and conditional asset (Kapferer, 2012) with a recognizable personality carrying a connection between products and consumers (Blackwell, Miniard and Engel, 2006). Whereas products are mute, the brand gives the product meaning and purpose, telling us how a product should be read. A brand is both a prism and a magnifying glass through which products can be decoded (Kapferer, 2012). It is something that is added to the basic product: it's a name with power to influence buyers (Kapferer, 2012). The added value that a brand name gives to a product is commonly referred as "brand equity" (Keller, 2001).

Target marketing

Every brand is usually linked to a specific target audience, a segment. This segment consists of a group of consumers who share a similar set of needs and wants (Kotler & Keller, 2012). To serve these segments, an organization should use target marketing: breaking a market into segments and concentrating the marketing efforts on one or a few of them (Ward, 2012). Therefore, an organization should identify and distinguish groups of consumers who differ in their needs and wants (market segmentation), select one or more markets to enter (market targeting) and establish and communicate the offering's distinctive benefit(s) to each market segment (market positioning) (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Dibb, 1998; Simkin & Dibb, 1998).

Market segmentation

In the first phase of the target marketing process the organization should allocate consumers to several segments. The aim of segmentation is to minimize the variance within segments and to maximize the variance between segments (Blackwell et al., 2006). Most segmentation is based on geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioral characteristics (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Blackwell et al., 2006; Kotler et al., 2003). Geographic segmentation divides the market into geographical units such as nations, states, regions, countries, cities and neighborhoods. Demographic segmentation includes variables such as age, gender, education, family size, family lifecycle, occupation, religion, race, generation, nationality and social class. Psychographic segmentation makes use of psychological/personality traits, lifestyle or values. In behavioral segmentation, the market is divided based on consumer's knowledge of, attitude toward, use of, or response to a product (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Market targeting

The next step in the target marketing process is targeting: choosing one or more segments to enter (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Therefore, the attractiveness of each segment should be well considered. To be attractive, market segments must be measurable, substantial, accessible, differentiable and actionable (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Dibb, 1998). To determine and consider the uniqueness of each market segment, Datta (1996) distinguished three types of characteristics: consumer characteristics, product characteristics and situation-benefit-specific consumer characteristics.

If an organization decides to enter multiple segments, the organization might need to use more than one brand. Today's consumers are becoming increasingly diverse and their needs can no longer be satisfied by a mass marketing approach (Dibb, 1998). They need variety and choice (Datta, 1996). Therefore, organizations need to use a multi brand strategy to gain a certain market share. This multiple brand strategy helps an organization to satisfy heterogeneous consumer needs and to build a larger market share (Chen & Liu, 2004; Kekre & Srinivasan, 1990). Due to this strategy, an organization could serve different groups of consumers with different needs and different expectations (Kapferer, 2012). The organization is able to market different products with a different price tag and a different combination of product characteristics (Datta, 1996). For example, KPN markets four different markets which are all linked to a specific market segment. With its multi brand strategy, KPN is able to serve young people (Hi), people who prefer a low priced phone subscription with limited service (Simyo), people who prefer a low priced phone subscription with more personal attention and a

physical store (Telfort) and the more business consumers (KPN). Due to this strategy, the company serves a greater share of the total mobile phone providing market.

Covering a larger market share might not be the only reason to use a multiple brand strategy. Morgan & Rego (2009) showed that the number of brands owned and market is positively associated with the firms Tobin's q (the ratio between the market value and replacement value of the same physical asset) and consumer loyalty, as well with lower contemporaneous cash flow variability. Moreover, they showed that serving a greater number of market segments is associated with lower relative advertising and SG&A (selling, general and administrative) expenses. Either, there are also several disadvantages in owning multiple brands. The main disadvantage in using multiple brands is that the brands within the portfolio might limit each other in several ways because they compete with each other. As a result, no one of the brands will be very profitable (Kotler et al., 2003) and consumers might switch between brands within the portfolio (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Morgan & Rego, 2009). A larger brand portfolio could also decrease the value of the brands within the portfolio and could increase price competition (Morgan & Rego, 2009). Broader portfolios are also inefficient because they lower manufacturing and distribution economies and dilute marketing expenditure (Morgan & Rego, 2009).

After the organization has decided which market segment(s) to enter and whether to use one brand or a multi brand strategy, the organization should define each brand. Market positioning should be used to do so.

Market positioning

The last stage of the target marketing process is the positioning stage: establishing and communicating the offering's distinctive benefit to each target segment (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The aim of positioning is to identify, and take possession of, a strong purchasing rationale that gives the consumer a real or perceived advantage. Thus, it is a key concept in brand management. Positioning is a two way process, covering the determination of the brands competitors and the distinctive properties of the brand (Kapferer, 2012).

First, an organization should indicate to what "competitive set" the brand should be associated and compared (Kapferer, 2012). According to Kotler & Keller (2012) this set covers the products or set of products with which a brand competes and which function as close substitutes. Positioning is categorizing: which brands do consumers see as competitive brands? (Floor & Van Raaij, 2002).

Second, an organization should indicate the brand's essential difference and *raison d'être* (its absolute necessity) in comparison to the other products and brands of this set (Kapferer, 2012). To determine this difference, the unique selling proposition is used. The unique selling proposition covers the benefits which a product offers to consumers (Blackwell et al., 2006; Kotler et al., 2003). Kotler & Keller (2012) describe these unique benefits as the Points-of-Difference (POD): the attributes or benefits that consumers strongly associate with a brand, positive evaluate and believe that they could not find to the same extent with a competitive brand. Points-of-Parity (POP) are attributes or benefit associations that are not necessarily unique to the brand, but may be shared by other brands. Marketers typically focus on brand benefits in choosing the POPs and PODs that make up their brand positioning (Kotler & Keller, 2012). According to Kapferer (2012) the distinctive characteristics of a brand can be summed up in the following four questions: "a brand for what benefit?", "a brand for whom?" (which covers the target aspect), "the reason for the brand?" (supporting the claimed benefits) and "a brand against whom?" (describing the competitors).

Deciding on a positioning strategy requires (1) determining a frame of reference, (2) identifying the optimal points-of-parity and points-of-difference brand associations and (3) creating a brand mantra. This brand mantra is an articulation of the brand essence and promise, economically communicating what the brand is and what it's not in short three- to five word phrases (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Establishing the positioning requires that consumers understand what the brand offers and what it makes it a superior competitive choice (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

There are several classifications of the positioning strategy. Floor & Van Raaij (2006) distinguish four kinds of positioning strategies: informational positioning (based on rational benefits), transformational positioning (based on the brand image), two-sided positioning (based on both rational benefits and the brand image) and execution positioning (based on the execution of the marketing campaign). The classifications of Kapferer (2012), Maathuis (2006) and Kotler et al. (2003) are more extensive. Kotler et al. (2003) distinguished positioning on rational product characteristics, moment of usage, target audience, activities, personalities and the place of origin. Kapferer (2012) suggest that positioning could be based on a differentiating attribute, an objective benefit, a subjective benefit, an aspect of the brand's personality, the realm of the imaginary, a reflection of a consumer type and "deep values". The classification of Maathuis (2006) covers strategies of both Kapferer (2012) and Kotler et al. (2003), but the realm of the imaginary, personalities and place of origin were excluded.

Maathuis' framework covers ten positioning strategies: rational benefits, moment of usage, price, target audience, distribution process, design, values, emotional benefits, mentality and positioning as prototype brand. Because of its completeness and versatility, the framework of Maathuis was used to compare positioning strategies within this research project.

Compensation of the brand portfolio

The brand portfolio reflects the market segmentation and branding strategies chosen by the company (Kapferer, 2012). Central to any brand strategy is the brand portfolio management - the ability to organize all the firm's brands into a coherent brand portfolio and manage the complex interrelationships in these portfolios (Kuzmina, 2009). Companies managing brand portfolios must address two primary tasks: optimizing the structure of the portfolio and adapting the portfolio to changes in the market or strategic directions of the firm (Kuzmina, 2009).

If the organization has decided to use a multi brand strategy, all brands within the brand portfolio should have a distinctive place in the minds of the target market. The portfolio should not be an accumulation of independent brands, but should be a reflection of a global strategy of the market domination (Kapferer, 2012). As suggested by Kuzmina (2009), using multiple brands would only be strategically viable if each brand is linked to a specific target segment and has a unique market position.

A framework for brand positioning strategies

The aim of this research project is to develop a framework for brand positioning strategies. The importance of multiple brands is widely described, but less is known about the composition of the brand portfolio and the positioning strategies to use. This research project describes how appealing several positioning strategies are and compares those strategies among several characteristics. As described, the main research question of this project is:

- **What positioning strategies should be used to build an effective and efficient brand portfolio?**

Each product category has unique characteristics, which makes positioning strategies more or less appealing for this category. For example, positioning on design isn't applicable for a health insurances and positioning on a low price might be seen as unreliable for mortgages. Therefore, the positioning strategies are compared among several product characteristics, which enables brand managers to apply the findings to their own product category. Product

categories could be compared based on several characteristics as described in Table 1. In this research project brands are compared based on their entity (product or service) and price level (low, middle or high).

Table 1
Product characteristics described in this research project

Variable	Described by	Categories
Entity	Kotler & Keller (2012)	Products
		Services
	Murphy & Enis (1986)	Products
		Services
Price level	Murphy & Enis (1986)	Low
		Middle
		High

Entity of the offer

A brand could offer a product, a service or a combination thereof. Kotler & Keller (2012) and Murphy & Enis (1986) suggest that there are fundamental differences in products and services which may have implications for brand equity. These differences might also have influence on the degree to which positioning strategies are considered to be appealing. First, services are intangible (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Kotler et al., 2003). Unlike physical products, services cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard, or smelled before they are bought. Second, services are inseparable (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Kotler et al., 2003). Whereas physical goods are manufactured, then inventoried, then distributed and later consumed, services are typically produced and consumed simultaneously. Third, services are variable because the quality depends on who provides them, when and where and to whom; whereas the quality of products is quite stable (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Kotler et al., 2003). Walgren, Ruble & Donthu (1995) describe that services are less standardized and are composed of largely of abstract, experience contributes and the values which must be inferred by consumers than products are. Fourth, services are perishable (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Kotler et al., 2003). Unlike products, services cannot be stored so their perishability can be a problem if the demand fluctuates. Fifth, services don't have an owner (Kotler et al., 2003). After buying a product, consumers own the product for an indefinite period whereas services don't have a physical owner. Therefore, organizations have to pay more attention to create a brand identity and an affective relation with the customer (Kotler et al., 2003).

It is expected that consumers experience the intangibility, the variability and the lack of ownership of services. The intangibility and variability might have influence on the purchase process. These characteristics cause a higher level of uncertainty and perceived risk, which might lead to a more comprehensive purchase process. Besides, consumers might be more invariable in their brand choice or take other considerations into account. Therefore, both products and services were included and compared in the research. To examine the influence of the entity of the offer, the following research question was included:

1. What positioning strategies are most appealing to consumers for (1) product brands and (2) service brands?

Price level

Murphy & Enis (1986) described the importance of price in product classification. In their research, two price dimensions were distinguished: effort and risk. Effort is defined as the objective amount of money and time it takes to purchase a product. It can be measured in quantifiable terms – dollars and units of time. Risk is the buyer's subjective assessment of the consequences of making a purchase mistake (Murphy & Enis, 1986). It is expected that the purchase process for products or services with lower effort and risk is quite different from products or services with higher effort and risk. For example, if less money is spend during the purchase process, it is expected that less alternatives are taken into consideration and less product properties are considered to be important than if more money is spend (and the perceived risk and effort are higher). Therefore, low priced, middle priced and high priced categories were included and compared in this research project. To examine the influence of the price level, the following research question was included:

2. What positioning strategies are most appealing to consumers for brands with (1) a low price level, (2) a medium price level and (3) a high price level?

Personal characteristics

It's also useful to get an insight in the influence of personal characteristics. Just like product characteristics, personal characteristics might influence the degree to which positioning strategies are considered to be appealing. As described, there are four major criteria to distinguish consumers and their personal characteristics: geographical, demographical, psychological and behavioral characteristics (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Blackwell et al., 2006; Kotler et al., 2003). Since segmentation is often based on demographic variables (Blackwell et al., 2006) these variables were included in this research project. This enables brand

managers to decide which positioning strategy to use if a brand is positioned on a specific target audience.

Demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics often affect how consumers make choices to buy and use goods and services (Blackwell et al., 2006). They are also popular for marketers because they are often associated with consumer needs and they are easy to measure (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Therefore, it's useful to get an insight in the influence of these characteristics on the attitude toward positioning strategies. The demographic variables age, gender, education and economic circumstances were included in this research project.

Involvement in the product category

According to Blackwell et al. (2006), the personal involvement is a key factor in shaping the type of decision process that consumers will follow. It's expected that several positioning strategies might be less appealing for low involved consumers than for consumers with a higher level of involvement. Therefore, the involvement in the product category is included in this research project.

Purchase frequency

The decision process might also be influenced by the purchase frequency. It's expected that consumers take less considerations into account if a product category is frequently bought than if it's infrequently bought. Therefore, the purchase frequency was included in this research project as well.

To summarize, the influence of demographic characteristics, the level of involvement and the purchase frequency were included. To examine the influence of those characteristics, the following research question was included:

- 3. Which personal aspects in terms of (1) demographic characteristics, (2) involvement in the product category and (3) purchase frequency do have influence on the degree to which positioning strategies are considered to be appealing for consumers?**

Methodology

The aim of this research project is to develop a framework for brand positioning strategies. An exploratory research was done to get an insight in the most used strategies, after which a survey was conducted to examine the degree to which these strategies were considered to be appealing. To get an integral view, different product categories were used. The theoretical framework showed that there is much difference between product categories in terms of the entity of the offer and the price level. Those two variables served as independent variables in both the exploratory research as well the main research.

The product categories used in this research project combine the entity of the offer (product vs service) and the price level (low vs middle vs high). To make the product categories comparable with each other, each product or service should be offered by more than one company and the availability of the product or services should be independent of someone's geographical living area. The product categories detergent, televisions, cars, mobile phone providers, health insurances and mortgages meet these requirements and were used. The selection of the organizations and brands within those product categories is described in Appendix 1.

Exploratory research

Aim

The aim of this exploratory research was to get an insight in how organizations manage their brand portfolios. It covers the number of brands managed by each organization and the positioning strategies used by these brands.

Method

The exploratory research was a content analysis based research. The research covered 37 organizations (three for detergent, eleven for televisions, nine for cars, seven for mobile phone subscriptions, three for health insurances and four for mortgages). The websites, commercials and annual reports of brands and organizations were used to determine the positioning strategies of these brands.

The exploratory research had two focuses: getting insight in the used branding strategies and getting insight in the used positioning strategies. The branding strategy involves the number of brands and the number of brand levels to be implemented, the role of the corporate in the

product value communication, the relative weights of these brands and their arrangement and the degree of globalization (Kapferer, 2012).

To determine the branding strategy, the number of brands market by the organization and the offered product types were analyzed. A multi brand strategy was defined as offering the same product type on the same market under multiple names.

To determine a brand's positioning strategy, the unique selling proposition and the description were analyzed. The unique selling proposition is defined as "the unique product benefit(s) which a product offers to consumers" (Blackwell et al., 2006; Kotler et al., 2003). The description is any text an organization uses to emphasize the brand properties, which could be communicated using a descriptor, a slogan or a tagline (Dijkstra, 2010). Brand positioning strategies were distinguished based on the classification of Maathuis (2006). This classification covers ten positioning strategies: prototype, rational benefits, moments, price, target audience, distribution, design, values, emotional benefits and mentality.

Results

A multi brand strategy is often used among all product categories. But, organizations which offer televisions often use only one brand. Overall, each organization markets between one and eight brands ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.98$). The number of market brand was quite high for health insurances ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 2.31$) and quite low for televisions ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.67$). The average number of brands market per service organization ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 2.35$) was higher than the average number of brands for organization which offer products ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.75$). There was little difference in the number of market brands per price level (low price level: $M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.65$, average price level: $M = 2.29$, $SD = 2.13$, high price level: $M = 2.92$, $SD = 2.14$). Appendix 1 describes the average number of brands and the used branding strategies per organizations.

Overall, the positioning strategies values (28.1%), prototype (18.8%), target audience (15.6%), price (14.6%), design (10.4%) and emotional benefits (10.4%) were used by most brands. Brands positioned on values often emphasized "corporate social responsibility", "consumer relationships", "simply offering the product" and "innovation". Most detergent brands were positioned on price (25.0%), as prototype (16.7%), on target audience (16.7%) and on values (16.7%). Most television brands were positioned as prototype (38.9%), on emotional benefits (27.8%) and values (16.7%). Most car brands are positioned on design (34.8%), values (23.1%) and price (19.2%), most mobile phone providing brands are positioned on price (50.0%) and target audience (25.0%) and most health insurance brands are

positioned on target audience (29.4%) and values (64.7%). Most mortgage brands are positioned as prototype (54.5%) and on values (36.4%). Appendix 1 describes the average number of brands and the used branding strategies per organizations more extensive.

Conclusion and discussion

The exploratory research showed that a multi brand strategy is often used. The brands within these portfolios are mostly positioned on values, on target audience, positioned as the prototype brand, or positioned on price. If a brand is positioned on values, "corporate social responsibility", "consumer relationships", "simply offering the product" and "innovation" were often emphasized. Figure 1 shows the used positioning strategies for all product categories.

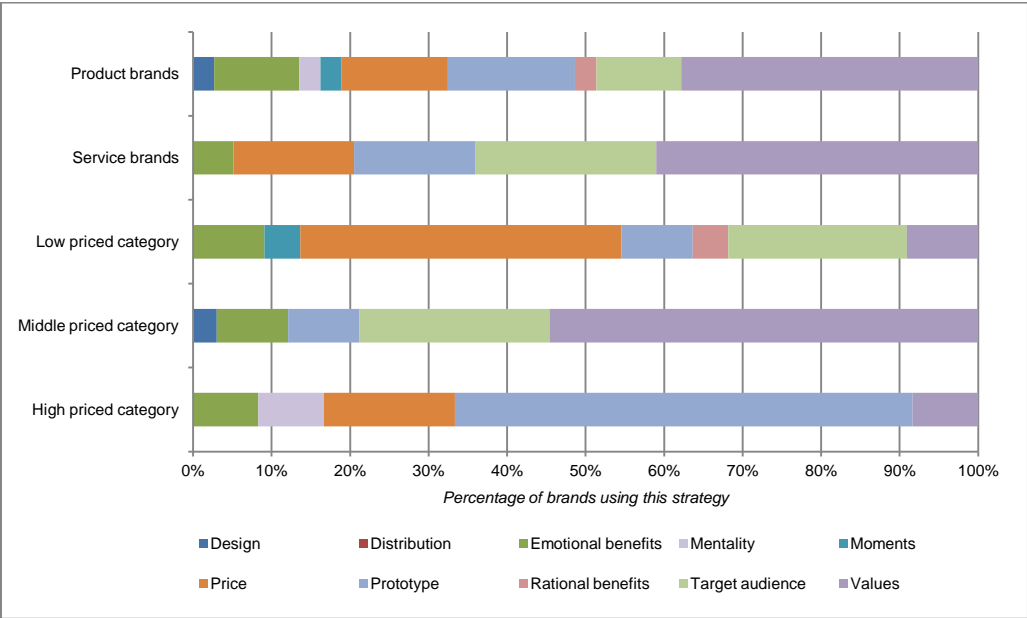


Figure 1. The usage of positioning strategies as distinguished by Maathuis (2006) among product characteristics.

Applying the findings to the main research

This exploratory research described several brands and brand portfolios. To limit the size of the main research several of those brands were excluded. Mobile phone providers without an own network (so-called MVNO's) were excluded from the research. These brands are all positioned on a low price and are barely different from each other. Health insurance brands for consumers with a specific job were also excluded. Because these brands are meant for a small target group it's less relevant to get an insight in the brand equity of these brands. In total, 62 brands were used for the main research. There was little difference in the number of used products (33) and services (29), as well the number of low priced (18), middle priced (22) and high priced (22) product categories.

Also the most used positioning strategies were included in the main research. This means that the main research covers the positioning strategies "prototype", "rational benefits", "target audience", "price", "emotional benefits" and "values". Values were distinguished in "corporate social responsibility (CSR)", "consumer relationships", "innovation" and "simplicity".

Main research

The main research was a questionnaire which measured whether positioning strategies are considered to be appealing among several product categories.

Research design

The research was a 2 (product vs service) x 3 (low price vs middle price vs high price) within subjects design. A web-based survey created, in LimeSurvey version 1.91+, was used. This method was chosen because of the ability to collect standardized data (Downs & Adrian, 2004), its low costs (Downs & Adrian, 2004; Andrews, Nonnecke & Preece, 2003), its quick distribution, its flexibility and ease to fill in (Andrews, Nonnecke & Preece, 2003).

Respondents

Relatives were approached to fill in and forward the survey. The survey was filled in by 113 respondents (44.2% male, 55.8% female). Their age varies from 16 until 67 years ($M = 35.2$ years, $SD = 13$ years). It is expected that most respondents were first or second grade relatives.

Measurement instrument

The measurement existed of two kinds of variables: variables related to product categories and variables related to personal characteristics.

Variables related to product categories

An open and a closed question were used to determine whether positioning strategies were considered to be appealing. In the open question, respondents had to call which factors determine their brand choice. In the closed ended question respondents had to rank 15 positioning strategies on a five point Likert scale from unimportant to important. The results from the exploratory research were used to determine those 15 strategies. Appendix 2 describes the selection of those strategies.

Either, it's expected that both questions only measure conscious considerations. Therefore, the survey also measured how consumers respond to existing brands. It's expected that those responses give an insight in how effective the used positioning strategies are. To measure those responses, the recall, recognition and purchase intention of existing brands were measured. Those variables were based on Keller's (2001) measurement of brand salience, which is related to aspects of customer awareness of the brand.

Variables related to personal characteristics

The survey also measured whether positioning strategies were considered to be appealing among personal characteristics. Those personal characteristics exist of demographical characteristics, the involvement in the product category and the purchase frequency. The demographic characteristics include age, gender, education and income. Several categories were created to compare consumers based on these characteristics. Table 2 describes these categories. The measurement of these categories is described in Appendix 3.1.

Table 2
Categories within the demographic characteristics

Age	Gender	Education	Income
Younger than 18	Male	Low	Until € 833.-
18 until 25 years	Female	Middle	€ 833.- until € 1,677.-
25 until 35 years		High	Higher than € 1,677.-
35 until 50 years			
50 until 65 years			
65 until 80 years			
80 years and older			

To measure the involvement in the product category, the Personal Involvement Inventory (Zaichkowsky, 1985, 1994) was used. In this construct, respondents had to rank ten statements related to the product category (five positive and five reversed). Based on the median scores, respondent were assigned to a low, middle or high level of involvement. The measurement and classification of the involvement in the product category is described in Appendix 3.2. To measure the purchase frequency, respondents had to answer how often they purchase a certain product. Based on these answers, a low purchase frequency (bought than less once per 22 months) and a high purchase frequency (bought more than once per 22 months) were distinguished.

Order of the questions

As suggested by Downs & Adrian (2004), the questions were grouped by product category. This means that the survey exists of six question groups to measure the items related to each product category and one question group to measure the demographic variables. Within the product type related question groups, variables related to the entire product category (involvement, purchase frequency, the factors which determine the brand choice and the degree to which positioning strategies were considered to be appealing) were measured first. Variables related to brands (brand recall, brand recognition and purchase intention) were measured at last. The aim of this order was to limit the influence of the brands on the brand independent variables.

Because of possible drop outs, demographic variables were measured first. To be sure that the number of filled in questions related to each product category won't differ too much, the six question groups related to product categories should appear in a random order. Either, the order of the items within each question group should be fixed to prevent the order effects within those groups as described in the previous paragraph. Unfortunately, it was technically impossible to create question groups which appear in a random order with a fixed order within those question groups. To solve this problem, four different versions of the survey were created. Based on their month of birth, respondents were assigned to one of the four versions. This method was rather effective: all product groups were filled in between 69 and 78 times ($M = 72.2$, $SD = 3.7$). Appendix 3.3 describes the assignment to the four versions of the survey.

Procedure

As described before, respondents were approached by e-mail to fill in and forward the survey. The aim and subject of the survey were not mentioned.

Results

The results are organized in four sections: factors determining the brand choice, appealing positioning strategies, the influence of personal characteristics on these strategies and the brand salience. The first section covers the open ended question which pertained the factors that determine their brand choice. The second part describes the rating of the 15 positioning strategies and the third section describes the influence of personal characteristics on these strategies. The last section covers the brand salience, including the brand knowledge and the purchase attention of several brands.

Factors determining the brand choice

In the open question, respondents had to call which factors determine their brand choice. A low price (63.5%), a good quality (25.2%) and technical specifications (11.1%) were often mentioned among all product categories. For health insurances also the compensation and cover (18.8%) and reliability (14.2%) were often mentioned. Appendix 4.1 describes the factors called in the open question more detailed.

Appealing positioning strategies

Each positioning strategy is described separate. First, it's described whether this strategy was considered to be appealing. Therefore a One Sample T-Test (test value 3) was used.

Appealing positioning strategies had a mean score significantly higher than 3.

Second, the influence of the product characteristics on each positioning strategy was described. It was described whether this positioning strategy was considered to be appealing for each entity of the offer (product vs service) and price level (low vs middle vs high). Again, a One Sample T-Test (test value 3) was used. It was also described whether there were differences between the product characteristics. This was done by using an Independent Samples T-test (to compare products and services) and an analysis of variance (to compare low, middle and high priced product categories). For all tests, a reliability level of $\alpha = .05$ was used.

I. The best brand on the market

In general, the positioning strategy "the best brand on the market" wasn't considered to be appealing ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.06$, $t(432) = -3.52$, $p = .004$), neither for one of the product characteristics.

II. Innovativeness

In general, the positioning strategy "innovativeness" wasn't considered to be appealing ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.19$, $t(432) = -3.26$, $p = .001$), neither for one of the product characteristics.

III. Knowledge and experience

In general, the positioning strategy "knowledge and experience" was considered to be appealing ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.28$, $t(432) = 6.86$, $p < .001$). The strategy was considered to be appealing among all product characteristics, except for product categories with a low price level. Table 3 describes the mean scores for product characteristics.

Table 3

Mean scores on the positioning strategy "knowledge and experience" among product characteristics

	Entity		Price level		
	Product	Service	Low	Middle	High
Mean	3.13 *	3.66 *	2.88	3.73 *	3.67 *
Standard deviation	1.30	1.22	1.32	1.16	1.19

Note. Respondents had to rank the statement "the brand should have knowledge and experience" on a five point scale from unappealing to appealing.

* = significant appealing at $p = .050$.

There were significant differences in the mean scores on this positioning strategy for the price levels ($F(432) = 22.18$, $p < .001$). Compared to low priced product categories, average priced products categories ($t(290) = 5.88$, $p < .001$) and high priced products categories ($t(286) = 5.38$, $p < .001$) score significantly higher on this strategy.

IV. A good quality

In general, the positioning strategy "a good quality" was considered to be appealing ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.08$, $t(432) = 21.73$, $p < .001$). This strategy was considered to be appealing for all product characteristics. Table 4 describes the mean scores for product characteristics.

Table 4

Mean scores on the positioning strategy "a good quality" among product characteristics

	Entity		Price level		
	Product	Service	Low	Middle	High
Mean	4.20 *	4.06 *	3.95 *	4.40 *	4.05 *
Standard deviation	1.05	1.11	1.15	0.89	1.15

Note. Respondents had to rank the statement "the brand should have a good quality" on a five point scale from unappealing to appealing.

* = significant appealing at $p = .050$.

V. Matching my target group

In general, the positioning strategy "matching my target group" wasn't considered to be appealing ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.36$, $t(432) = -3.45$, $p = .001$), neither for one of the product characteristics.

VI. Matching my personality

In general, the positioning strategy "matching my personality" wasn't considered to be appealing ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.37$, $t(432) = -3.16$, $p = .002$), neither for one of the product characteristics.

VII. A low price

In general, the positioning strategy "a low price" was considered to be appealing ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.13$, $t(432) = 17.02$, $p < .001$). This strategy was also considered to be appealing for all product characteristics. Table 5 describes the mean scores for product characteristics.

Table 5

Mean scores on the positioning strategy "a low price" among product characteristics

	Entity		Price level		
	Product	Service	Low	Middle	High
Mean	3.90 *	3.95 *	4.07 *	3.99 *	3.83 *
Standard deviation	1.12	1.15	1.22	0.98	1.08

Note. Respondents had to rank the statement "the brand should have a low price" on a five point scale from unappealing to appealing.

* = significant appealing at $p = .050$.

VIII. Creating the right ambiance

In general, the positioning strategy "creating the right ambiance" wasn't considered to be appealing ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.20$, $t(432) = -2.69$, $p = .007$), neither for one of the product characteristics.

IX. Giving a comfort feeling

In general, the positioning strategy "giving a comfort feeling" was considered to be appealing ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.31$, $t(432) = 6.68$, $p < .001$). This strategy was considered to be appealing for services, middle priced product categories and high priced product categories.

Table 6 describes the mean scores per product characteristic.

Table 6

Mean scores on the positioning strategy "giving a comfort feeling" among product characteristics

	Entity		Price level		
	Product	Service	Low	Middle	High
Mean	3.11	3.74 *	2.77	3.70 *	3.82 *
Standard deviation	1.31	1.23	1.32	1.11	1.23

Note. Respondents had to rank the statement "the brand should give a comfort feeling" on a five point scale from unappealing to appealing.

* = significant appealing at $p = .050$.

Services score significantly higher on this positioning strategy than products ($t(431) = 5.10$, $p < .001$). There were also significant differences in the mean scores on this positioning strategy for the price levels ($F(432) = 31.79$, $p = .001$). Compared to low priced product categories, average priced products categories ($t(290) = 6.49$, $p < .001$) and high priced products categories ($t(286) = 6.95$, $p < .001$) score significantly higher on this strategy.

X. Used by many consumers

In general, the positioning strategy "used by many consumer" wasn't considered to be appealing ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.13$, $t(432) = -9.32$, $p < .001$), neither for one of the product characteristics.

XI. Social responsibility

In general, the positioning strategy "social responsibility" wasn't considered to be appealing ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.28$, $t(432) = -5.31$, $p < .001$), neither for one of the product characteristics.

XII. Sustainability

In general, the positioning strategy "sustainability" was considered to be appealing ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.28$, $t(432) = 3.82$, $p < .001$). The strategy was considered to be appealing for products, average priced product categories and high priced product categories. Table 7 describes the mean scores per product characteristic.

Table 7

Mean scores on the positioning strategy "sustainability" among product characteristics

	Entity		Price level		
	Product	Service	Low	Middle	High
Mean	3.34 *	3.13	3.04	3.40 *	3.27 *
Standard deviation	1.27	1.44	1.34	1.21	1.28

Note. Respondents had to rank the statement "the brand should be sustainable" on a five point scale from unappealing to appealing.

* = significant appealing at $p = .050$.

There was no significant difference between the scores for products and services ($t(431) = 1.74$, $p = .083$). There were also no significant differences in the mean scores on this positioning strategy for the price levels ($F(2) = 2.96$, $p = .053$).

XIII. Attention for the individual consumer

In general, the positioning strategy "attention for the individual consumer" wasn't considered to be appealing ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.40$, $t(432) = 0.96$, $p = .337$). But, this strategy was considered to be appealing for services, average priced product categories and high priced product categories. Table 8 describes the mean scores per product characteristic.

Table 8

Mean scores on the positioning strategy "attention for the individual consumer" among product characteristics

	Entity		Price level		
	Product	Service	Low	Middle	High
Mean	2.49	3.66 *	2.56	3.41 *	3.38 *
Standard deviation	1.30	1.28	1.11	1.28	1.38

Note. Respondents had to rank the statement "the brand should have attention for the individual consumer" on a five point scale from unappealing to appealing.

* = significant appealing at $p = .050$.

Services score significantly higher on this positioning strategy than products ($t(430) = 9.60$, $p < .001$). There were also significant differences in the mean scores on this positioning strategy for the price levels ($F(432) = 27.48$, $p = .001$). Compared to low priced product categories,

average priced products categories ($t(290) = 6.72, p < .001$) and high priced product categories ($t(286) = 6.11, p < .001$) score significantly higher on this strategy.

XIV. Possibility to customize the product

In general, the positioning strategy "possibility to customize the product" was considered to be appealing ($M = 3.52, SD = 1.30, t(432) = 8.37, p < .001$). This strategy was considered to be appealing for all positioning strategies except for products and low priced product categories. Table 9 describes the mean scores per product characteristic.

Table 9

Mean scores on the positioning strategy "possibility to customize the product" among product characteristics

	Entity		Price level		
	Product	Service	Low	Middle	High
Mean	3.11	3.95 *	3.14	3.82 *	3.62 *
Standard deviation	1.28	1.17	1.44	1.13	1.21

Note. Respondents had to rank the statement "the brand should offer the possibility to customize the product" on a five point scale from unappealing to appealing.

* = significant appealing at $p = .050$.

Services score significantly higher on this positioning strategy than products ($t(430) = 7.11, p < .001$). There were also significant differences in the mean scores on this positioning strategy for the price levels ($F(432) = 11.22, p = .001$). Compared to low priced product categories, average priced products categories score significantly higher on this positioning strategy ($t(290) = 4.52, p < .001$).

XV. Simply offering the product

In general, the positioning strategy "simply offering the product" was considered to be appealing ($M = 3.54, SD = 1.22, t(432) = 9.15, p < .001$). The strategy was considered to be appealing for all product characteristics. Table 10 describes the mean scores per product characteristic.

Table 10

Mean scores on the positioning strategy "simply offering the product" among product characteristics

	Entity		Price level		
	Product	Service	Low	Middle	High
Mean	3.39 *	3.69 *	3.39 *	3.77 *	3.45 *
Standard deviation	1.24	1.19	1.34	1.05	1.05

Note. Respondents had to rank the statement "the brand should simply offering the product" on a five point scale from unappealing to appealing.

* = significant appealing at $p = .050$.

Influence of entity and price level combination

Overall, the combination of the entity of the offer (product or service) and the price level (low, middle or high) seemed to have little influence on whether a positioning strategy was considered to be appealing or not. The positioning strategies "knowledge and experience", "giving a comfort feeling", "sustainability", attention for the individual customer", "the possibility to customize the product" and "simply offering the product" were considered to be appealing for one or more product/service and price level combinations, whereas they weren't considered to be appealing for other combinations. A multivariate analysis showed an interaction effect between the product/service and price level combination and the positioning strategies "giving a comfort feeling" ($F(2) = 6.47, p = .002$), "sustainability" ($F(2) = 5.18, p = .003$) and "the possibility to customize the product" ($F(2) = 23.86, p = .022$). Appendix 4.2 describes the influence of a specific product/service combination on the positioning strategies more extensive.

Influence of personal characteristics

The positioning strategies were also compared among personal characteristics. Again, a One Sample T-test (test value 3) was used and strategies with a mean score significantly ($\alpha = .05$) higher than 3 were considered to be appealing. This section only covers the most striking deviations: positioning strategies that were considered to be appealing by one or more cohorts whereas these strategies weren't considered to be appealing by others. Appendix 4.3 describes the influence of the personal characteristics more extensive.

Age

The positioning strategy "sustainability" was only considered to be appealing for respondents between 35 and 50 years ($t(138) = 4.97, p < .001$). The age cohort 25 until 35 years deviates more. The strategies "knowledge and experience" ($t(69) = 1.57, p = .121$), "giving a comfort feeling" ($t(69) = 1.78, p = .079$) and "simply offering the product" ($t(69) = 0.60, p = .578$) were considered to be appealing for all age cohorts, except for this group.

Gender

Men and women differ in their view on sustainability. This positioning strategy was only considered to be appealing for women ($t(242) = 4.95, p < .001$).

Level of education

The positioning strategy "sustainability" was only considered to be appealing for respondents with an average level of education ($t(148) = 4.15, p < .001$).

Income

The income also seemed to have influence on the view on sustainability. This positioning strategy was considered to be appealing for respondents with an income between € 833.- and € 1,677.- ($t(113) = 4.23, p < .001$) and higher than € 1,677.- ($t(173) = 2.13, p = .035$).

Level of involvement

The level of involvement seemed to have influence on the number of positioning strategies which were considered to be appealing. The strategies "knowledge and experience" ($t(126) = -1.24, p = 2.16$), "giving a comfort feeling" ($t(126) = -1.933, p = .055$), "sustainability" ($t(126) = -1.98, p = .050$) "attention for the individual customer" ($t(126) = -5.07, p < .001$) and "possibility to customize the product" ($t(126) = -0.82, p = .413$) weren't considered to be appealing for respondents with a lower level of involvement.

The positioning strategies "the best brand on the market" ($t(99) = 3.44, p = .001$), "innovativeness" ($t(99) = 3.82, p < .001$), "matching my target group" ($t(99) = 2.96, p = .004$), "matching my personality" ($t(99) = 2.77, p = .007$) and "creating the right ambiance" ($t(99) = 3.91, p < .001$) are only considered to be appealing for respondents with a high level of involvement.

Purchase frequency

Also the purchase frequency seemed to have influence on the number of positioning strategies which were considered to be appealing. More positioning strategies were considered to be appealing for infrequently purchased products than for frequently purchased products. The positioning strategies "knowledge and experience" ($t(233) = 2.21, p = .028$), "giving a comfort feeling" ($t(233) = 1.38, p = .170$), "sustainability" ($t(233) = .40, p = .686$), "attention for the individual customer" ($t(233) = -2.42, p = .016$) and "possibility to customize the product" ($t(233) = 2.14, p = .033$) weren't considered to be appealing for frequently bought products.

Correlations

It seems that the number of appealing positioning strategies differed for each level of involvement and for each purchase frequency. A Pearson correlation was conducted to see if the mean score of the positioning strategies and the number of strategies which were considered to be appealing correlate with the level of involvement and the purchase frequency.

There was a positive correlation between the level of involvement and the mean score on the 15 positioning strategies ($r(431) = .406, p < .001$). There was also a positive correlation between the level of involvement and the number of appealing positioning strategies ($r(431) = .344, p < .001$). There was a negative correlation between the purchase frequency and the mean score on the positioning strategies ($r(260) = -.350, p < .001$). There was also a negative correlation between the purchase frequency and the number of appealing positioning strategies ($r(260) = -.282, p < .001$). Table 11 describes the mean score and the number of appealing positioning strategies per involvement level and purchase frequency category. In general, the level of involvement has a positive influence on the mean score on the 15 positioning strategies as well the number of appealing positioning strategies, whereas the purchase frequency has a negative influence.

Table 11

Mean score and number of appealing positioning strategies among the involvement and purchase intention

Variable		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Number of appealing strategies
Involvement	Low	2.65	0.93	3
	Middle	3.28	0.70	8
	High	3.58	0.69	13
Purchase frequency	Low	3.42	0.72	8
	High	2.95	0.89	3

Brand salience

The section "brand salience" covers the recall of existing brands, the recognition of existing brands and the purchase intention of existing brands. The aim was to get an insight in the used positioning strategies of recalled and recognized brands as well the positioning strategies of brands with a high purchase intention. Therefore, Maathuis' (2006) classification of positioning strategies was used.

Used positioning strategies of recalled brands

In the recall question, respondents had to call all the brands they know within a certain product category. The positioning strategies of the recalled brands were compared among the six product categories. This comparison showed that among all categories, most recalled brands were positioned on values (32.6%), as prototype brand (18.0%), on target audience (10.7%), on price (10.3%), on emotional benefits (10.0%) and on design (5.4%). Appendix 4.4 describes the used positioning strategies of recalled brands more detailed.

Used positioning strategies of recognized brands

In this item, respondents had to answer if they know the brand name and the product or service the brand offers. The used positioning strategies of these recognized brands were compared with each other. Brands positioned on values (67.2%), as prototype (60.0%), on target audience (58.4%), emotional benefits (57.2%), price (56.6%) and rational benefits (29.0%) were recognized most. Appendix 4.5 describes the used positioning strategies per product category.

Used positioning strategies of brand with a high purchase intention

The purchase intention was measured on a five point scale. A One Sample T-Test (test value 3) showed that only the brands Robijn (emotional benefits), Philips (emotional benefits), Sony (prototype) and KPN (target audience) had a mean score significantly ($\alpha = .05$) higher than 3 and therefore had a high purchase intention among the entire sample.

But, an overall average score which isn't significantly higher than 3 doesn't mean that the brand isn't successful since there might still be several respondents who (consider to) purchase the brand. Therefore, it is more useful to compare the number of times that a brand has a positive purchase intention (which means that a respondent answered 4 or 5 on the question related to the purchase intention) with the used positioning strategies. This comparison shows that brands which are positioned on target audience (35.5%), as prototype (25.1%), on emotional benefits (24.5%), on values (19.5%) and price (16.6%) often had a high a purchase intention. Appendix 4.6 describes the used positioning strategies per product category.

Conclusion & discussion

The exploratory research showed that most of the organizations use a multi brand strategy. It is likely that the reasons for the use of this strategy correspond to the findings in the literature: organizations use multiple markets to gain a certain market share (Kapferer, 2012; Kekre & Srinivasan, 1990). The current chapter describes which positioning strategies should be used. Therefore, the influence of product characteristics and personal characteristics is described. Moreover, it describes the positioning strategies of recalled, recognized and considered brands. This chapter also contains a paragraph in which the main research question is answered and (practical) implementations are given. At last, the limitations and suggestions for further research are described.

Appealing positioning strategies among product characteristics

The research project covers two product characteristics: the entity of the offer and the price level. To describe the appealing positioning strategies among product characteristics, the research questions were used.

1. What positioning strategies are most appealing to consumers for (1) product brands and (2) service brands?

It seems that more positioning strategies are considered to be appealing for service brands than for product brands. Figure 2 describes these appealing positioning strategies.

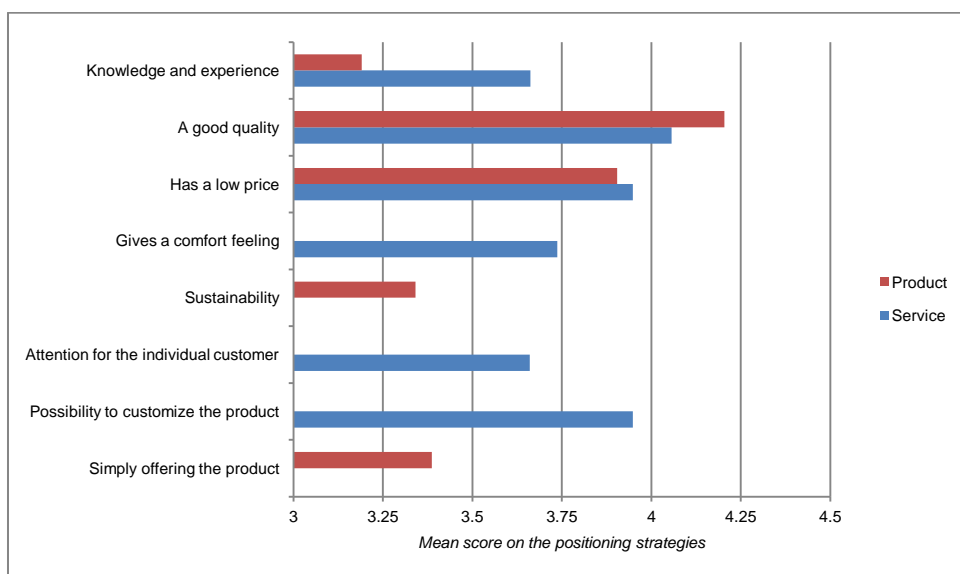


Figure 2. Appealing positioning strategies for products and services. Only positioning strategies with a mean score significantly higher than 3 ($\alpha = .05$) were displayed.

Research showed that much of the value of a brand is related to its ability to reduce perceived consumer risk (Morgan & Rego, 2009; Aaker 2001, Keller, 1990). This perceived risk is defined as a buyer's subjective assessment of the consequences of making a purchase mistake (Murphy & Enis, 1985). It's expected that the perceived risk for services is higher than it is for products because of two reasons: the entity of services and the purchase frequency of services. First, as described in the theoretical framework, services are intangible and variable (Kolter & Keller, 2012). There are no tangible indicators of the service's quality and the quality of the service might be different each time the service is used. Second, services have a lower purchase frequency. All services in this research project had a subscription basis, which means that consumers use to service for a certain time (which is at least 12 months). The survey supports this suggestion: products are bought once per 58 months, services are bought once per 99 months.

As suggested by the high score on the positioning strategy "simply offering the product", the purchase process for products is quite simple. Consumers want a brand that simply offers the product, with a reasonable quality for a reasonable price. Thereby, the brands knowledge and experience might be seen as indicators of this quality. The purchase process for services seemed to be more complex. Because of the higher perceived risk of services, the number of considerations taken into account during the purchase process of a service is also higher. There are little tangible properties to compare service brands, so the consideration is mainly based on the brand's appearance and emotional properties. This might explain the high score on the positioning strategy "giving a comfort feeling". Besides, there are two operational properties which could minimize the perceived risk: the possibility to customize the product and attention for the individual customer. If it's possible to customize the brand's offer, a consumer is better able to purchase the offer that best meets his or her demands. This might reduce the risk of a purchase mistake. Attention for the individual customer might also reduce the perceived risk since consumers might have the feeling that the organization is more accessible if there are any problems.

The positioning strategy "sustainability" was only considered to be appealing for products. It's expected that this is caused by the fact that sustainability is less applicable and less imaginable for services. First, in almost all stages in the value chain of products, like the production, storage and transport, sustainability is realizable and measureable. The manufacturer could use sustainable components or the process itself could be sustainable (for example by using sustainable energy). In general, the value chain of a service doesn't include

a production process. Besides, a service doesn't have derivable components. Therefore, it's more difficult to make a service sustainable and it's more difficult for consumers to imagine the sustainability of a service. It's expected that consumers don't believe in sustainable services or believe that sustainable services make little sense compared to sustainable products. Consumers might choose to purchase sustainable products instead of sustainable services.

2. What positioning strategies are most appealing to consumers for brands with (1) a low price level, (2) a medium price level and (3) a high price level?

Figure 3 describes the appealing positioning strategies for brands within low priced, middle priced and high priced product categories.

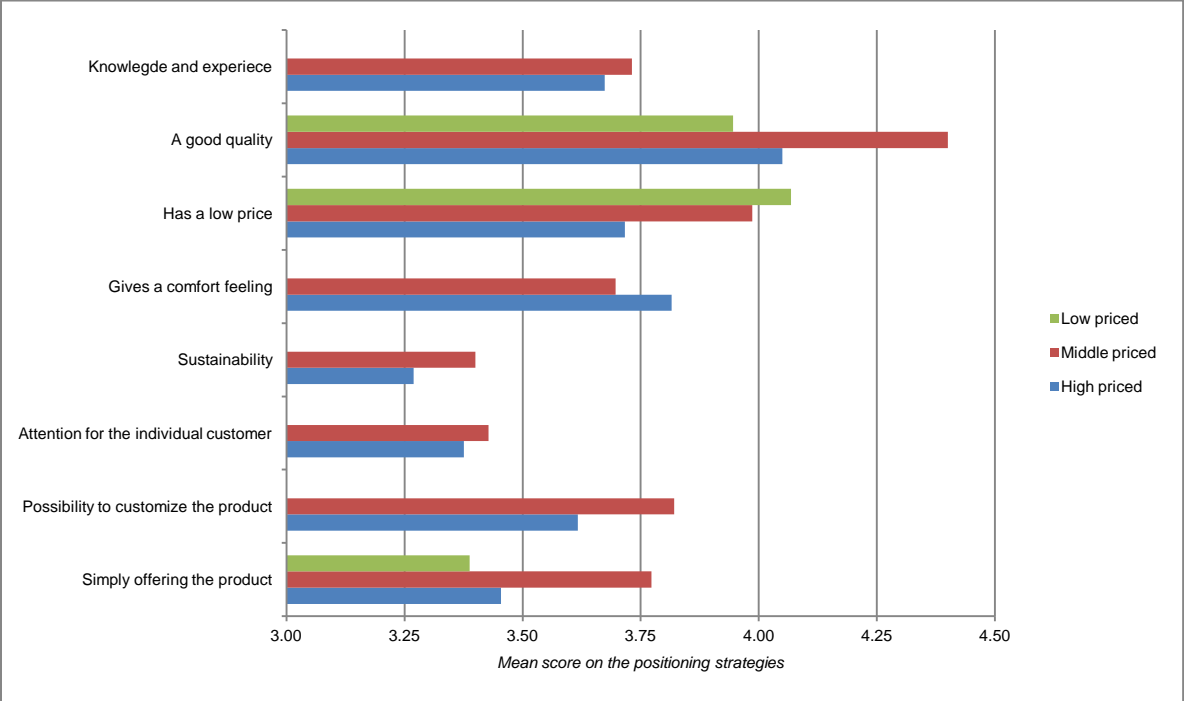


Figure 3. Appealing positioning strategies for low priced, middle priced and high priced product categories. Only positioning strategies with a mean score significantly higher than 3 ($\alpha = .05$) were displayed.

It seems that the number of appealing positioning strategies is higher for more expensive product categories. It's expected that the perceived risk was important again. This perceived risk is lower for lower priced product categories since a bad buy has fewer consequences. Therefore, consumers don't want to spend much time on the purchase process and they base their choice mainly on the offer's price and quality. This might also explain why it's important that the brand simply offers the product.

The number of appealing positioning strategies is lower for high priced offers than it is for average priced offers. It's expected that this is caused by the higher level of involvement in average priced product categories. The research data showed that a higher level of involvement is often associated with a higher number of appealing positioning strategies. Moreover, the data showed that respondents feel more involved in average priced product categories than they feel in high priced product categories.

The open question showed that for the high price level "a low price" is less often mentioned, and "reliability" is quite often mentioned. It's expected that this is also caused by the higher perceived risk of higher priced product categories: respondents want to restrict their perceived risk by buying a reliable brand. They might even see the reliability as more important than the price of the offer.

Conclusion: influence of product characteristics

This research shows that the entity of the offer and the price level have considerable influence on the degree to which a positioning strategy was considered to be appealing. In general, fewer positioning strategies were considered to be appealing for product categories with a lower perceived risk.

In general, consumer decisions could be emotional or rational (Weber, 2006). According to Gilboa, Maccheroni, Marinacci and Schmeidler (2010) rational decisions could be objectively rational and subjectively rational. A choice is objectively rational if the decision maker can convince others that he/she is right in making it, a choice is subjectively rational if others cannot convince the decision maker that he/she is wrong in making it. For example, the low price of a brand is objectively rational, whereas the good quality of the brand is subjectively rational.

Figure 4 shows the number of appealing positioning strategies per product characteristic and the nature (objectively rational, subjectively rational or emotional) of those strategies. It seems that most of the appealing positioning strategies are subjectively rational, which means that their implementation differs per consumer. Consumers might have a different view on for example "simply offering the product" and "a good quality". Besides, it seems that emotional benefits are more appealing for services and middle priced offers. As described, it's expected that this is caused by the intangibility, variability and duration of a service.

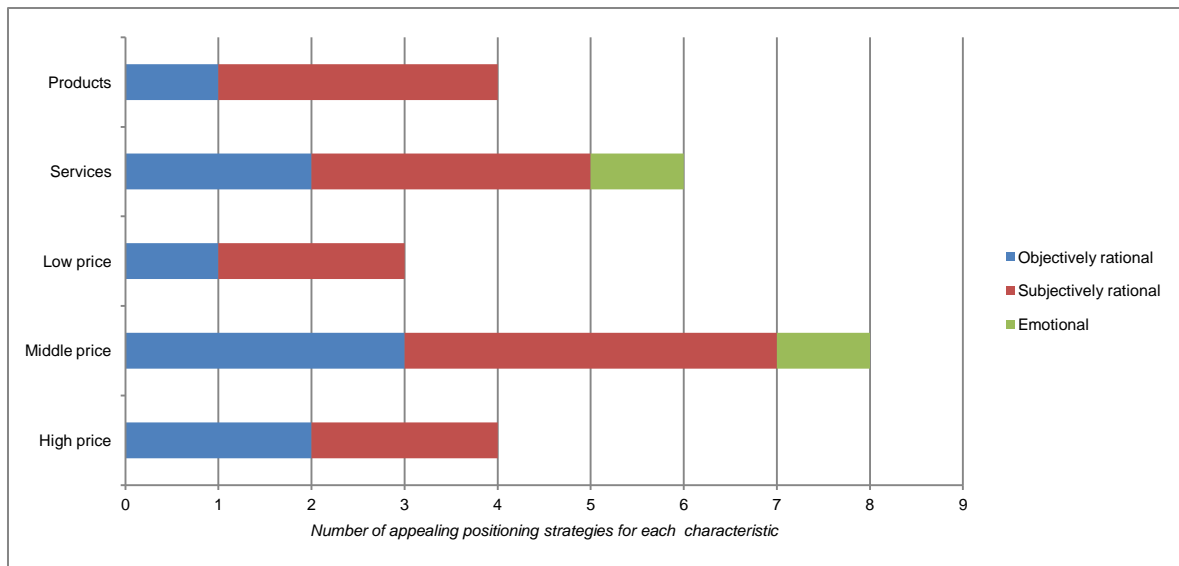


Figure 4. Appealing positioning strategies among products, services, low priced, middle priced and high priced product categories. The positioning strategies could be distinguished in emotional benefits positioning ("giving a comfort feeling", "creating the right ambiance", "matching my target group), objective rational benefits positioning ("a low price", "possibility to customize the product", "innovativeness", "used by many consumers", "matching my personality", "social responsibility", "sustainability") and subjective rational benefits positioning ("knowledge and experience", "a good quality", "simply offering the product", "attention for the individual consumer", "the best brand on the market").

Personal characteristics

In this section the influence of personal characteristics is described. The positioning strategies are compared among demographic characteristics, levels of involvement in the product category and the purchase frequencies.

3. Which personal aspects in terms of (1) demographic characteristics, (2) involvement in the product category and (3) purchase frequency do have influence on the degree to which positioning strategies are considered to be appealing for consumers?

The degree to which positioning strategies were considered to be appealing was barely influenced by demographic characteristics. But, demographic characteristics had influence on the positioning strategy "sustainability". This strategy was only considered to be appealing for women, people between 35 and 50 years, people with a middle level of education and people with an income above € 833,-. It is expected that these findings correlate with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. According to this theory, people first fulfill psychological needs such as food and water before they pay attention to "higher needs" such as safety, love/belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. In general, the level of education has a positive influence on the level of income. Therefore, higher educated people usually have a higher income and are better able to fulfill their basic needs. Due this higher income, this

group is better able to pay attention to "higher needs" such as sustainability. Either, since most of the respondents with a higher level of education were students, they had a lower income. As a result, sustainability wasn't considered to be appealing for respondents with a higher level of education. Furthermore, it is expected that women consider "sustainability" more appealing than men since women are expected to be more supportive and nurturing than men are. Therefore, they care more about the environment and the future (Daiton & Zelle, 2005).

The involvement in the product category and the purchase frequency seemed to have more influence than demographic characteristics. If the consumer is more involved in the product category and if he or she buys the product infrequently, more positioning strategies are considered to be appealing. It's expected that more involved consumers are willing to spend more time on the purchase process and therefore take more properties into consideration. A lower purchase frequency might also cause a higher perceived risk since there are more consequences of making a purchase mistake. Therefore, consumers spend more time on this purchase process and take more properties into consideration as well.

Brand salience

The exploratory research showed that most brands are positioned on values, on target audience, on emotional benefits, as prototype brand and on price. The survey showed that brands which use these strategies often have a higher recall and recognition rate. Figure 5 describes the recall and recognition for those positioning strategies.

In general, brands using these positioning strategies also often have a high purchase intention. Therefore, it's supposed that brand positioned on emotional benefits, price, target audience, as prototype or on values are quite successful.

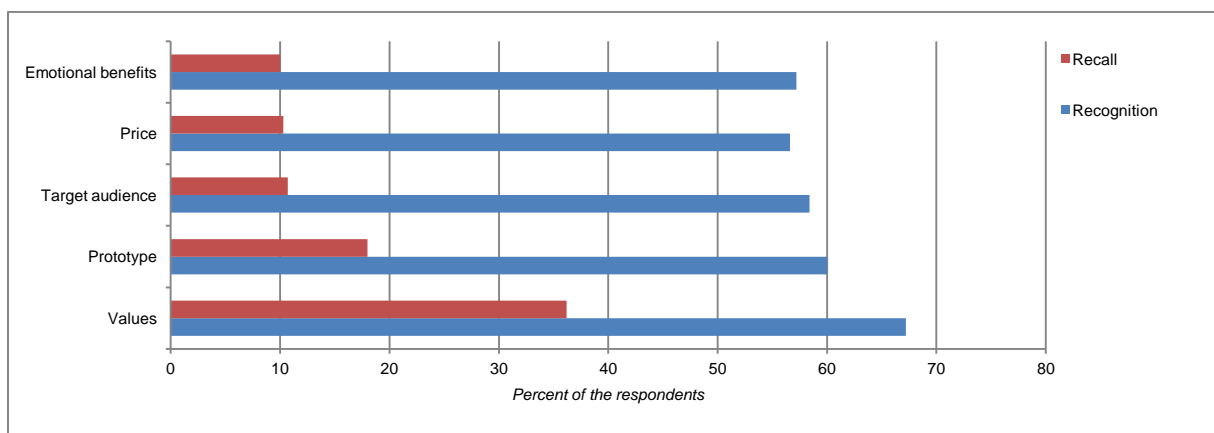


Figure 5. Brand recall and recognition among the most used positioning strategies

Overall view on positioning strategies

The closed ended question showed that the positioning strategies "knowledge and experience", "a good quality", "a low price", "giving a comfort feeling", "the possibility to customize the product", "sustainability", "attention for the individual consumer" and "simply offering the product" are considered to be most appealing. The open questions showed that brands positioned as prototype and positioned on a target audience are quite popular. These findings match with the positioning strategies of existing brands: several brands are positioned based on one of the more appealing positioning strategies.

Price/quality ratio

The positioning strategies "a low price" and "a high quality" seemed to be the most appealing strategies. However, the positioning strategy "a low price" was mentioned more than twice as much as the positioning strategy "a good quality". This supports the suggestion that the price is the most important property for both food and non-food products (OVIO, 2013). But, the customer-perceived quality is the single most important factor affecting the success of a

business in the long-term (Datta, 1996). It's expected that consumers first look at the price and considerate the brands within their preferred price category. In general, consumers wouldn't buy products they cannot afford or pay for a quality that they don't need (Datta, 1996). As a result, consumers look at a good (and affordable) price/quality ratio.

A brand's perceived quality is determined by comparing the quality to alternative brands. The brand could be considered having higher, equal or lower quality than competitive brands and could be seen as the best brand, one of the best brands, one of the worst brands or the worst brand on the market (Aaker, 1996). The brand's price could be classified in a similar manner. Although the number of major price-quality segments can vary from product to product, many markets can be divided into three basic price-quality segments: premium, mid-price and economy (Kotler et al., 2003; Datta, 1996). In the premium price strategy, the organization offers a high quality for a higher price. In the good value or mid-price strategy the organization offers a high quality for a lower price. In the economy strategy, both the quality and price are lower (Kotler et al, 2003; Datta, 1996).

Brands like Sunil (detergent) and Tele2 (mobile phone provider) are purely positioned on their low price and use an economy strategy. Brands like Lidl (supermarket), Telfort (mobile phone provider) and Witte Reus (detergent) use a good value strategy: they don't only emphasize their low price, but they also mention the quality of their products. Brands like Coolbest (fruit juice), Gaastra (clothing) and Apple (consumer electronics) use a premium price strategy and offer products with a higher quality for a higher price. It seems that consumers are willing to pay a higher price, but the perceived quality of the product should be higher to justify the price difference (Kotler et al., 2003; Rustenburg et al, 2003).

Possibility to customize the product

It's expected that the positioning strategy "possibility to customize the product" is appealing for many respondents because today's consumers want variety and choice (Nijssen, 1999; Data, 1996). It is less expensive to market one brand and offer consumers the possibility to customize the product than to market more brands. In this strategy, an organization creates a certain "basic product" and offers consumers the possibility to customize this basic product in some degree.

Health insurance brands like FBTO, Avéro and Interpolis and telecom brand T-Mobile emphasize the possibility to customize their product. However, it's expected that this strategy is only effective if consumers are attracted by the brand itself. It seems that brands which offer the possibility to customize the product don't limit their positioning strategy to this

property. The brands FBTO (simplicity), Avéro (knowledge), Interpolis (clearness) and T-Mobile (easiness to share photos and videos) all have other distinctive benefits. Therefore, it's suggested that the positioning strategy "possibility to customize the product" is only considered to be appealing if it's a complement to other positioning strategies. Besides, the degree to which this positioning strategy is appealing is also dependent of the practical possibility and costs to customize the product. Services are less standardized than products and it's easier to customize them for an individual customer. For example, it's easier to include compensation for the dentist in a health insurance than to adjust the number of presets of a television.

Simply offering the product

The research also showed that positioning based on simplicity, defined as "simply offering the product" is quite appealing. It is expected that this positioning strategy is appealing because of the growing number of brands and the thereby caused brand confusion as described by Kapferer (2012). Every brand has several (distinctive) properties, which makes it more difficult to make a choice. Therefore, the brand without specific properties, which emphasizes that the product is offered without any nonsense, might be attractive for several consumers. Brands like Philips (electronics), C1000 (supermarket) and Simpel (mobile phone providing) successfully apply this strategy.

Sustainability

Research showed that Dutch consumers have become more sustainable (Bakker, 2013; EIM, 2012). The total spending on sustainable products increased with 0.7% in 2011 compared to 2010 (CBS.nl, 2013) and it's expected that those will increase in the future (EIM, 2012). Moreover, respondents are willing to pay a higher price for sustainable food if there is insight in the establishment of the surcharge (Van Rooijen & Van Amstel, 2011). Brands like Rabobank (banking), Volkswagen (cars) and Sharp (televisions) emphasize their sustainability.

As suggested, sustainability is related to higher demand needs, so consumers would in particular choose sustainable goods if their income enables them to do so. Therefore, an organization which attempts to gain a market share as large as possible should not limit its offer to sustainable brands. Combining sustainable brands and brands positioned on other benefits seems to be rather effective. For example, the Dutch supermarket chain Albert-Heijn markets four house brands: AH Huismerk (the basic house brand), AH Excellent (premium price strategy), AH Puur & Eerlijk (sustainability) and Euroshopper (economy brand). These four house brands cover a market share of 50% of the turnover of the products sold at the

Albert Heijn stores, which is higher than for all other Dutch super markets (DistriFood.nl, 2013).

Although the score on the positioning strategy "sustainability" is quite high, the score on the strategy "social responsibility" is much lower. These strategies are closely related to each other and could both be seen as elements within corporate social marketing. There are three possible explanations. First, the concept "social responsibility" might be unclear and wasn't considered to be unappealing because of the indistinctness. Second, the concept "sustainability" could also be seen as lifetime of the product and in fact doesn't have to do with corporate social marketing. Third, respondents might believe that social responsibility is important, but they want to decide whether to support a project or organization by themselves. Therefore, they don't want to make an organization to make this decision and they don't prefer organizations which support social responsibility.

Attention for the individual customer

It seems that the strategy "attention for the individual customer" is most appealing for brands offering a product or service with a high perceived risk. The perceived risk might be reduced by personal attention since consumers might get the feeling that this personal attention makes the organization more accessible. This accessibility might reassure consumers because they have the feeling that it's easier to contact the organization if there are problems or questions. Brands like Univé (health insurances), OZF Achmea (health insurances), VGZ (health insurances), AEGON (mortgages) and Regiobank (mortgages) emphasize their attention for the individual customer. It's expected that these services have a higher perceived risk since they are used for a longer period.

Knowledge and experience

The positioning strategy "knowledge and experience" was also considered to be appealing. Those characteristics are often not directly communicated, but part of an entire positioning strategy. Knowledge and experience are properties which are often associated with product leadership. Therefore, it is assumed that this positioning strategy is closely related to the prototype strategy. This strategy might be successful because it reduces the perceived risk: knowledge and experience might confirm that the consumer makes a right choice. Brands like Opel (cars), ABN Amro (mortgages) and Persil (detergent) claim that they have much knowledge and/or experience and are the prototype brand within their product category.

Giving a comfort feeling

The positioning strategy "giving a comfort feeling" was also often considered to be appealing. This strategy was especially appealing for product categories for which it is difficult to emphasize the brand's rational benefits (like it is for services). The decision process within those categories is barely based on rational properties. For those product categories, the feeling and the ambiance that the brand creates are major determinants in the brand decision process. It is expected that a brand gives a comfort feeling if the brand meets the consumer's expectations. Therefore, this characteristic is most of the time not directly emphasized in the brand positioning process.

Target audience

Although the positioning strategies "matching my target group" and "matching my personality" weren't considered to be appealing, brands positioned on target audience (like OMO (detergent) and Hi (mobile phone provider)) often had a high recall rate, recognition rate and purchase intention. It's expected that the preference for these brands isn't consciously based on the positioning strategy "target audience". Consumers might consider the targeted audience of a brand to be unimportant, but they also might not realize that the brand is meant for a specific target audience. Therefore, it's also possible that these brands are popular among other segments than the target group.

Prototype

Also brands positioned as prototype were often recalled, recognized and often had a high purchase intention. It's expected that respondents also chose these brands unconsciously: they purchase a brand which they see as "the" brand within a certain product category, but they don't see this brand really as "the best brand" or as an innovative brand. Therefore, the positioning strategies "the best brand on the market" and "innovativeness" weren't considered to be appealing, but the brands positioned as prototype brand were popular. For example, Opel (cars), ABN Amro (mortgages) and CZ (health insurances), which positioning their selves as prototype brand, might be seen as the leading brands within the product category and are thence purchased by many consumers. But, it's expected that these brands are not seen as the best brands or most innovative brands on the market. It is also possible that these brands have a natural leadership like Douwe Egberts, Disney and Randstad do (Maathuis 2003), without explicating their product's quality or innovations.

As suggested by Kapferer (2012), innovations are the lifeblood of a brand since they renew its relevance and differentiation. So, although the positioning strategy "innovation" wasn't considered to be appealing, it is important to market and apply product innovations. Moreover, it might even be valuable to communicate them in some way.

Overall conclusion and practical implications

What positioning strategies should be used to build an effective and efficient brand portfolio?

To build an effective and efficient brand portfolio, an organization should market one or more brands which are all meant for a specific target segment. All of these brands should simply offer the product and give a comfort feeling by meeting the segment's demands and expectations. In general, an effective and efficient brand portfolio should cover each of the brand characteristics as described in Table 12.

Table 12

Positioning strategies to include in an efficient and effective brand portfolio

Role	Price/quality	Sustainability	Approach
Prototype	Economy	Yes	Individualistic approach
Other brand(s)	Good value Premium	No	Mass approach

Based on the brand characteristics, several brands and brand positioning strategies could be established. There are some general decisions in creating a brand positioning. Besides, there are some important points of attention in creating a brand positioning. Both are described in the next section.

Brand positioning decisions

Table 12 describes several important brand characteristics. In fact, an organization should decide on all those properties. However, the organization should also define a target segment and be sure that the decisions meet the expectations of this target segment.

First, the organization should choose between the role as a prototype brand and the role as another type of brand. In most markets, there are one or a few prototype brands and there are several other players on the market which try to distinguish their-selves based on other benefits.

Second, the organization should determine the price/quality ratio of the brand. It seems that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for a brand with a higher quality, so also higher priced brands could be successful. However, the brand's price should match the brands perceived quality since consumers wouldn't pay a higher price for an offer with a lower quality. But, the brand should be affordable.

Third, the organization should considerate whether the brand should be sustainable or not. Sustainability causes higher production cost and should be in line with the chosen price/quality ratio.

Fourth, the organization should determine whether the brand uses a mass approach or a more individualistic approach. Therefore, a brand should choose between offering a standardized product and offering the possibility to customize the product. Furthermore, a brand should decide to pay attention to the individual customer. Again, this should be in line with the price/quality ratio.

Points of attention

Based on the described characteristics, an organization could decide to market one or more brands. As suggested, this is mainly determined by the attractiveness of each target segment. But, there are some important points of attention in composing a brand positioning strategy and a brand portfolio.

First, it's important that all of the brands within the portfolio fulfill a specific role in the minds of the target audience. Positioning on target audience might be a useful tool to create distinctive brands and to serve a heterogeneous group of consumers who prefer the same product characteristics. As an example, the Coca Cola Company markets two sugar-free coke brands; Coca Cola Light and Coca Cola Zero. Since Coca Cola Light was seen as a feminine product, the company decided to launch a more studier brands targeted on masculine consumers: Coca Cola Zero. Like Coca Cola serves two segments with sugar-free beverages, other companies could market different brands with almost the same (rational) characteristics to serve multi segments.

Second, the positioning strategy should match the product category, the organization and the market position. According to Green & Krieger (1989), every market and situation is unique and requires another approach. The research already showed that some positioning strategies are more appealing for some product characteristics than they are for others. Besides, the brand positioning should match the organization's generic competitive strategy and the brand's position on the market.

According to Porter (1980, in Rustenburg et al., 2003) there are three generic competitive strategies: the overall-cost leadership, the differentiation strategy and the focus strategy. The positioning strategy should match with this generic competitive strategy. For example, a brand which has chosen to apply the overall-cost leadership strategy should position itself on the low price whereas positioning on for example target audience or emotional benefits would make less sense.

According to Kotler & Keller (2012) there are four general market positions: the market leader, the market challenger, the market follower and the market nicher. This means that certain brands have a much larger market share than others do, which makes the use of certain positioning strategies more or less appealing. For example, brands with a small market share shouldn't be positioned as the prototype brand.

Third, the characteristics emphasized in the brand positioning should correspond to each other to create a reliable and trustful brand. For example, a sustainable economy brand would be less successful.

Fourth, one property could be applied to more than one brand within the portfolio. As suggested by Kapferer (2012), an organization shouldn't "rob Peter to pay Paul". Some properties are appealing for each brand and could be applied to more brands in the portfolio.

Endorsed and mono brand strategies

This research project generally covers organizations which use a so-called branded house strategy or a mono brand strategy. In those strategies, all brands are independent stand-alone brands. Either, some organizations emphasize a corporate or master brand name by using an endorsed strategy (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). In the endorsed strategy, the brands include a parent brand (the endorser). If an organization uses an endorsed strategy, the endorser should be positioned in a way that each consumer served by the endorsed brands is also attracted to this more general positioning strategy. This strategy should be broader and meet the demands and expectations of all customers of the endorsed brands. Therefore, the organization should emphasize a (rational or emotional) benefit that is appealing for all of them. For example, the parties and festivals of ID&T are visited by different types of consumers, but all these consumers visit them to recreate. Therefore, ID&T's positioning based on "Celebrate Life" is appealing for all their customers. Also, the endorsers Achmea (ontzorgt) and Nestlé (Good Food, Good Life) emphasize a benefit that is sought by all customers of the endorsed brands.

Limitations

Selection of product categories

Each product characteristic (entity and price) was represented by only two or three product/service types. Due to this, the score for these characteristics could easily be influenced by the score of one product category. Product category related characteristics (like detergent which might be particularly used by women) could also have influenced the results. At last, the selection of brands and brand portfolio's doesn't cover the entire product category so some used positioning strategies could be overlooked. The use of the selected product categories might also explain why some of the positioning strategies as described by Maathuis (2006) weren't used. Those strategies might be more applicable for other product categories.

Selection of the respondents (survey)

The respondents for this survey were randomly selected. Either, since almost all respondents are people which the researcher knows or relatives of him, this group might be less representative for the entire Dutch population. The demographic variables show that most respondents are between 18 and 50 years with a middle or high level of education and having a low or middle income. So, the suggestion that there were differences with the Dutch population was supported. A larger and more random selected sample would have made the results more representative and applicable.

Completeness of the research design

Several items were used to measure the factors which determine the product choice and the brand preference. Either, within this preference also the unconscious thoughts could play an important role. Therefore, it would have been better to use non existing brands which communicate certain values or factors. Either, because the high costs or possible low validity of these fictive brands, it wasn't possible to do so. Appendix 5 describes the consideration of several alternatives more comprehensive.

Clarity of the used definitions

Several concepts seemed to be quite unclear. The definition "mobile phone provider" was implemented as purely the connection to the network as well the connection to a network in combination with a mobile phone. The definition "quality" was also unclear, especially for services. The concept is quite difficult to define and might threaten the validity of the items related to the offer's quality.

Research design

There might have been order effects in the research design. Since the same questions were used to measure six product categories, the answer possibilities in the closed ended questions might have influenced the open questions for the next product categories in the survey.

Assumptions

It seems that the level of involvement had much influence on whether positioning strategies were considered to be appealing or not. This might have threatened the validity of the construct: the involvement in the product category might have caused the differences among product characteristics.

To determine the effectiveness of several positioning strategies, the brand knowledge and purchase intention were measured. Either, the purchase intention might have been influenced by many other variables than the positioning strategy and the effectiveness of a positioning strategy isn't only determined by the brand knowledge and purchase intention. Bell & Lattion (1998) describe that the brand choice is often based on the utility of the brand, the size in category, the brand loyalty and the price of a brand. Kapferer (2012) suggest that there are several other characteristics to evaluate the brand positioning strategy. As a result, a high level of brand knowledge and a high purchase intention don't directly indicate a successful positioning strategy. However, they are proper indicators to determine the brand's popularity.

Technical limitations

In Limesurvey version 1.91+, it isn't possible to create a random order within question groups. Therefore, four versions of the survey were created and respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four versions. Since the number of questions was limited in the used version Limesurvey, respondents were redirected to a version of the survey after filling in their month of birth. As a result, the survey looked less attractive and professional and the number of filled in questions might be decreased.

Another disadvantage of the used version of Limesurvey is that the number of questions for each page couldn't be customized. Since some questions could influence other questions, every question had to be put on a separate page. As a result, the number of mouse clicks was quite a lot which made the survey less attractive. The number of mouse clicks might also have influenced the respondent's number of filled in questions.

Suggestions for further research

This research project measured the degree to which several positioning strategies were considered to be appealing. The research gave a good overall view, but it didn't measure the rank order within these positioning strategies. It might be useful to get a view in the relative importance of positioning strategies and product characteristics: when purchasing a product, what is the most appealing property, and what is the second most appealing property?

In the current research project each product characteristic was measured by only two or three product categories. These categories often had several characteristics in common, but their similarities were often not restricted to their entity or price level. Therefore, it might be useful to repeat this research project and use more product categories to measure a certain product characteristic. The use of fictive brands would also make the research results more complete. If fictive brands which all use a certain positioning strategy or emphasize a certain characteristics are used, it is more valid to measure which characteristics really determine someone's product and brand choice.

According to Park & Moon (2003), purchase motivation could be classified into utilitarian or hedonic motivation. Whereas the first category is characterized by function or performance, the second is featured by pleasure or self-expression. The way a consumer considers a product might influence the purchase behavior and the appealing positioning strategies. For example, if somebody considers a car higher in hedonic needs than in utilitarian needs (for example: the number of seats is more important than its appearance), his purchase motivation and process will be quite different from the process of somebody who buys a car for its design. Therefore, the purchase motivation (to which degree is an offer considered to be hedonic or utilitarian) might be interesting. Besides, it's expected that the perceived risk influences the degree to which positioning strategies are considered to be appealing. Therefore, it might also be interesting to research the relation between product category, perceived risk and positioning strategies.

Another interesting point is the match between the brand role according to the classifications of Kotler and Keller (2012) or Porter (1980) and appealing positioning strategies. Which positioning strategies are appealing and less appealing based on the relative market share or the generic competitive strategy?

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Appendixes