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POSITIONING OF COMPANY X WITH
AN EMPHASIS ON BRANDING IN THE
SWEDISH DOG WEAR MARKET

Thesis instructions accepted 11.5.2016

Thesis instructions updated 22.2.2017

International Business
2020

ABSTRACT

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Title	Positioning of Company X with an Emphasis on Branding in the Swedish Dog Wear Market
Year	2020
Language	English
Pages	95 + 9 Appendices
Name of Supervisor	Thomas Sabel

During the past four decades, positioning has received attention as an influential marketing paradigm, but still lacks theoretical and empirical investigation on its employment. This research addresses the gap and focuses to suggest the appropriate position of a small-sized case company in the Swedish dog wear market. The position is chosen with regard to the firm's branding ambitions.

The paper started with gathering theory regarding positioning and its correlation with branding. The theoretical frame bounded the two phenomena by initiating the corporate brand identity matrix that is bridged to the external market environment through the intended position. Further, the empirical part comprises an interview with an owner-manager of the case company and an electronic survey that obtained forty-four responses from the targeted audience.

The data analysis prompts Company X to primarily follow benefit positioning that can be encapsulated with user strategy. First, this positioning proposition is in line with the brand culture. Second, it wins over customer problems. Third, it differs from the competition. The proactive synergy between branding and the positioning concept builds the foundation for becoming a powerful brand.

Keywords Positioning, branding, SMEs

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

1	INTRODUCTION	7
1.1	Background of the study	7
1.2	Research problems and objectives	9
1.3	Thesis structure	10
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	11
2.1	Introduction to positioning: what does “positioning” mean?	11
2.2	Branding. What is the link with positioning?	16
2.3	What kinds of positioning exist?.....	17
2.4	What is the process of positioning?	26
2.5	Summary of the theoretical framework	48
3	EMPIRICAL STUDY – METHODOLOGY	51
3.1	Overview of the case company	51
3.2	Research Methodology	52
3.2.1	Methodology choice.....	52
3.2.2	Research strategy	55
3.2.3	Methodology practice and survey design.....	56
4	EMPIRICAL STUDY – ANALYSIS & RESULTS	60
4.1	Quantitative.....	60
4.2	Qualitative.....	71
4.3	Summary: Intended brand-market position	73
4.4	Validity and reliability	75
5	CONCLUSION	78
5.1	Study limitations	81
5.2	Recommendations.....	81
	REFERENCES.....	83
5.3	Books	83
5.4	Articles.....	84
5.5	Electronic publications.....	92

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1 The positioning era cometh (Advertising Age, 1972).....	7
Figure 2 Approaches to positioning (Urde M., 2011)	18
Figure 3 A conceptual model of brand orientation (Schmidt H. J., Baumgarth C., 2014)	22
Figure 4 Jack Danial's Brand Platform (Kapferer, 2012)	24
Figure 5 The brand and market orientation matrix (Urde M., et al, 2011).....	24
Figure 6 Intended, Actual, and Perceived Positioning (Fuchs C., 2008)	29
Figure 7 CBIM (Urde M., 2013)	34
Figure 8 Tiina-Kaisu Kuuru (2013).....	41
Figure 9 STP model (Sliburyte L., 2008)	43
Figure 10 Marketing Research Methods (Hooley G., et al, 2004)	53
Figure 11 Provinces respondents live.....	61
Figure 12 Quantity of dogs per owner by the province of living	62
Figure 13 The preferred way to do shopping by province	64
Figure 14 The preferred way to shop in per cents	64
Figure 15 Activities respondents do with their dogs	65
Figure 16 Customer problems with online shopping.....	66
Figure 17 Customer problems with shopping in physical outlets	67
Figure 18 Customer Key Purchasing Criteria and Actual Shopping Experience.....	68
Figure 19 The openness of respondents to visit new premises.....	69
Figure 20 Perceptual map	70
Figure 21 Company X CBIM	71
Table 1 Theoretical framework. Brand-market intended positioning. (Author)	31
Table 2 Strategic positions and examples.....	45
Table 3 Theory and survey questions connection	56
Table 4 Main findings and suggestions	79

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SME	Small medium enterprise
LO	Large organization
MO	Market orientation
RMO	Responsive market orientation
PMO	Proactive market orientation
BO	Brand orientation
KPC	Key purchasing criteria
4Ps	Four Ps (product, promotion, place, price)
CBIM	Corporate brand identity matrix

LIST OF APPENDICES

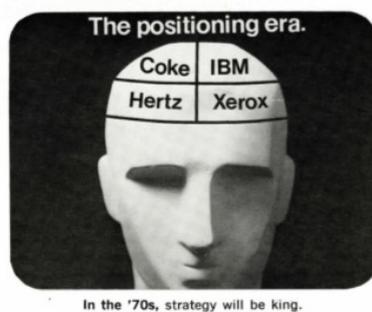
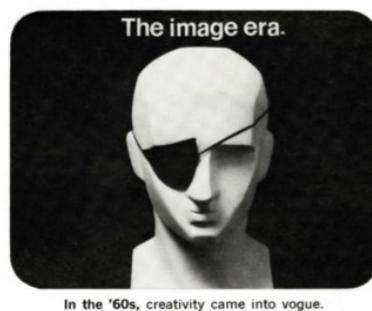
Appendix 1. Quantitative survey questions (English).....	96
Appendix 2. Quantitative survey questions (Swedish).....	100
Appendix 3. Qualitative interview questions.....	104

1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction presents the background of positioning together with branding and they in turn form the ultimate research problem. To tackle the research aim, objectives, which form the thesis structure, are listed.

1.1 Background of the study

Roots of positioning are shrouded in the fog of history because basic concepts of the term were not certainly new when positioning became popularized. In the middle of the last century, companies already communicated a distinctive benefit to customers, but in the long run, it became obvious that these efforts were not enough to catch and keep custom-



ers. While this may be true, it is commonly considered that Jack Trout and Al Ries were the first who made positioning widely discussed in the marketing and advertising community. The figure on the left is derived from the popularized co-authored seminal. A new era of positioning replaced eras of image and product due to rising pressure from outside. The authors claimed that: "...creativity is no longer a key to success. The fun and games of the '60s have given way to the harsh realities of the '70s. Today's marketplace is no longer responsive to the kind of advertising that worked in the past. ... just too much marketing "noise". This is impossible to appeal to every consumer. Hence, the only hope to score big is to be selective, to concentrate on narrow targets, to practice segmentation. In one word, it is called "positioning" (Ries A. & Trout J., 1986).

The need for positioning originates from several factors. First of all, environmental dynamism pushes companies to monitor changes to avoid becoming outdated (Butt I. et al, 2017). With the help of positioning, companies

Figure 1 The positioning era
cometh (Advertising Age, 1972)

can constantly modify resources and redesign their business models, because it stems from the external environment. Continuously updating technologies are also an inherent part of environmental dynamism. Despite companies are pursuing innovativeness, companies will not be able to rely only on it for a long time. Anyway, the relationship between buyer and seller will take the prior stage. Customers today are not like fifty years ago. They have started to act more conscious and confident at the purchasing point. More than ever before they have become closer to the highest level of Maslow's pyramid of needs – self-actualization. J. Baker (2007) claims the world market may experience globalization, but its members still demand to distinguish themselves from each other to speak their minds. Therefore, the ability to position a company properly in the prospect minds became a question of survival in an overcommunicated society. To this statement, Seth Godin adds in *Brand Equity* of June 4, 2003: “Marketers are doing exactly the wrong thing. They are running more ads, they are putting ads on parking meters in hotel elevators, in washrooms. Because they think that the answer to clutter is more clutter. That is why there is so much spam in your e-mail box. Because marketers are desperate”. “Glittering generalities” occur because business managers leave positioning aside together with competition and customer analysis. Conversely, Al Ries (1988) says that before delivering a company message, companies must find a way to neutralize the competition. Enterprises must consider not only their strengths and weaknesses but those of its competitors as well. Without specific attributes and identification (the brand), the product would become a commodity like wool, wheat, and iron ore, where the only rational reason for acquiring is the cost-benefit (J. Baker, 2007). Positioning is that revolutionary concept that is directed to find a perceptual and preference foothold in the mind of the target market and claiming it with a Point of differentiation benefit and/or a feature (Tybout, A. M. and Sternthal, B., 2010). In like manner, Malik A. & Rahman M.S. (2016) support “there is no such kind of thing prevail as a product or service at the marketplace for a long time until finds a space in consumer's mind with strong positioning of a brand”. Along the same line, authors continue positioning reflects the customer psyche under which powerful brands can be created. The link between branding and positioning is discussed by many authors (Knox S. 2006, Muhonen T. et al 2017, Eduardo de Paula e Silva Chaves (2017), Kendall K.W. and Gursoy D. (2007), Fuchs, C. and Diamantopoulos, A. (2010)).

It is found that positioning affords the ground for strong brands, and companies possessing poor positioning strategies and brand management skills will drag behind those who successfully combine both concepts into balanced synergy. The current research is aimed to investigate empirically positioning concept taking account of brand management. By and large, there is a lack of managerial application research and coherent guidelines of practical implementation in the context of positioning. Moreover, no research studied positioning in connection with branding relative to micro firms. Henceforth, the novelty of research and research problem should not be underestimated. There is limited insight into how small firms operationalize the positioning and branding phenomenon compared to the vast literature designed for and about LOs (large organizations). This paper addresses this gap by conducting research on an example of an SME (small-medium-sized enterprise) naming Company X. The case company is a thesis client and current research is dedicated to solve out the company's problem.

1.2 Research problems and objectives

This paper aims at answering a further research question:

RQ. How to position Company X in the Swedish dog wear market in a way that the company addresses the right problems of a customer and wins a competitive advantage over competitors?

The solution to the question should help the case company on establishing a market appearance and foundation for branding that would reflect the right choice of a product to be included in a catalogue and further company performance.

To solve the research problem, the following objectives are set. First of all, it is necessary to thoroughly define the concept of positioning. With this goal in view, a wide spectrum of literature is explored. The theory reveals intended brand-market oriented positioning that is applied empirically further. Second, empirical research is obligatory to explore the phenomenon practically. A combined qualitative and quantitative research method is conducted for that. A company interview (qualitative approach) helped to establish Company X brand identity; and an online questionnaire (quantitative approach) contributed with

customer and competitor data that belongs to the positioning issue. Accordingly, the results are analyzed. Finally, conclusions, practical suggestions are made, and the ground for future research is offered as following.

1.3 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of four main parts. They are the introduction with topic and thesis background, theory and theoretical framework, an empirical case study with analysis, and conclusion.

The theoretical framework is developed with the help of different sources such as articles, books, and websites that are relevant to the research topic. The theoretical section is divided into four subchapters that shed the light on what is positioning all about, what it consists of, and how it can be applied in line with branding.

The empirical study applies a theoretical framework to the case company Company X. The chapter introduces a case company and methodology used. Besides, results from the research methods are presented, and the validity and reliability of the research are assessed. In the end suggestions for further research are given.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory and theoretical framework play a key role in guiding the entire research process. It forms the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the importance, and the research questions (Azadeh O. and Cynthia G., 2014). It demonstrates an understanding of theories and concepts pertinent to the topic of the research and clarifies the implicit set of theories in a way that is more clearly defined. The theoretical framework is not considered as something readily accessible. Therefore, it is called “framework” which is supposed to be derived from multiple concepts, theories, past studies, and relevant books or via any other method depends on the field of study. The theoretical framework in this research is developed through extensive literature review since the study subject is one of the thorniest and most complex concepts in marketing (Bhat and Reddy, 1998). The chapter is focused on to provide answers to the ensuing questions which must in their turn hold and support the research aim:

1. What is positioning?
2. Branding. What is the link with positioning?
3. What types of positioning exist?
4. What is the positioning process?

The framework is divided into four main subchapters. Subchapter 2.1 defines the term “positioning” and discusses its importance nowadays. The second subchapter opens up branding and its connection to the positioning. Then, the third subchapter determines the means of positioning, gives a profound description of each positioning type, and emphasizes one of them that is relevant for research. The fourth subchapter demonstrates positioning process and proposes a theoretical framework. Last but not least, the summary on subchapters is given.

2.1 Introduction to positioning: what does “positioning” mean?

2.1. Positioning as a part of marketing

American Marketing Association defines the term marketing as the performance of business activities that directs the flow of goods and services from producer to customer or

user (Marketing Definition, n.d.). Peter Drucker, a famous management consultant, argued that marketing is broader than just selling (Marketing Definition, n.d.). It covers the entire business in a way how a customer perceives it, thus a concern for marketing must invade all areas of an enterprise. Marketing aims to manage profitable customer relationships (Dr. K. Karunakaran, 2008). A company creates corporate attributes and chooses product features that are likely to appeal in minds of clients to properly position itself and merchandise in the market space. Hence positioning forms the core of modern marketing theory and practice (Hooley G. et al., 2001). An attractive position is a necessary condition to achieve superior performance in a particular market (Debra and Abbie, 2010).

2.2. What is positioning?

Ries A. and Trout J. (1986) are assured: “positioning starts with a product, a piece of merchandise, a service, a company, an institution, or even a person. Perhaps yourself”. Since the 1960s when the term “positioning” has been popularized by well-known marketing professionals Ries and Trout, many new terminologies such as product positioning, brand positioning, market positioning, and position have been proposed in the literature, but as Arnott (1994) posited, the various terminologies are merely “several sides of the same coin” and complement each other. As far as literature expanded in the matter of positioning, the fragmentation of the term has become misleading. There is still a lack of understanding of the concept (Stavros et. al, 2000; Saqib N., 2020). “Positioning” means different things to different people (Aaker D.A. and Shansby J.G., 1982). Natasha Saqib in her research “Positioning – a literature review” collected 153 definitions of the term. Somebody connects positioning with segmentation and product selection. Others would say positioning is about image issues and competition. Business practitioners still debate what the term exactly stands for. However, everyone agrees upon its importance in marketing management. In the reason that the term is ambiguous, this section unfolds aspects of positioning to narrow down the scope of the research and explain from which point the study is going to examine the concept.

Positioning as a strategic bedrock

Nowadays marketplace is no longer responsive to the strategies that worked in the past (Ries Al and Trout J., 1986). To stand out overcrowded business world, companies need

to position themselves. Stavros et. al (2000) determines the process of positioning as “iterative, it necessitates deliberate and proactive action, it involves decisions at conceptual, strategic, and operational levels and should reflect the triumvirate deliberations of the company, its competitors, and its target market/customers”. Philip Kotler believes that positioning comes before 4Ps—Product, Price, Place, and Promotion that compile marketing of a good or service. Kerry Chick in her article “The Marketing Mix (4ps of marketing) totally outdated or still a valid tool?” (2017) stresses the backwardness of simply applying the marketing mix since it misses the picture of a customer itself. To continue, Philip Kotler made a foreword to the marketing classic: “for years, all of us in marketing taught our students to build a marketing plan around the “four Ps”, meanwhile noticing that there are more steps before thinking about 4Ps. They are research, segmentation, targeting, and revolutionary concept positioning. They are directed to know the market profoundly. Research indicates how customers may differ in their preferences and behavior, and therefore they are classified into segments. In the reason that it is impossible to serve all segments equally, businesses address targeting. In today’s marketing, there is a new additional concept, and it is called “positioning”. Likewise, Richarme (2007) believes market practitioners should adopt positioning as fifth “P” and apply it in conjunction with the other four “Ps”. Furthermore, it is a higher order “P” that lays the foundation of the other four “Ps” and at the same time serves as a bridge to corporate strategy. All in all, an effective marketing mix can only be developed once a company has crafted a distinct positioning strategy (Natasha Saqib, 2020). To make an example, Volvo positions itself as a provider of the safest cars in the automobile industry. Indeed, this position affects features of the product and its design, ways of distribution and supply chain, pricing, and promotion messages Volvo communicates to a prospective customer. Hence positioning and marketing mix work in a tandem, where positioning comes before elaborating 4Ps. One cannot be successful without another. Not to mention that positioning is thought to drive the entire marketing program of the organization including total strategy, not just an advertising ploy, product, brand, price, promotion, and distribution – they all must be consistent with the positioning statement (Crawford, 1985). A rising number of companies are trying to apply positioning strategies to move to new positions in consumers’ minds and so generate an advantage over their competitors (Ruta and Laimona, 2008).

Positioning as a customer prospect

In marketing, no product or service exists by itself in space, independent of the consumer. To exist, it must occupy a place in an individual consumer's perception, which is subjective and guided by consumer's values, needs, experience, beliefs, and environment (Subroto Sengupta, 2005). People buy not just a product, but a bundle of values, and if a company wishes to be successful today, it must create an attractive position in the mind of the customer.

One of the earliest mentions of positioning takes roots in the 1960s. Alpert and Gatty determined "positioning" in their seminal "Product positioning by behavioral lifestyles" as "differentiation of brands by studying the ways in which their consumers differ as well as how consumer perceptions of various brands differ. Same year Ries and Trout complemented the definition by identifying it as a strategy that "staking out turf" or "filling a slot" in the mind of target customers. Both definitions put one's attention on customer perception of a brand. Positioning helps customers to acknowledge a distinctive meaningful image of a brand thus simplifying their buying decision. To companies, positioning helps to understand consumers and their needs deeper to satisfy them and offer values that are appreciated by consumers and which in their turn can be shared.

Trout and Ries address positioning from the advertising perspective which shapes the customer's mind. They heralded that in a new world this is difficult to be creative and create something new in a prospective mind. Therefore, they view positioning as a form of communication that manipulates what is already up in the mind, re-enforcing existing connections (Ries A. & Trout J., 1986). Minds of consumers are generally limited, insecure, hard to change, they dislike confusion and accept only what fits existing knowledge and experience (Trout A. & Rivkin J., 1996; John R. Darling, 2001). To be more specific, only seven brands of the same product category find room in the mind of a customer, and this is what is meant by limitation of the mind (Trout A. & Rivkin J., 1996). Moreover, consumers tend to purchase goods and services they think they should have, highlighting the fact of insecurity. Similarly, they avoid confusing messages. The basic positioning premise must be straightforward to reality, and the only reality is where the prospect customer mind is. Customers are not captivated anymore with messages as "best", "fastest",

finest”. Today there are comparatives, not superlatives. Same difficulty to change the mind if it is already formed. “Don’t confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up.” That is a way of life for most people (Trout A. and Ries J., 1986). Proper positioning statements can attract and keep the customer loyal which in the long run provides a competitive advantage (Chowdhury, 2013). Overall, it governs product strategy, distribution strategy, pricing strategy, advertising and sales promotion strategy, sales force strategy, direct marketing strategy, and the Internet strategy points out how (and why) the product mix, line, or brand is to be positioned in the target market segment and hence effective targeting and positioning of the firm’s products are core dimensions of market-driven strategy and hence are essential in attaining superior performance (Cravens and Piercy, 2009).

Positioning as a “battle for your mind”

To grab customers’ attention, a position must be competitive. According to Natasha Saqib (2020), 39% of examined positioning literature was emphasized positioning competitiveness, whereas other substantial 58% percentages were consistently shared between “filling an empty slot” in minds of customers and customer perceptions, the value of which was expressed in the preceding paragraph. The reason for competitiveness is that there are plenty of companies around and overmuch communication messages that are trying to grab the attention of a targeted consumer. Al Ries expressed his opinion on this point in the interview in 1988. He asserted that before marketers can even attempt to reach the consumer, they must first neutralize the competition. Only then they can launch an attack on a mental battlefield. Laukkanen Tommi (2015) argued that competitor orientation has a direct positive effect on financial performance in young established companies rather than their older counterparts. To settle down their position in the marketplace, young firms should track competitor’s path, create, and sustain their strengths over their rivals. Differentiation aims to create a noticeable position for customer’s eyes. The spatial distance between brands in consumers’ minds shows the subject’s perception of similarity or dissimilarity between products and brands (Subroto Sengupta, 2005). The position or distinctive point is created through components of the market offering: product, terms of sale, distribution, and communication provide opportunities whereby the firm can competitively differentiate its position (Song and Parry, 1997), and each of these components

must be strategically reviewed for this purpose (Darling J.R., 2001). Positioning is the way to set business and product apart from the competition (Kardon, 1992).

To conclude the subchapter, the definition of positioning was viewed from many perspectives, summaries of which contribute to the whole concept of the term. It is noticed that different scholars define positioning in different ways (Chowdhury, 2013), but all of them complement one another. For instance, positioning can be seen as nothing more than a simple, all-purpose word such as placing or locating (Maggard J.P., 1976). Locating a product, a brand, a company, or even a person. At the same time selected position serves as the vehicle that drives the whole marketing program. Positioning is proactive, customer-focused, and competitor-oriented. Competitive positioning involves differentiating the firm's market offerings from directly competing markets' offerings in ways that prospective consumers find meaningful and appropriate within their established mindset (Darling J.R., 2001). By leveraging the strategic positioning concept, companies can compete in a chaotic market. For that, a company must fully understand what—at its core—a company does, which value proposition is to most important customers, how the brand is positioned vis-à-vis its competition, and how to tell a story in a compelling way (Cunningham A., 2017). A company's message must be oversimplified and as close to reality as possible. Perception reflects substance, not desire or spin. That is why positioning clarifies the brand's essence, what goals it helps the consumer achieve, and how it does so in a unique way (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Anyone can use a positioning strategy to get ahead in the game of life. And look at it this way: If you do not understand and use the principles, your competitors undoubtedly will (Ries A. and Trout J., 1986).

2.2 Branding. What is the link with positioning?

“There is no such kind of thing prevail as a product or service at the marketplace for a long time until finds a space in consumer's mind with strong positioning of a brand” (Malik A., 2018). Simon Knox (2004) defines a brand as an entity that provides customers (and other relevant parties) with added value built upon elements thereto to its functional performance. These brand values differentiate the offer and lay the basis for customer preference and loyalty. In an increasingly networked world, understanding the consumer behavior effects of associating a brand to other entities such as another person, place, or

a thing, is a focal ability. (Ghodeswar B.M., 2008). By strategically positioning desired attributes a company can build a compelling unique brand personality and worthwhile reputation. Such benefits may assist an enterprise to survive in a clustered environment because the brand provides a promise of predictability. Above all, it is known that branding is not as utilized by small firms as it is applied in large ones. Although this may be true, it does not mean branding proves to fail in micro-companies. Branding is different in small organizations, but still has the place to exist. Furthermore, if employed correctly, a craft brand that offers something unique to highly engaged target can win over global brands since those might fail to serve local customers at best and even more, would not notice a small niche because it stays hidden away. Graham Robertson (2018), in his brand bestseller, gives an accurate example of such a craft brand. Dollar Shave, an American company, yet started small with its online direct-to-consumer model selling pattern, it mocked Gillette via this business strategy and continued to grow until was bought by Unilever for \$1 billion. Another example is Five Burger Guys, an American fast-food restaurant, which builds success on micro benefits where global brands missed from attention. Five Guys burger cooked high-quality meals from fresh ingredients meanwhile their enormous popular competitors just microwaved ready portions. This is how the small enterprise took the market share of \$57 million in 2016, and so how provoked competition to international restaurants such as McDonald's, KFC, Burger King. Such craft brands take an antagonistic approach to others, challenging the rest in the category as leftovers, disrespectful to ecology, unethical, careless in the use of ingredients. Hence, branding is possible in small companies. To make a start-up prosperous, positioning concentrates on that singularly exclusive product/ service/ corporate responsibility difference, and branding focuses on the user's senses and experience of using the product (George Boykin, n.d). This is a clear difference between branding and positioning which highlights their linkage. This thesis is made to detect that link between the terms and offer positioning within the branding context of a small firm.

2.3 What kinds of positioning exist?

2.1. Market-oriented positioning

Positioning typologies were examined from various perspectives: conceptual or empirical, managerial or customer derived (Urde M., 2014). Specific typology induces the company's operationalization and drives destinations in quest of competitive dimensions. Bridson K. et al. (2013) argue that business orientations are capabilities, as they set the firm's direction and activities to ensure that resources are fully exploited. The most common perspectives in which positions were analyzed are market and brand orientations. "Successful consumer marketing does not begin with a unique product or a great idea. Marketing begins with consumers who want or need the product and have the resources to buy it" (Darling J.R., 2001). Market orientation seeks for satisfying those needs. In contrast, brand orientation is made to be super-ordinated to meet the wants of customers. Brand or market positioning is not an "either-or proposition" (Urde M., 2013) The choice of paradigm influences the positioning process, business performance as following, and hence paramount to investigate (Urde M., 2014). Both approaches may seem similar. However, in essence, they are based on different grounds.

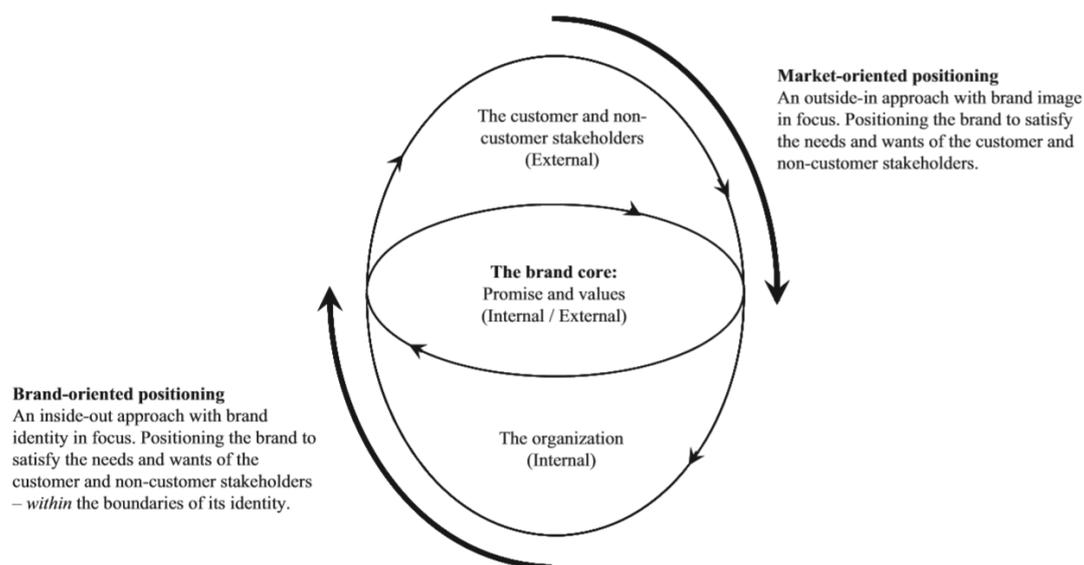


Figure 2 Approaches to positioning (Urde M., 2011)

Figure 2 represents ongoing interaction between the organization (internal), the brand core (internal/external), and the customer and non-customer stakeholders (external), where two bold arrows direct positioning approaches. Market orientation or how it is also called "image-driven positioning" is viewed as an outside-in paradigm. Meanwhile brand-orientation or "identity-driven positioning" is an inside-out flow.

Market orientation is considered as an antecedent to developing various positioning strategies in an organization (Iyer P. et al, 2018). It refers to a mindset of an organization and involves complete knowledge of market and customers, strategic decisions, and well-coordinated functions (Bigné E. et al, 2000). Market orientation consists of three behavioral elements: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination that communicates value creation based on market intelligence (Narver, J.C., & Slater, S.F.,1990). The angle is from the outside in, where a customer and brand image are pivotal. They guide a firm's behavior and actions. Development projects, organizational structures, and marketing activities are aimed in search to compete, and these attempts inevitably count on the knowledge of the market. Positioning distinguishes a company or product from competitors along with real dimensions benefits or values that are important or meaningful to customers to become the preferred company or product in a market (Di Mingo E, 1988), and thus the concept is unquestionably about market orientation. Market orientation evolves necessary behaviors for developing superior value for consumers via collecting and disseminating market intelligence (Iyer P. et al, 2018). Therefore, market orientation is seen as a strong competitive advantage: it requires a vast of time to implement and it is complicated to imitate. Nonetheless, market orientation does not exist in a vacuum from other activities and pressures in the business. Managers generally pursue to establish a mix of orientations or priorities suited to the particular environment in which they operate. Currently, researchers are seeking richer descriptions of other orientations of firms (Hooley G., et al, 2001). Concerning market orientation, Pramod Iyera et al (2018) distinguish proactive and responsive market orientation (henceforth PMO and RMO), which are market-driving and market-driven activities. Two separate constructs express two types of consumer needs: explicit and latent. PMO is more research-oriented: explores and learns the unmet needs of customers. Accordingly, PMO is characterized as inventive involving quality or/and design-focused differentiation with inclination on opportunity and risk detection. Conversely, RMO responds to present buyers' wants. RMO's conduciveness is directed towards differentiation and cost-leadership, which underscores consistency, efficiency, and low-risk market skimming (Iyera P., et al, 2018). Ranjit Voola and Aron O'Cass (2010) stress attitude towards market orientation as RMO and PMO as imperative. Leveraging them to some degree allows a company to sufficiently obtain benefits of the competitive strategies and, more importantly, use them as crucial

mechanisms for transferring those benefits to performance, specifically if the market is not stable. Findings indicate that firms may strive for adopting RMO or PMO individually, with some success. However, relying only on customers' expressed needs does not generate new insights into opportunities to accumulate customer value; consequently, it may be cogently not enough for responsive MO to attract and keep potential buyers (Narver et al. 2004). Therein, bundling both will lead to optimal long-run business performance results. The winners will be companies that are responsive to challenges and adroit in both creating opportunities and capturing them (Radović Marković, M., 2008). Market orientation (RMO plus PMO) is also purported as capability (Voola R. and O'Cass A., 2010). A company's capabilities are defined as what a business does and can do and is an encapsulation of end-to-end functions into an abstraction that is agnostic to the underlying process and supporting system (Capstera, n.d.). The definition outlines the complexity of applied knowledge and experience which are latently built over time. Enrique Bigné et al (2000) concur that market orientation is an "invisible triumph" that is difficult to duplicate. Competitive positioning and market orientation: two interrelated constructs. As positioning seeks a distinctive place in the mind of the prospect, market orientation is seen as a resource that extracts a competitive advantage and reveals the required abilities to provide superior value to a customer. Especially, market orientation can be a source of comparative advantage if it is rare among competitors (Hunt, S. D.; Morgan, R. M., 1995). Without attending to the market orientation culture of the firm, developing a successful value proposition could prove futile (Blankson C. et al, 2013). Therefore, market orientation is a precursor to positioning, and so forth positioning is a market-based process that can provide firms with an advantage in the marketplace. At the same time, Charles Blankson et al. (2013) found that even a market-oriented firm can establish poorly positioned products, which inevitably cannot create or sustain long-term competitive advantage. Firms may not build links between market orientation and business strategy which leads to confusion. They are likely to build promotional slogans while having difficulty in explaining a positioning view supporting these ads. For this reason, Charles Blankson claims that meanwhile market orientation promises commitment to continual creation of superior value, positioning calls for the iterative deployment of market-oriented strategies that alter consumers' perceptions about the firm's offering(s), and both of them must work in tandem to deliver asynchronous, efficient outcomes. Effective positioning aligned with

a firm's market orientation culture is found to have the potential to build powerful brands. As a result, market orientation appears a strong positive determinant of brand creation (Laukkanen T., 2015), and, is perceived as closely related to branding and brand positioning (Iyer P. et al, 2018).

2.2. Brand-oriented positioning

According to Urde M., and Koch C. (2014), brand-oriented positioning is an approach that detects and implements an intended position with brand identity as its point of departure. Brand orientation emerged as a response to market orientation (Gromark J., and Melin F., 2013). In the early 1990s market orientation was not enough to withstand the dynamic environment. Then brand orientation was coined as a new approach to appear in the market. It was found that the brand is the inherent element in completing the decision-making process when purchasing the products by the consumers (Radoviciu R. and Stremțan F., 2009), meanwhile, positioning is central to the success of the brand, because it directly shapes customer perceptions (Fuchs C., 2008). To reference back, consumers are extremely limited in their minds. When a customer is at a purchasing point, (s)he would most probably opt for a brand (s)he knows and trusts, and thus branding and customer relationship marketing topics are actively researched. Implement Consulting Group defines brand orientation as a management philosophy that places the brand at the heart of organizational decision making. They contend that in a brand-oriented company, both internally and externally, is informed by the brand (Implement Group Consulting, 2017). Therefore, as Figure 2 represents, brand orientation is an inside out approach, where customers' needs are identified, but the brand integrity is foremost. The goal of such a company is to design, develop, and secure brands as valuable resources and as viable competitive advantages (Urde M., n.d.). A brand positioning statement explains what your brand does, who is the target to serve, and how a firm undertakes it in its 'unique' way". Branding (the process of brand building) informs how the business fits in the market space and positioning (the layer beneath it) tells where the business fits (Fox A., 2017). The brand is considered as an asset for an organization in the light of that it provides a company with an identity (mission, vision, and values), it makes a business memorable, persuades consumers to buy, and supports marketing and advertising programs. It reflects the overall

experience a customer undergoes when interacting with a business — as a shopper, consumer, social media follower, or mere passerby (Decker A., 2019). Given that the brand orientation is seen as a strategic resource, it challenges market orientation regarding customer needs as the driver of brand development (Urde M., 1999; Laukkanen T., 2015).

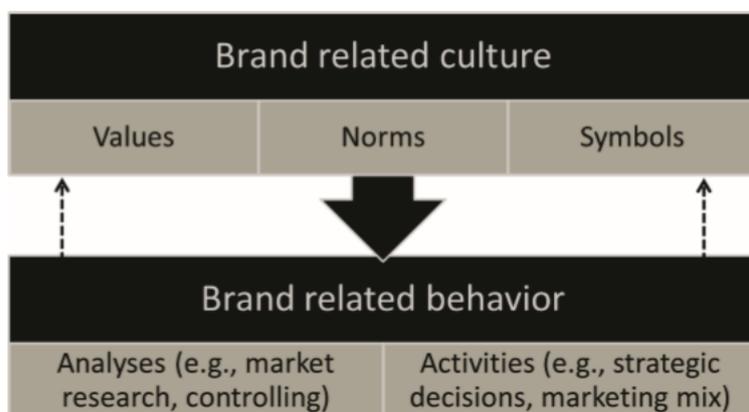


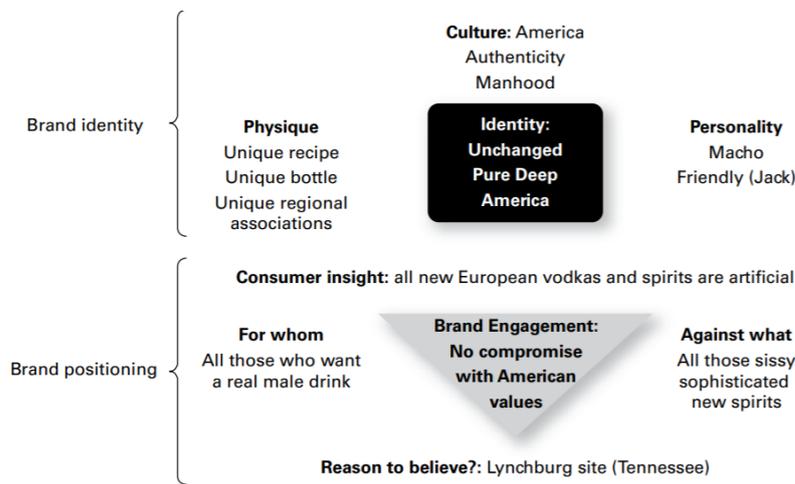
Figure 3 A conceptual model of brand orientation
(Schmidt H. J., Baumgarth C., 2014)

Locating a customer at the forefront and thus unconditional responding to customer needs can be crucial for a brand in the long run. Holger J. Schmidt and C. Baumgarth (2014) assert brand orientation is a certain type of corporate culture and a corresponding behavior that are commu-

nicated with each other. Figure 3 demonstrates these two constituents. The cultural layer consists of values, norms, and symbols, which, in turn, are exhibited in actions. Values are defined as fundamental beliefs that guide or motivate attitudes or actions (Ethics Sage, 2018). It is via positioning that the company expresses and interprets the core values (Urde M., 1999). Norms can be viewed as cultural products or explicit and implicit rules which govern the company's members how to present a company to themselves and others. Symbols carry meaning to people who share a culture and are broadly understood and used so frequently that it does not require explanation (Course Hero, n.d.). Actions are activities that can be in the form of branding programs, integrated marketing communications, measurements of brand equity. The idea of 'living the brand' has a strong link to the brand orientation concept, and the behavioral cluster measures the manifestation of the respective orientation (Schmidt H. J., Baumgarth C., 2014). Figure 3 proves that a brand-oriented company is driven from inside, where market orientated one is more customer-centric, where all company activities are prompt by customers' wishes and wants. J. Gromark and F. Melin (2013) define five differences between market and brand orientations: 1) brand orientation captures an attribute of possessing brand identity (mission, vision, and values) on the contrary to market orientation; 2) stakeholder issue is

broader where the customer does not have the same special status (s)he does in market orientation. A customer does not value in brand-oriented companies like it does in market-oriented ones; 3) brand orientation consists of a broader spectrum of objectives; 4) temporal dimension – since brand orientation has a survival concentration, a company's perspective on its brands is completely different from a more short-sighted focus on income that characterizes market orientation; 5) last but not least, the difference in integrity that creates a balance between the external and internal perspectives. Authors then forge the definition of brand orientation which sounds like a deliberate approach to brand building where brand equity is created through the interaction between internal and external stakeholders, where brand management is perceived as a core competence, and where brand building is intimately associated with organizational development and superior performance. As it was stated before, positioning is founded on the consumer's perception of the product and not the other way round (Urde M., 1994). Thus, positioning can be seen as a communication channel via which a company asserts for instance specific attributes or benefits that belong to the brand's identity (Urde M., 1999; Tiina-Kaisa Kuuru, 2013). Kapferer (2012) assures that positioning is derived from identity. It ensures the brand to meet its objectives. C. Fuchs (2008) arrived at a view that a well-positioned brand appeals to the particular needs of a customer segment, leads to high consumer loyalty, positively shaped preferences and beliefs about brand value, and larger willingness to seek for the brand. In line with that, Kerrie Bridson et al (2013) posit that brand orientation together with positional advantages has positive relationships with financial performance and strategic effectiveness within the retail sector, which means that organization of both can lead to either successful or fruitless outcomes. Proper brand orientation work is related to issues such as differentiation and engagement, characteristics that seem to be even more necessary in sectors such as services and online commerce (Supulcri et al, 2020). Besides, Supulcri et al (2020) discovered that in the field of online commerce, if the brand orientation impacts the reliability of this type of retail, it positively affects the consumer's purchase intention. In the service sector, brand orientation is found to empower standardization (Supulcri et al 2020). All in all, brand-oriented positioning is the component of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be dynamically communicated to the target audience and that testifies an advantage over competing brands. To demonstrate how brand identity and positioning work within an organization, Figure 4 is derived from

“The New Strategic Brand Management” by Kapferer (2012). Through the example of Jack Danial, it is illustrated how brand identity collaborates with brand positioning to establish an explicit and concise brand platform. It is noted in a model that positioning



can be encapsulated in four key questions: for whom, why, when, and against whom? They are further translated into a brand platform.

Figure 4 Jack Danial's Brand Platform (Kapferer, 2012)

2.3. Synergy: market & brand, brand & market

Finally, market and brand-oriented types of positioning are interlinked because customer orientation is central in both orientations (Gromark J. and Melin F., 2013). Despite this connection, fundamentally two approaches are different. At the same time, they considered working synergistically. Johan Gromark and Frans Melin (2013) concluded that in

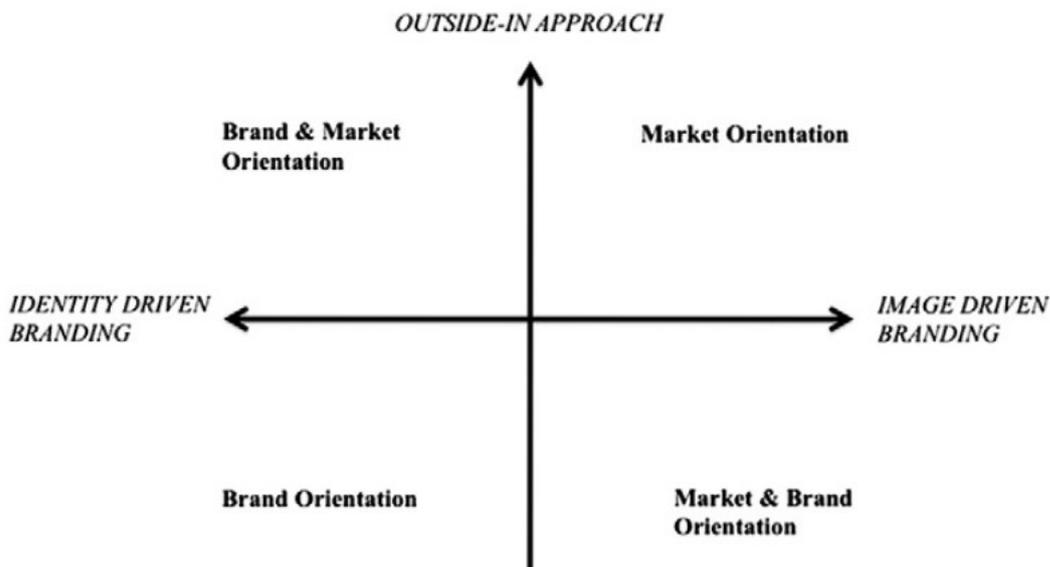


Figure 5 The brand and market orientation matrix (Urde M., et al, 2011)

highly competitive trades, market orientation can be a hygiene factor, and further sophistication in the form of brand orientation is required to attain a competitive advantage, which was empirically proved. Mats Urde, the Swedish professor and researcher in brand management, supports this perspective and considers brand orientation as a “plus” to market orientation. Laukkanen Tommi (2015) posits in a similar way that marketing-related value creation and competitive advantage, understanding customer preferences may not be enough unless this information is turned into a distinctive brand, meanwhile, a brand cannot be developed without an adequate understanding of customers’ preferences (Laukkanen T., et al, 2011). Following the logic, Urde M., et al (2011) proposed an alternative model, where synergies of two paradigms are mapped all together. Figure 5 is adapted from Urde M. et al (2011) article. The matrix presents not only brand and market-oriented approaches, but their hybrid versions as well.

Market and brand orientation is a mix of both approaches, where market orientation takes the front place. In this hybrid form, the view of the market and a customer comes first, but brand identity is also recognized which initiates the behaviour and strategy of the organization. To be more specific, the company’s design starts with customer research, results are transformed into new products and services. Depending upon the new character of a product or service, it is channeled to the key brands of a corporation. Electrolux is an example of such an orientation. On the other side, there is a brand and market orientation, where the brand is at the fore, where a firm recognizes the external aspect of the brand. Brand identity is imperative, but the buyer’s needs and wants play a crucial role in strategy and culture formation within the organization. In other words, the core brand values are in the foundation of the company, but they act as bellwethers in the process of meeting customer needs. Volvo follows such an orientation.

Urde M. et al (2011) also discovered that companies may change their orientation throughout time. Like this, being market-oriented, a company may recognize a need to develop brand orientation. Namely, Avis, a famous car rental service, at first was pure market-oriented by unconditionally responding to customer demands. The strategy brought successful and profitable outcomes, so Avis became one of the leaders in this market. Customer service is still critical for Avis, but the combativeness of their strategy is regulated by the need for a more stable and brand-based offering applicable to a market

leader. The dynamic story of Nicorette tells how a company moved from brand orientation to market and brand orientation. From being part of a traditional pharmaceutical company, as a prescription-only smoking cessation product, it became an international over-the-counter consumer brand (Urde M., et al, 2011). The marketing team surveyed buyers and gave them exactly what those asked for. On the flip side, the organization stated that it did not abandon its values and identity as a brand company. On a balance, Nicorette succeeded to fit the transition from medicine to consumer products and from patients to consumers.

To summarize, there are two most-viewed positioning typologies – brand and market orientations. Both are different approaches to position a company but interrelated with each other. Gromark J. and Melin F., 2013 discovered that brand orientation and market orientation as coexisting, where the former is seen as a variant of the latter. Besides, they found brand orientation as an independent concept that solves the problems that market orientation generates. Accordingly, Mats Urde asserted brand orientation as a market orientation “plus”. Lastly, the authors state market orientation and brand orientation as two alternative approaches, but which can be used separately or in hybrid forms. To support the new hybrid view of positioning typologies, there is a quotation made by Kapferer and Bastien adapted from Urde M. and Koch C (2013) "there are two ways to go bankrupt: not listening to the client, and also listening to him too much." Urde M. and Koch C. (2013) found speech in works of Hatch and Schultz (2008) about extreme organizational behavior as self-absorbing narcissism (identity taking overhand) and hyper-adaption (image taking overhand). Market & brand orientation and brand & market orientation can be considered as third and fourth ways to see a company's position core.

2.4 What is the process of positioning?

David A. Aaker and J. Gary Shansby (1992) proposed six steps model in order to develop a positioning strategy: 1) Identify the competitors; 2) Determine how the competitors are perceived and evaluated; 3) Determine the competitors' positions; 4) Analyze the customers; 5) Select the position; 6) Monitor the position. To establish an offering Darling J. R. et al (2008) offered a generalized guide: 1) Establish the initial market offering in the

minds of consumers; and 2) Differentiate the market offering from the offerings of competitors. Tiina-Kaisa Kuuru (2013) in her master's thesis of corporate brand positioning came to this procedure: 1) Analyzing the current situation; 2) Analyzing the own brand; 3) Analyzing the customers and market; 4) Analyzing the competitors; 5) Determining the target position; 6) Achieving the target position. These processes are slightly different. All of them circle a customer, a competitor, and a brand. It is considered that the more interpretations of the positioning concept exist, the more different typologies appear as it can be seen from an example above. Typologies are understood to be classification schemes of positioning bases. To be more specific, there are product positioning typologies (Ostasevičiūtė R. & Šliburytė L., 2008; Aaker D.A. & Shansby J.G., 1982), brand management positioning typologies (Matsuda J., 2017; Fayvishenko D, 2018; Knox S., 2004), positioning studies within promotion and image creation (Ries A. & Trout J., 1972, 1980), positioning as strategic competitiveness (Darling J.R, 2001; Hooley G., et al, 2001), positioning for small and medium-sized companies (García-Pérez A.M. et al, 2014; Chen S. & Schiele K., 2017), market-oriented positioning papers (Bigné E. Et al, 2000; Blankson C. et al, 2013), and the list can extend further. This enormous quantity of positioning can be explained by extant literature. It indicated that the term “positioning” in marketing is interpreted from several perspectives. The vagueness of the term is noted by many academics (Kalafatis S.P. et al, 2000; Maggard J.P., 1976; Saqib N., 2020; Urde M. and Koc C., 2014). Therefore, the author argues it is important to emphasize from which perspective and in which context the phenomenon is studied. Some academics like Blankson C. (2016) and Kalafatis S.P. et al (2000) posit that positioning typologies in most cases are described as loosely formulated processes because they are conceptually driven and offer no normative guidelines both for industrial and customer markets. Lack of operationalization of the positioning process is reflected in propositions for strategic positioning frameworks. From all these statements it is acknowledged and highlighted that positioning topic requires vast literature investigation. To narrow the borders of the positioning process, this particular paper serves the need of a case company and explores a fair amount of academic scholars. The detailed description of a company will be provided next chapter, but herein it is necessary to emphasize that a firm is a small entity, and the positioning process should remark this particular aspect of the study. The next point to consider is that the study will hold brand & market-oriented position context

building a business in a new market since it was discovered from the scenario of a case company. The choice of the paradigm will be also justified in the next chapter. Before moving to the theoretical positioning synthesis there is a need to explain major predecessors that will become the main constituents of the future framework.

To begin with, it is necessary to accentuate that positioning can be seen as a continuous process (Darling J. R. et al, 2009; Darling J. R., 2001; Radoviciu R. & Stremțan F., 2009; Arnott D. C., 1992). The work of Hooley G. et al (2001) declared and depicted the forming of competitive positioning that in the end influences the performance of both the company and the market so in the end positioning is continually revisited. At the same time, the term can be seen as a point a company wishes to achieve. It can be fixed in time to measure customer perceptions of a brand. For example, Lhotáková M. and Olšanová K. (2013) assign brand equity as a part of a brand positioning statement. In turn, brand equity with help of marketing mix measures if the intentional positioning idea equates customer perception, and which can be transformed into strategic actions. In the words of authors: “low brand awareness, as an example, requires strong communication with consumers focused on brand recognition, while high unaided brand awareness allows concentration on specific brand values when communicating with the consumers” (Lhotáková M. and Olšanová K., 2013). Charles Blankson (2016) supports that there is a difference between perceptual positions (i.e., a static representation of a market structure) and positioning (i.e., the deliberate and proactive management of activities designed to position a brand against competing brands). Christoph Fuchs (2008) notes there is an intended, actual, and perceived position of a company, which underlines the positioning as a processual notion and at the same time with static points in the timeline.

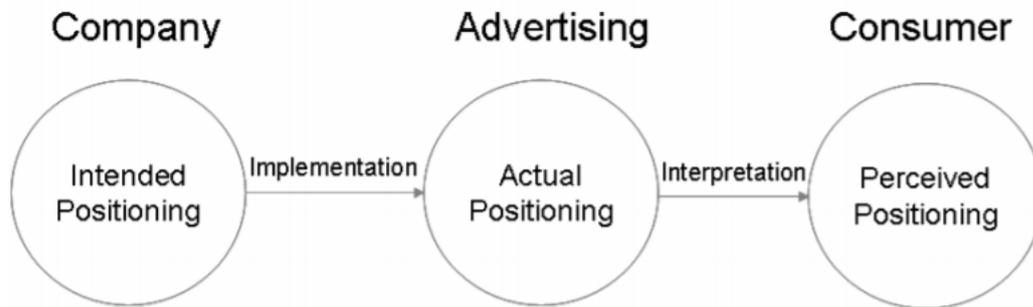


Figure 6 Intended, Actual, and Perceived Positioning (Fuchs C., 2008)

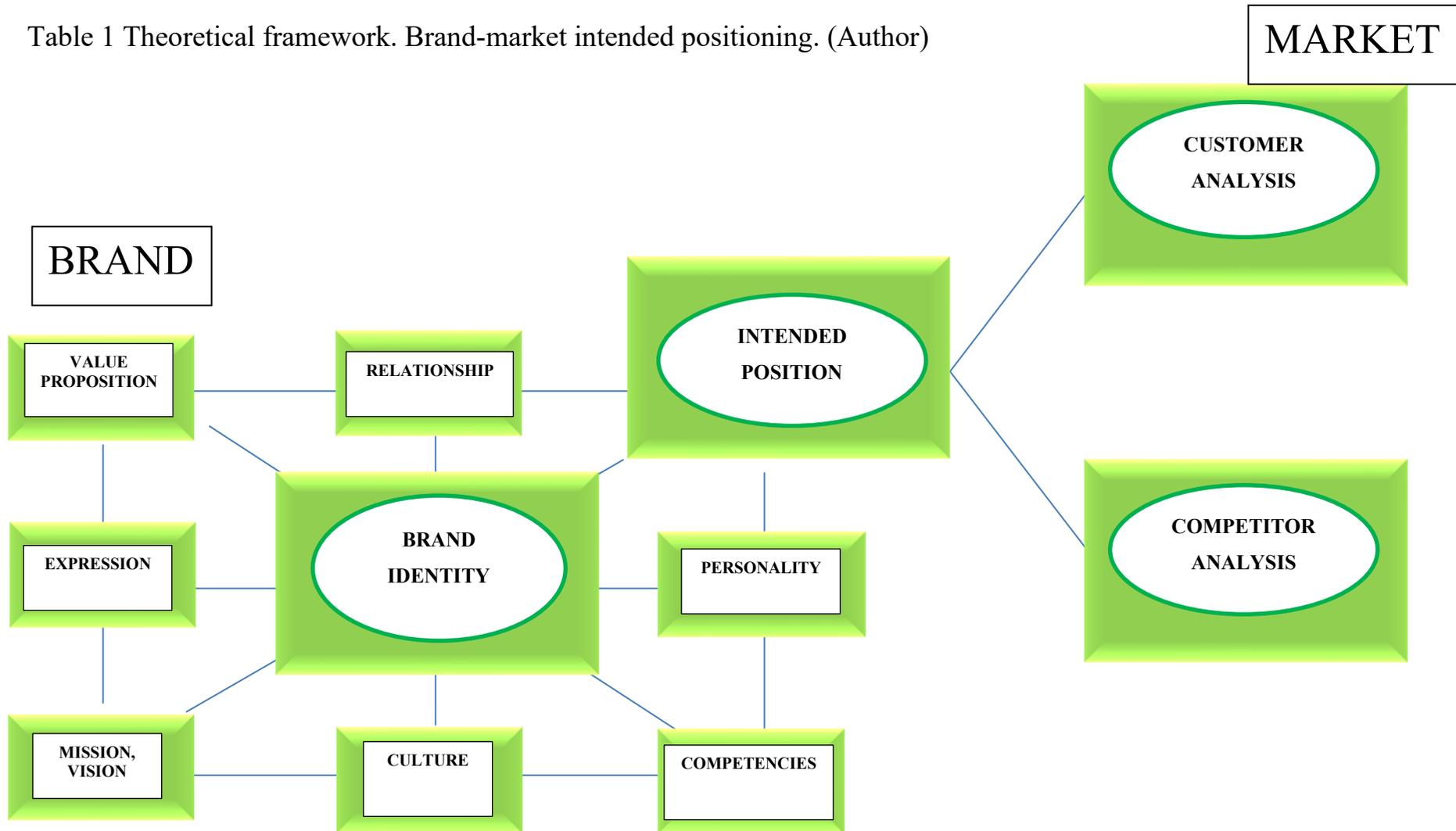
In intended positioning, which is seen from an organization's perspective, a company presumes identification of associations to create, strengthen, or change consumer's perception of the particular brand against other brands. An intended positioning shows how a company would like a customer to see it. Actual positioning is an implementation of the intended one. It may be implemented through the marketing mix, customer relationship marketing, learning, and innovation (Hooley G. et al, 2001). Perceived positioning is a final message a customer beholds. Consumer brand perception is formed based on how far needs and wants are satisfied, how marketing communication translates a company's vision to a customer. Lhotáková M. and Olšanová K. (2013) add to this list price and a distribution channel as important influencers in forming customer experience. Discovering this division, this paper is going to focus on forming the intended position in the context of brand & market-oriented positioning for a case SME.

Another predecessor and future component to the theoretical framework is the brand & market-oriented positioning, where brand orientation is foremost and has a point of reference coming from inside out with brand identity in the core. Market orientation is on the opposite an outside-in path, where a customer is seen as a corporate business engine. To combine these two orientations into a synergetic hub, a brand & market-oriented company can be defined as a company that adopts the part of the brand identity and value proposition that demonstrate an advantage over competing brands with establishing the optimal location in the minds of existing and potential customers so that they think of the brand in the "right way" (Keller K., 1999). To successfully pursue such an orientation

positioning, brand identity, added value, and identification an “empty room” in the prospects' mind must be clearly defined. Discerning positioning typologies that could offer instructions on a corporate positioning process for an SME with evident brand inclinations were not identified. It appears that this is the first study that narrows down positioning focus to the intended position without further sophistication of actual forming and monitoring of the position. The border between the forming of the intended position and actual implementation minimizes the risk to blur the study validation and concentration. Besides, such an aspect of exploring an SME case may contribute to SME positioning literature, because it is going to be empirically tested based on case company scenario. The framework can be considered for similar SME companies expanding its business abroad that are brand-minded in roots and at the same time market-oriented. The study may make a contribution also in brand management in the context of SME. What was generally found that even though at least ninety-five percent of all business belongs to the SME group, branding is traditionally considered a large companies issue, and lacks an SME perspective (Ahonen M., 2008), thus the current study might help SMEs to shed light upon their brand potential and stimulate to consider the positioning. The theoretical synthesis is introduced on page 31. And described as following.

Centrally, intended positioning is placed as a subject of the thesis. The intended position will form a positioning statement that a company will be able to communicate via actual positioning. To form the intended position there is a necessity to address brand orientation roots since the case company cultivates this issue. Market orientation is the last, but not least part that contributes to the choice of the position, because it is indeed composed of

Table 1 Theoretical framework. Brand-market intended positioning. (Author)



elements that a case company as an SME does not intend to leave aside without attention. The connection between these three constituents is justified in the theoretical frame description. They are linked and emerged into the intended position, subsequent aim(s), objective(s), and strategy proposition

Brand orientation, positioning, and brand identity

Small and medium-sized owner-managers often observe branding as an unattainable matter because there is a lack of expertise in brand management and uncertainty about whether it contributes to their business performance (Muhonen T. et al, 2017). Instead, SMEs are more product-oriented and price-focused attempting to survive in the growing stage. They have a keen interest to develop and improve products building on intuition rather than practicing marketing segmentation and apply formal strategies, most typically because it is “difficult for them to coordinate their brands as strategic resources as the overall direction of the business is still developing” (Hirvonen et al, 2013). At the same time there are pieces of research that assert branding is needed and is beneficial in SME business (Ahonen M., 2008; Mitchell R. et al 2015). Timo Muhonen et al (2017) found that even though researchers dispute insisting on branding is essential for SME companies, there is no cogent and thorough answer on how they can adopt this subject, or even if they are able to do it such as large organizations (LOs) do. The article of Mari Ahonen (2008) contains a quotation from Robert Opoku et al (2007): “Branding is a critical issue in the SME sector because brands allow actors, such as organizations, to say things about themselves in ways that every-day language cannot convey.” Paradoxical though SMEs do not seem to show interest in branding (Muhonen T., et al, 2017), and they stay quite a price and product focused (Anarnkaporn A., 2007). Customers can perceive older firms as more trustworthy than micro-companies, so this aspect may demotivate small companies to attempt branding. Ultimately, Timo Muhonen (2017) argues that the orientation choice depends heavily on the direct impact of owner-managers and their personification of the company. At all accounts, micro firms are recommended to recognize that orientations overall can

prove to be helpful with various growth and performance goals (Reijonen H., et al, 2012). Angkana Anarnkaporn (2008) admits that micro firms have considerable local opportunities. They can serve the customer more flexibly and creatively compared to global companies. Huge international brands are forced to invest in advertising because they are unable to be present for a customer everywhere in the world. Through a promotion campaign, it makes customers feel closer to global LOs rather than local SMEs that are physically nearby. Small organizations can use this benefit of being closer to build a compelling experience for consumers, and via branding themselves, strengthening advantages, they can overcome competition. This is not a secret that winning a competitive advantage became a problematic issue in the reason that every successful step in terms of sales is fast to be copied by competitors. Companies are recommended to design unique units of resources and capabilities to secure their organizations. It is acknowledged intangible capabilities important because they are hard to duplicate (Hooley G. et al, 2001). This kind of knowledge is idiosyncratic and has been built over time with reliance on tacit experience and skills. Brand orientation is that asset, which is difficult to copy because it has a distinctive identity. Brand orientation is not merely as an identifiable logo for consumers, but as a business capability. The brand identity was mentioned in the preceding section 2.2. of utmost importance in brand orientation. Brand orientation is viewed as the ground for brand identity (Urde M., 1999). Identification increasingly gains the foreground, and therefore prior to knowing how a company is perceived. Identity found the ground for a brand image that means how a brand is perceived among customers and stakeholders. Charles Blankson (2016) is assured that buyers position brands with or without the help of marketers, hence there is a need to iteratively manage brands to assume the greatest advantage in selected target markets. As a result, this should lead managers to strive for employing specific positioning strategies and brand management tactics to support the intended positions in the marketplace. Combining positioning with brand management ensures a brand's position in the market space. According to David Aaker and Erich Joachimsthaler (2000), brand positioning is part of the brand identity and value proposition

that will be actively transmitted to the target audience. Positioning is what the brand wants to be for its consumers, which in turn should be derived from its identity.

Ekaterina Walter (2013) inferred that there is a need to be careful in the shaping of brands and companies in order not to miss fundamental questions that seem to be the answer for the brand identity. They are: 1) What is the purpose of a company?; 2) What does the brand stand for?; 3) What are brand values?; 4) What is the culture to nurture?; 5) How does the company institutionalize the culture / How the company intends to communicate? All these questions are not considered as a one-off exercise, but the cultivation of the way of thinking. To specify and visualize what the brand identity is, in 2013 Mats Urde offered the three-by-three corporate brand

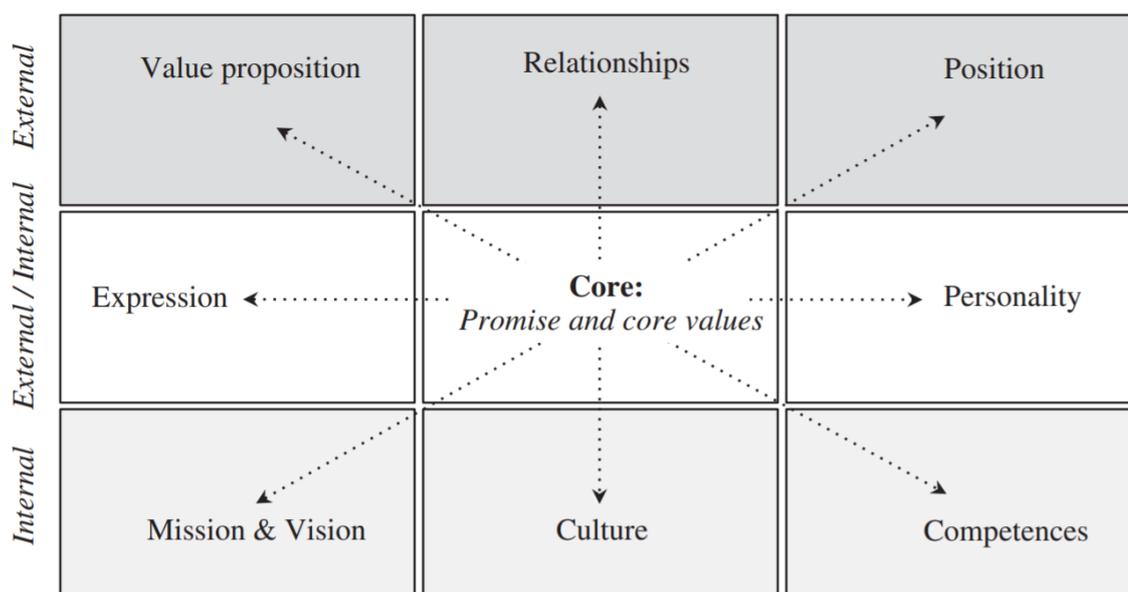


Figure 7 CBIM (Urde M., 2013)

identity matrix (CBIM), which was developed theoretically and managerially tested, respectively. Figure 7 illustrates CBIM framework. All the elements that are divided into three groups: internal, internal/external, and external. The internal row displays the organizational level, the external is a transmission to the outside “world”, the middle row sums them up. The arrows going out of the core: they indicate components are interrelated and establish a complete structure. The core reflects all elements, and each element reflects the core. Altogether they establish a

coherent corporate brand identity. The organizational level includes mission and vision, culture, and competencies. Mission explains the reason why a company exists, and vision defines where the company heads to. They can be expressed in the question “what engages us, beyond the simple aim of making money (mission)? What is our direction and inspiration (vision)?”. Both are usually seen as a point of departure in identifying a brand. To reference the brand culture, it is appropriate to come back to Figure 3 that represents the brand culture in a set of norms, symbols, and values. To identify them, a company may think “what are our attitudes and values?”. Notably, Schmidt H. J., Baumgarth C. (2014) refer them to the organizational property of a company that is translated into actions, strategies, and relationships with customers and non-customer stakeholders. Competencies show what a company is good at, and what it can do better than the competition. They flourish capabilities and help the company to gain assets, so to note them it is proper to raise a question on “what are we particularly good at, and what makes us better than the competition?”. Moving to the middle row, personality and expression connect external and internal sides. “Brand core” in the center is defined here as an entity of core values supporting and leading up to a promise (Urde, 2013). The brand promise assembles the core values as a meaningful entity. The core concentrates a focus, guidance both externally and internally, and initiates collaboration between the parts. It can be formulated with a question that is offered by the author of CBIM: “what do we promise, and what are the core values that sum up what our brand stands for?”. Kotler P. and Keller K. (2006) define brand personality as the mix of human traits that may be attributed to a certain brand. To that academics add that buyers frequently opt for a brand personality that reflects theirs, how they would like to see, and feel themselves. Therefore, the following question fits here: “What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character?”. This personality is dependent on the degree to which it is expressed. The expression is the form of brand identification that can be showed via verbal, non-verbal, visual communication, design, tone of voice, the logo of the firm. The expression should connect and resonate with the audience — otherwise, they probably will not pay

attention. Then, a company might ask itself: “what combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character?”. A defined brand identity illustrates the vision of how the organization wants to be perceived externally. In the creation process of the corporate brand identity, the target audience is considered, because in values the brand seeks to be a mirror for a potential consumer. The value proposition is an assertion that is made for the customer and non-customer stakeholders which in turn can be found in the question “what are our key offerings and how do we want them to appeal to customers and non-customer stakeholders?” (Urde M. 2013) The relationship element defines the code of conduct. Together with the cultural emphasis, it delivers a special service to its customers. Last, but not least comes the position with the question “what is our intended position in the market, and in the hearts and minds of key customers and non-customer stakeholders?”. The position determines how the brand wants to be viewed in the prospect minds. It is the initial station for the process of positioning that trails the definition of the corporate brand identity. The intended position is meant to differentiate the brand. The bridge between the intended position is emphasized since mission and vision guide the choice of the position.

Mats Urde (2013) offers further three ways to apply the framework. First, the company can describe corporate brand identity. Second, it can identify and lastly align. The description can be examined, for example, through thorough interviews with company representatives, analyzing brand platform, documents that describe the way of work, code of conduct, design guidelines, workshops. Hence, it is possible to gather a whole picture of CBIM. The second method is to identify the corporate brand identity. It can be implemented with the help of sessions where managers and company professionals are asked to fulfill the matrix that reflects their view on brand identity, and which afterward can be discussed in a common plenary session. An external survey of customers and non-customer stakeholders can provide sufficient input to adjust the corporate brand identity. The third way to apply CBIM is to align it with the core and extended identity in order to fill gaps between them and establish the correspondence among all elements. To be more specific, the brand

might have a set of competencies, but which are not turned into value propositions that are important in customer and non-customer relationships, or mission and vision that are not turned into a distinguished position that makes a brand unique. Some gaps may inspire managers to fulfill them, for instance, to create a brand personality that might influence communication manner.

To put the whole matter in a nutshell, brand identity is the collection of all elements that a company creates to portray the right image to its consumer, and that is why is extremely important. The importance and influence of the core values and corporate promises reflect the degree of brand orientation. For one, corporate brand identity can be mere simple words, and for another is a point of departure. Nonetheless, the corporate brand is generally considered as a strategic resource and competitive advantage that SMEs are recommended to build.

Market orientation: customer and competitor analysis

Helen Reijonen et al (2012) came to the conclusion that SMEs looking for ways to improve their performance should focus on brand orientation and the various elements of market orientation. To refer market-oriented firms, they are those that develop an appreciation of understanding present and potential customer needs is vital in providing superior customer value; inspire the systematic gathering and sharing of information regarding current and potential customers and competitors (RMO & PMO); and, inculcate an indispensable condition of an integrated, organization-wide priority to meet changing customer needs and competitor activities to avoid risks and originate opportunities (Morgan, R. E., & Strong, C., 1997). It is argued firms that pursue market orientation are more likely to possess strong brands. (Aron O’Cass & Liem Viet Ngo, 2007). As it was pointed out, the position is the part of CBIM that differentiates the brand identity from competitors in the mind of customers. Correspondingly, market orientation heads to the development of positioning strategies, which in turn influence the firm's competitive advantage and performance (Iyer P., et al, 2018). In principle, positioning, if done properly, individual-

izes the brand from its competitors, appeals to customer's needs, and creates consumer loyalty and consumer-derived brand equity (Iyer P., et al, 2018). This is how brand identity, market orientation, and positioning are bridged. To continue, market orientation is widely recognized as having a positive effect on business performance in all types of markets (Jones R. & Rowley J., 2011; Narver J.C., et al, 1998). Moreover, several pieces of research approve market orientation is not related to any specific firm size (Blankson and Cheng 2005; Pelham, A.M., 2000), which means that it applies as much to small, medium, or huge organizations. Conversely, firm size is an important consideration with respect to the competitive advantage of enterprises. LOs tend to have access to a bigger range of resources than SMEs do, hence establishing privileges such as economies of scale, bargaining power with suppliers and distributors, high brand awareness, and monopoly to beat the competition with price leverage (Raju P.S., et al, 2011). SMEs have limited resources and little margin for error (Richard C. B., et al, 2001). In other words, new-born companies and SMEs encounter “liability of smallness”. It may cause the absence of market orientation and skills in SMEs that frequently leads to lower performance results and threats of business failure, which was found from the literature review by Rosalind Jones and Jennifer Rowley (2011). Nonetheless, it is appropriate to conceptualize the market orientation of an organization as one of degree, on a continuum, rather than as being either present or absent (Slater S.F. & Narver J.C., 1999). Small enterprises may not owe as many resources as larger firms, this ability to develop unique strategic resources in terms of how they exploit information, knowledge, and responsiveness could make them enjoy another potential sustainable competitive advantage. (Raju P.S. et al, 2011). As it was discussed, SMEs are less bureaucratic and more output flexible compare to LOs, so they have a greater capacity for speed in responding to customer needs (Richard C. B., et al, 2001). SMEs tend to be more innovative, especially, in the first stages of development, to survive and compete in the market. Studying MO in the context of SMEs, Raju P.S et al (2011) discovered that these structural and cultural antecedents generally favour SMEs having a higher degree of MO than larger firms. Likewise, in BO, to a

great extent, MO implementation is dependent upon owner-managers, their experience, attitude, and expertise. Increasing awareness regarding MO and BO practices among owner-managers can contribute to the growth and development of micro firms, SME enterprises. This is another aspect of this study, a result of which, should commit in awareness of the case company and possibly finding the way to influence other SMEs, thus probably impact decision-making, and improve performance. Researching MO in the context of SMEs is important, because smaller firms have different marketing than larger firms, and their resources and capabilities are on different levels. To say so, small business needs marketing in a format that is compatible with small firm characteristics and is acceptable to the small firm owner-manager. The market-driven approach is extremely important in micro-companies because they are more dependent on the market situation. Marjanova T.J., et al (2012) state they should aim at being close to the customer because this is where most of their strength and possibilities exist. A profound understanding of customer demands, conditions of the market, and the competitive environment are essential for success, still, they are often missing. Reijonen H., et al (2012) concluded that customer-oriented SMEs are likely to be more profitable than their less customer-oriented counterparts. Overall, findings showed that growing SMEs are more customer-oriented, and surprisingly, competitor-orientation had the weakest effect. In contrast, Timo Laukkanen (2015) argues that competitor orientation is strongly recommended in SMEs compared to the situation in LOs, and it has a direct positive effect on financial performance. The reason for that is that small firms meet fierce and diverse competition while entering the market. The implication is that both customer and competitor dimensions should be considered though may to different degrees. From the literature review, it was found that market orientation can be measured by three elements: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination (Reijonen H., et al, 2012; Raju P.S. et al, 2011), whereas inter-functional coordination, is the creation of customer value based on customer and competitor intelligence (Laukkanen T., 2015). Those elements are found to be positive determinants to brand orientation, and where customer orientation has the strongest effect because it is the ground for value creation. Superior value creation

is the core of the market-driven approach (Reijonen H. et al, 2012; Lagat C., et al, 2015; O'Cass A. & Liem Viet Ngo, 2007). Market orientation generates the ability to deliver superior value to consumers through the organization's brand offering (O'Cass A. & Liem Viet Ngo, 2007). This is how brand and market orientations can be connected in a synergetic view of positioning. To refer to positioning, it is the "act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinct place in the target market's mind" (Kotler P. & Keller K., 2006). Therefore, the role of the market elements in the brand & market-oriented positioning cannot be underestimated. Marketplace positioning describes how a firm differs from the competition in terms of what it does and how it does it within the market (Lagat C., et al, 2015). Market orientation elements influence value creation and generate company marketing capabilities via learning that ultimately might lead to greater business performance. Superior value is a central tenet in building competitive strategies, and in the reason that it is the major objective of market orientation, successful MO can build a competitive position and defend it through intangible resources and capabilities that are built over time and difficult to copy.

To find the position and create a superior value in market orientation, a company needs to:

1. Analyze competitors

"A competitive analysis is a process of identifying competitors and evaluating their strategies to determine their strengths and weaknesses relative to your own business, product, and service" (Myk Pono, 2018). A company should gather as much relevant information as possible about competitors. It is important to understand who direct and indirect competitors are. Aaker and McLoughlin (2010) offered two ways of doing that. The first is to evaluate the views of consumers in choosing among various competing companies. This technique helps to define competitors at the choice of customers. In this regard, a perceptual map or multidimensional scaling can be employed illustrating the positions of competitors in the perceptual space

of consumers, so managers can find an “empty room” to compete in the marketplace. The way to decide upon a list of criteria or features where competitors are measured can be group discussions, profile analysis, word association test (Baker M.J., 2007). Figure 8 illustrates an example of how a map can look like. Fuchs C. (2008) suggests that after understanding competitor positions, there is a need for

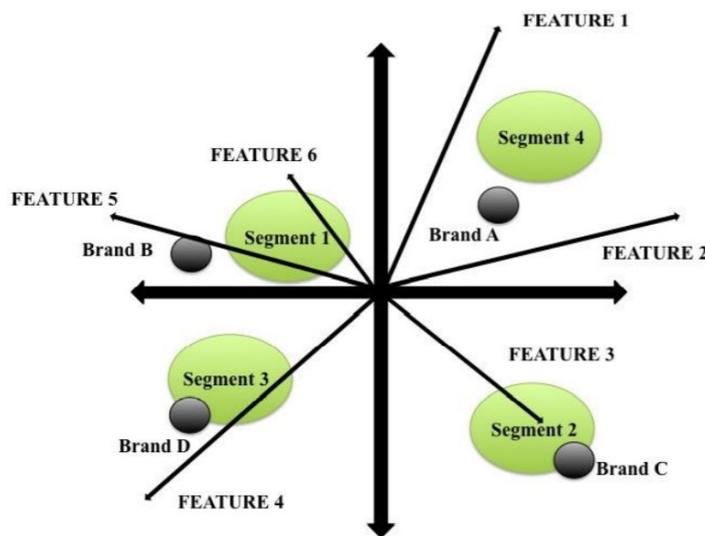


Figure 8 Tiina-Kaisu Kuuru (2013)

customer analysis in order to derive a set of potential associations that managers desire the target segment(s) to hold. The author emphasizes that managers normally need to focus on a constrained set of associations to avoid confused positioning. The second route to conduct competitor analysis is to allocate competitors into groups by the same competitive strategies. Through that, it is possible to build a schema or a checklist on certain criteria and settle a unique position. Myk Pono (2018) offers to describe competitors by company-specific information, target/customer message, product, or service-specific. Riezebos H.J. and Jaap van der Grinten (2012) suggest a similar alternative analysis, which consists of four group-based competitor intelligence. The information is divided into organization-based, product-based, marketing-variable-based, and receiver-based. By fulfilling the gaps, the manager can have a clue on whom to compete with, what kind of strategies competitors use, where they are strong, and where they are weak. This information helps to differentiate the company from competitors and gives a clue on go-to-market strategies.

2. Analyze customers

The fulfillment of customers' wishes in a profitable way demands that companies understand which attributes of the product or service are valued by the customer. To figure this problem out it is necessary to conduct a customer analysis that can generate customer knowledge. Customer knowledge is at the origin of most improvements in customer value (Rowley J.E., 2002). There is a minimum of two views of the value delivery process. The traditional one is to produce the product and afterwards sell it. This approach worked effectively in the past when the market was substantially different, however, market conditions are not the same nowadays. Even though this view is old-fashioned and considered to be unsuccessful especially for SMEs, it is still practiced. Satisfying customers' needs became challenging in a keenly competitive environment, so the modern view appeared as to carry out a targeted market approach: once companies identify who customers are, they can generate appropriate product accordingly that match customers' needs and wants and deliver the expected value (Ruzzier M.K., et al, 2013). Customer satisfaction is especially relevant for young firms that have not yet established a customer base. In fact, losing a customer in the early stages is very costly because it implies that the business must invest resources (time, capital, effort) in attracting new customers. In contrast, a satisfied customer can make repeat purchases and create favorable word of mouth that attracts new buyers (Ruzzier M.K., et al, 2013).

Sally Dibb and Lyndon Simkin (1991), Rūta Ostasevičiūtė and Laimona Šliburytė (2008), and several internet sources (Claessens M., 2019; Hanlon A., 2020) describe STP model that is made to make customer research leading to positioning. Figure 9 illustrates the model in the form of steps, which are segmentation, targeting, and positioning.

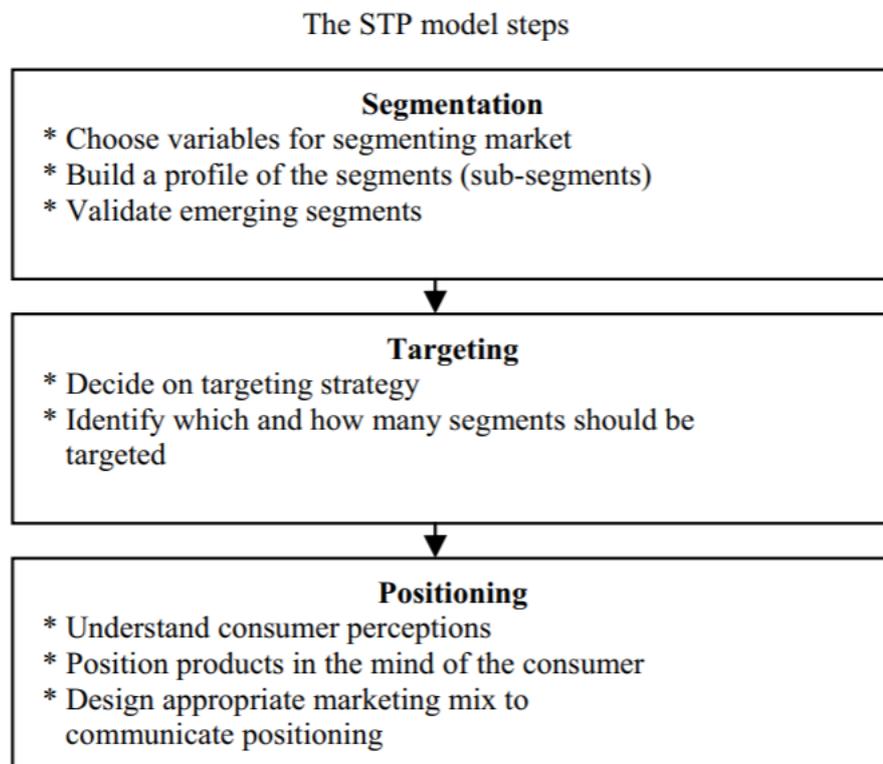


Figure 9 STP model (Sliburyte L., 2008)

Segmentation represents the process of breaking down the market into specific segments (Ruzzier M.K., et al 2008). It is necessary to understand who potential customers are. A homogenous group of consumers, specifically at the SMEs level, is named market niche, a narrowly defined group of customers obtaining special features and benefits. Graham Robertson (2018) noticed that a niche can be a competitive ground to serve consumers because it is small enough not to attract the attention of LOs as well as it may bring only a few competitors. It is important to practice effective segmentation because individual marketing and too narrow segments can lead to constraints to serve those segments; meanwhile, too broad segments can lead to confused positioning or difficulties in reaching effectively all the segments. In SMEs, it is significant that segments are incompatible and can be served with similar products because it is essential that targeted buyer groups respond similarly to the company's marketing activities (Fuchs C., 2008). Variables to segment potential buyers usually are divided into the following groups: geographic, demographic,

psychographic, and behavioral variables. Practicing segmentation, a company may choose some of the well-defined variables to establish segments. Notably, only essential criteria must be selected based on variables, otherwise, it brings the company to excessively narrow segmentation. The next step is to target segmented markets. Here is the space to conduct a customer audit to find to derive needed customer information, and possibly competitor information, to uncover a market position that will help to design product offerings that are needed by customers as well as unique in comparison to competitors. Business practitioners are recommended to concentrate on those targets which they can serve in a superior way. Targeting strategy and positioning represent actual and perceived positioning, which is out of the focus in this study. However, based on information found from targeted segments and competition, a positioning statement can be drawn, and proposition on positioning strategy and place made. Tailor-made methodology (qualitative or/and quantitative) can be used as a way to gather such information.

Intended positioning

To form a position and formulate a positioning strategy effectively, firms require a simultaneous analysis of competitor and consumer behaviour (Chowdhury P.P., 2013). In this research, the intended position stands on a mix of corporate identity and market knowledge in the form of customer and competitor intelligence. The objective of a position can be to gain a relevant, distinct, and enduring position that is considered important by the targeted buyers. It can vary from company to company depends what a firm wishes to achieve. Positioning objective is necessary because it stresses resources available to the firm, the degree of market orientation, and the profitability of segments (Blankson C., 2012). The company can identify itself through multiple associations. For example, the position can be based upon intangible associations like eco-friendliness, fashion, fun, or tangible ones like specific shape or taste. The most known positions in positioning literature were noted by David A. Aaker and J. Gary Shansby (1982). Authors accentuate the positioning of a product, which can be a little different from corporate positioning. However,

their positioning propositions can be considered while targeting the market and considered the adjustments and applications for the corporate level. They are positioning by attribute, by price/quality, by-product user, by application, positioning concerning product class, and with respect to a competitor. Positioning by attribute assumes to associate a feature of a product. For example, Volvo associates durability and safety with the proof of crashing test campaigns. Toyota stresses economy and reliability by implying total quality management. Authors note that a product can be associated with attributes that competitors might miss. Another mentioned positioning strategy is to position by price/quality. Positioning by quality, companies offer attractive prices to customers thus creating value. Conversely, positioning via quality might offer customers better service or product performance, but which requires a price increase. There is always the risk that the low-price message can blunt the quality position, so there is a need to be careful in mixing two terms. The next position is to associate with a product user, a personality, or a lifestyle. To be more specific, in 1975 Miller's Lite beer, adopted beer-drinking personalities to position itself as a beer for the heavy beer drinker who detests filled-up feeling. Marlboro cigarettes associate itself with a cowboy symbolizing individualism and independence. A different option for the position is possible with respect to a product class. For example, 7-Up positioned its beverage as an “uncola” drink. Lastly, positioning with respect to a competitor can help to communicate a different or new image referencing to a competitor. The most discussed case is the positioning of Avis “we are the second, but we try harder” against Hertz. Referencing a competitor, it is easier to make a bundle with a particular attribute, price/quality. Later in 2013, Chowhurry P.P. extended the positioning list by summarizing some into the table. The table below illustrates the clarity that a company can position itself in infinite possibilities.

Table 2 Strategic positions and examples

Strategic positions	Example (firms)
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Relating the brand against an established brand	Avis vs. Hertz
Repositioning the competitors	Beck's beer against Lowenbrau
Benefit positioning	Crest for cavity protection
Use/Application	Campbell's soup for lunch time
User positioning	Johnson & Johnson mild shampoo for frequent users, Miller high Life beer for upper class
Price/Quality	Departments stores in high quality, Sears or J.C. Penny in value segment and discount stores like KMart in low price/quality segment
The best	Accenture, Harrods
Value	Skoda, Aldi
Innovator	Nokia, SAP
Product focus	Rolex, Land Rover, Amazon
Target Segment	Hamleys, Mothercare
Product categories/class association	Red Bull, Remy Martin e.g. 'Un-cola' for Seven-up e.g. Caress as a bath oil
Product attributes	Saab, Duracell, Volvo (safety & reliability) BMW-performance, fun in driving, engineering innovations. Range Rover- Style & design Sony Wega TV- picture, bright colour
Product line scope	Tesco, Amazon
Organizational intangibles	HP, Sorbonne
Emotional benefits	MTV, BBC, Radio Five Live Safe in Volvo, energized while drinking Redbull, strong & rugged when driving a Range Rover
Contemporary (reliable, safe, a friend, and even innovative)	U2, Zara
Self-expressive benefits	Puma, Mercedes (successful, in control, and a leader by driving a Mercedes
Experience	Harvey Nichols (merchandise, ambience, and service) , Guardian Unlimited
Personality	Patek Philippe, Velcom Volvo/ Financial Times (professional and competent) Mont Blanc, Jaguar (upscale and sophisticated
Competitors	Visa, Virgin
Multiple strategic positions	Honda- (youth and racing) in Japan; family orientation in US; quality and engineering in Europe
Perceptual positioning	Headache remedies

Structural complementarities, structural diversity, and overall development direction	Service firms
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Finally, the position can be figured out in a positioning statement. A positioning statement is made for internal usage in a company, to clarify its position and provide a direction for future marketing campaigns. Kapferer (2012) suggests that the desired position can be formulated as follows:

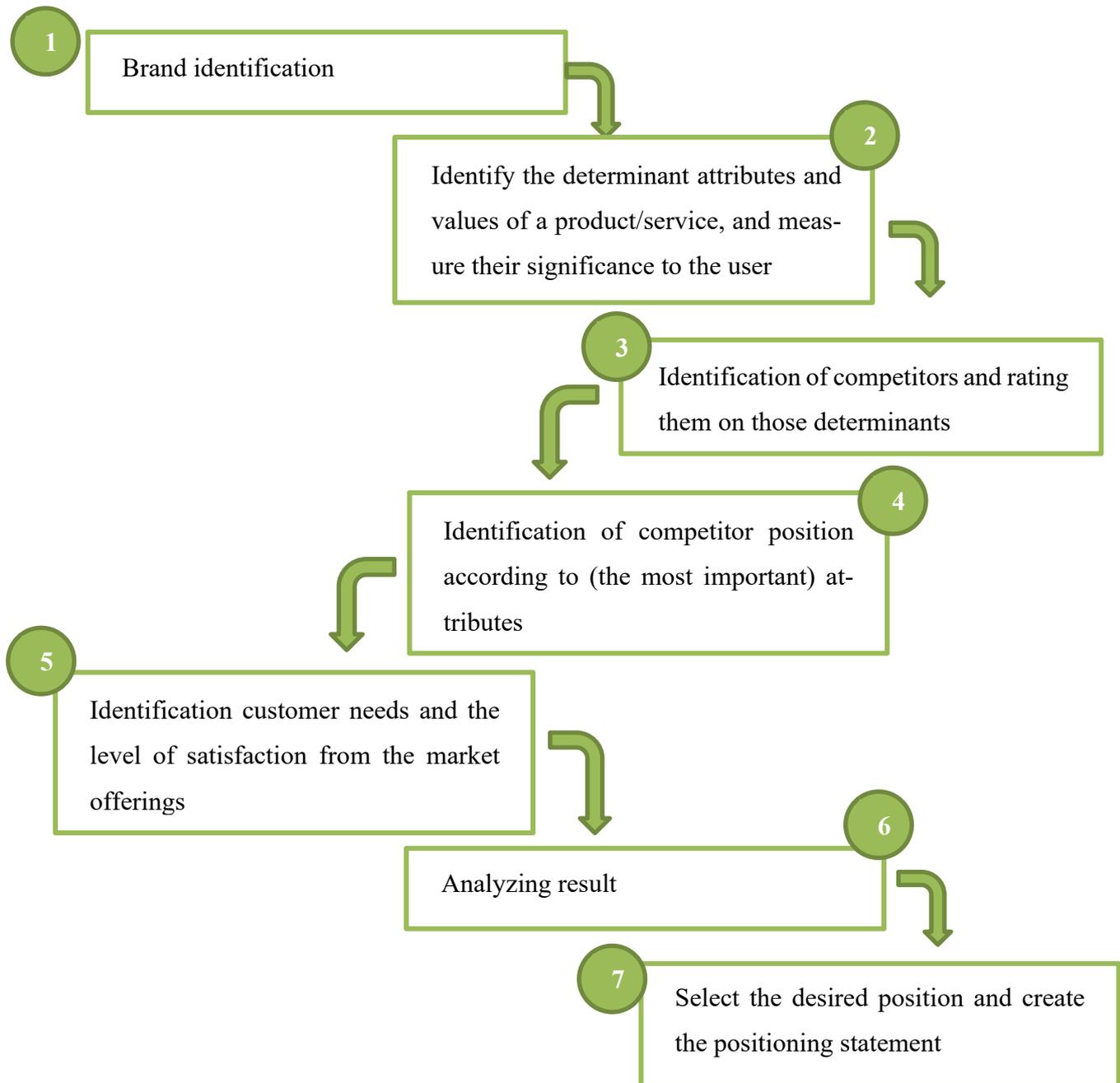
- For... (Definition of target market)
- Brand X is... (Definition of frame of reference and subjective category)
- Which gives the most... (Promise or consumer benefit)
- Because of... (Reason to believe)

All in all, the example of the positioning statement offered by Kapferer (2012) illustrates the essence of the positioning concept. To be more specific, the statement shows its dedication to the target group, its difference from competitors via communicating brand identity which is supported by promise and reason to believe. Graham Robertson (2018), a high-profile brand consultant, admits the same. The author further suggests four types of claims a brand might use. They are process support, when a company highlights its value-added service, unique production showcase, or how a product acts differently; product claims highlight the usage of a feature that makes it more comfortable to use or more durable; third-person endorsement supposes to betake to an expert's opinion to speak the brand, demonstrates prizes and awards; behavioral outcomes that include certain tests, usage studies. Using this example, it is possible to build an accurate and comprehensible positioning statement.

2.5 Summary of the theoretical framework

From extant literature, the positioning appeared to be complex, and its meaning and connotation should be clearly defined for everyone involved in guiding subsequent strategies and the company's decisions. This research encompasses positioning as the art and science of designing an organization's distinctive image and value offer so that target groups perceive the firm and firm's offering preferably against other brands. Positioning directs a company towards the needs/expectations of prospective buyers, it detects and connects specific attributes to the brand with help of marketing communications. The study scope is narrowed down to the intended positioning which means that it concentrates only on detection excluding marketing communications. In the meantime, the topic of branding is not left aside but is granted to be crucially affluent in forming future position and company performance. To refer back, the case company wishes to connect the brand threshold to corporate positioning. Finally, theory discloses brand-market intended positioning (see p.29), where brand identity is foremost for a company and acts as a point of reference, but customers' desires stay enough important to shape an organization and activities. In the reason that the paper talks the context of a micro firm example, brand identity is not straightly defined. Therefore, theory discovered the brand identity framework (CBIM) designed by Mats Urde (2013), today's voice of brand management. The matrix pointed out the most important aspects that assemble brand identity as a whole. Finally, brand identity as an inherent part of brand-oriented positioning is bridged to the external environment – the market. Market-oriented positioning consists of customer needs and further competitor analysis. Based on the theoretical framework, the next research steps are used in the methodology:

The research process for brand-market intended positioning



Primarily, there is a need to fill CBIM in order to have a thorough picture of brand identity as a point of reference. For that, a case company is directed to complete the matrix. As soon as it is done, the following phases cover customer and competitor analysis. As the second step there, determinants, and attributes that are valuable for customers in opting for a shop to make purchases are detected. Same time customers are asked to evaluate these determinants according to their perceptions. This helps to understand which dimensions are important for a customer and which are less significant. On a third step, prospective buyers are questioned to choose three shops they most often buy from and rate them based on previously defined attributes correspondingly. From competitor data, a perceptual map is built, the fourth stage. It allocates companies on the back of attributes, whereafter the “empty” space is found to establish the case company, the intended position against competitors. Besides, consumers talk about their needs, satisfaction/dissatisfaction from the market experience. Identified customers’ needs and level of market satisfaction help to create a benefit, the reason why to acquire goods from the case company. This customer data is essential to analyze because right along it gives the ground for positioning strategy, the design of product line and services, the start of marketing communications. In the issuance, the CBIM alongside data from the customer analysis, creates the intended position respectively to competitors.

The next chapter depicts the case company and argues the choice of methodology to conduct an analysis.

3 EMPIRICAL STUDY – METHODOLOGY

The empirical study begins with the case company description. Henceforth, the choice of research methodology is explained, it covers both qualitative and quantitative methods within the case study. The quantitative method involves issues raised regarding customer “hot points” during purchasing products, level of satisfaction from the market offering and service, their unsolved problems. Additionally, the survey contains competitor data; it paves the path for future multidimensional perceptual scaling. The qualitative method consists of fulfilling the corporate brand identity matrix (CBIM) completed by the case company.

3.1 Overview of the case company

Company X is a personal named Swiss company, which was established in 2015. This is a micro firm that is involved in foreign trade and mainly acts as an e-retailer. The company imports & exports dog, military, and tourist outdoor stuff. In 2020 the company laid a branch to Sweden, and modified its name, with a plan to concentrate on dog activities leaving military and tourist goods as a secondary business for Switzerland. Yet in Switzerland, the company spread different kinds of dog merchandise on occasion: from sleds and harness to dry food and snacks. Now Company X wishes to leave the idea of “sell for sell” but nurture the mission of promoting an active lifestyle with help of supplying high-quality reliable stuff that is comfortable both for a dog and its owner.

The company sees its customer as a dog lover who is eager to do outdoor activities with his/her dog, and who values quality for welfare improvement. A customer would not see any value in luxury stuff since it involves great worthless expense. S/he looks for an efficient and reasonable-priced item and can pay little more if the characteristics of an item worth that, so to say Company X follows the quality-price ratio.

To start a business in a Scandinavian country, the firm wondered which image to create in the market and how to turn rising brand ambitions into clear statements. It needed to get acquainted closer to customer problems and doubtlessly to the competition. All these issues are the subject of the thesis, they are problems of positioning and branding. The theoretical framework discovered a connection between the terms and is being explored empirically.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Methodology choice

To commence with, this research circles around a case study. Case study, in general terms, is already considered an intensive research method, where a person, a group, an organization, or an even is a case subject. Case studies are based on an in-depth investigation and produce descriptive and exploratory analysis (Press Analysis, 2018). It sets research boundaries, dynamics of the topic within the context. Understanding the context is principal in a case study, this is why the company description and the problem description within its situation are necessary. Saunders M., et al (2016) contend case studies contribute to a theoretical phenomenon because they address the issue within real-life. The methodological choice, argued further, is grounded on case study research. Kothari C.R. in his book “Research methodology: methods and techniques” (2009) defines methodology as a way to systematically solve the research problem. It describes methods applied to a field of study and thus coming to answer the research question. There are a variety of different methods in marketing, and the choice depends on a research question, resources, and time available. Hooley G, et al (2004) gathered marketing research

activities that are mostly included in the services of research agencies. Figure 10 below presents that chart.

The authors divide marketing research methods into three main branches that direct

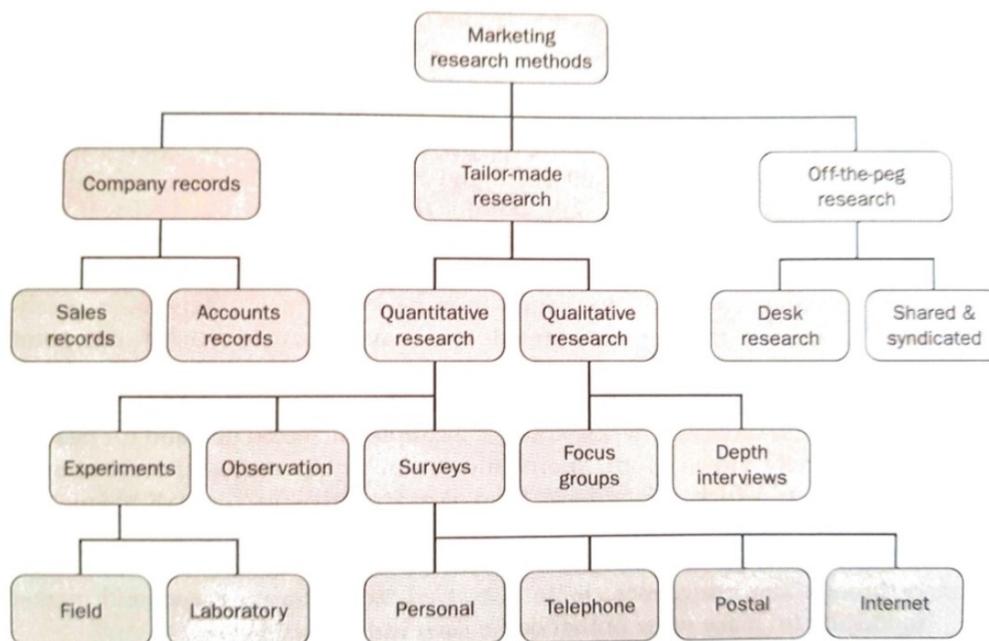


Figure 10 Marketing Research Methods (Hooley G., et al, 2004)

further research analysis. They are company records, tailor-made research, and off-the-peg research. It happens so an enormous amount of data is held within the company and analysis that can assist in marketing decisions. In a particular case, this method will not be effective since Company X does not possess relevant data. What is more, the purpose of this research is to acquire that data. Next, off-the-peg method. Indeed, some data already exists but remains externally of the company's touch. Information needed might be held in research services. For instance, it can be already published data with public access, which is termed as desk or secondary research. Desk research may be useful because it is cheap and quick to attain, but only when it is known where to search. Syndicated off-the-peg is another subdivision to the aforementioned research, which assumes data collected, and research methods are shared by the syndicate of research buyers. Shared off-the-peg is similar to the previous in terms that the method used is shared, however, at the same

time the information collected is not. Off-the-peg research does not fit to tackle this thesis problem. If some related reliable and accurate data exists, it must be strictly secured taking into consideration privacy. Besides, there is no interested syndicate to share the research. The only left is tailor-made research that classifies qualitative and quantitative approaches. Tailor-made research, from its name, suggests the research specially designed for the need of the client company. It provides flexibility and plenty of techniques compared to the off-the-peg and the company records options. Tailor-made research includes qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative ethnography is dynamic and measured in value. The qualitative information can be obtained from focused groups and depth interviews – everything can be measured by quality. A focused group is a group talking where several respondents participate in a discussion. A direction of the discussion is usually led by a moderator, trained speaker/psychologist. The facilitator encourages participants to share perceptions and points of view. The focus groups can benefit from creating something critically, for example, an advertising campaign; or give a full perceived picture of a certain phenomenon. Nonetheless, the group discussion does not provide valid information on an individual level and can be dominated by some members. Additionally, data analysis is time-consuming, so the meeting must be planned thoroughly. Depth interview, on the other hand, is arranged by one interviewer with questions to the one respondent. This method can give comprehensive knowledge, but like focus groups, results require a vast of time to analyze. On the contrary to qualitative, the quantitative technique supposes numeric data that can be counted. This data often involves responses that coded, categorized, and reduced to numbers so that the data can be represented in a statistical view. To derive quantitative knowledge, Hooley G., et al, 2004 offer to address experiments, observations, and surveys involving multiple-choice, rating scales, or other closed questions. Saunders M., et al (2016) argue it is necessary to distinguish these methods; however, the distinction might cause certain limitations. In reality, business practitioners get used to using both qualitative and quantitative separately or merging to cope with drawbacks that come from a single method. For example, a research design may use a questionnaire but it might necessitate to include some open questions where

the respondent can express an issue in their own words rather than ticking the box, the options of which might be limited due to the researcher non-acquaintance. Possibly, an observation or experiment results may require the following interviews to find out reasons for this or that circumstance.

This research paper combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques since one methodology can support the other. It is named the embedded mixed-method when a research practice includes multiple methods that combine qualitative and quantitative techniques and analytical operations. The quantitative approach will provide data needed to decide upon the market situation, meanwhile qualitative one will aid to make the ultimate decision on positioning with a brand as a point of reference.

3.2.2 Research strategy

In a broad manner, a strategy is a set of a plan to reach an aim. Basically, the research strategy explains the way data should be derived. Particular research opts for an interview as qualitative data, and survey as a quantitative method. To argue the choice, an interview fits superior to discuss CBIM (corporate brand identity matrix) with the company owner. The CBIM information in the context of Company X will be based on the director's reflection of the brand and eventually provide value in its answer, not statistical or numerical data. For the quantitative method, the survey with a questionnaire is chosen as a research strategy excluding an experiment and an observation. An experiment requires a hypothesis to test rather than a research question like this thesis raised, and observation is usually used when a respondent is unlikely to explain, for example, own behavior and provide accurate data. The only effective way is to survey potential buyers about their market satisfaction, and places they usually acquire dog equipment (competitor investigation). Saunders M., et al (2016) concede "survey strategies using questionnaires are popular as they allow the collection of standardized data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way, allowing easy comparison". Surveys can provide data on the segmentation of markets, define customer perceptions and requirements, and quantita-

tive data on markets – exactly what is needed in the research case. Moreover, quantitative data can be analyzed quantitatively applying descriptive statistics. Thereby, for instance, a perceptual map for competitors can be created – what is required for this research.

3.2.3 Methodology practice and survey design

Particularly embedded mixed method was used to collect data from prospective buyers and a case company in a short period, 15 days.

The qualitative interview was conducted on 1.10.2020 with an owner-manager of the case company. The purpose of the interview was to define the corporate brand identity of the organization. The quantitative approach comprised the questionnaire that was shared via the help and collaboration of the Swedish dog clubs. In addition, the questionnaire was shared among targeted Facebook users and individual Swedish kennels.

Table 3 Theory and survey questions connection

Theory	Inquiry Purpose	E-survey questions
Segmentation/targeting Background information	The canton a respondent lives; figure out the quantity of dog per person depend on canton, the most preferred purchasing channel by area -> helps to decide the need (and area) to open a physical shop	Which province do you live in?
	To identify the number of dogs per person; the quantity of dogs might affect the buying habits and key purchasing criteria of a respondent	How many dogs you have?

	Segment respondents by activities they do to figure out which equipment to include in the catalogue at most; most profitable segment	Choose an activity/activities you do with your dog(s)
	Understanding the buying habit of a respondent to assume the necessity of opening a physical shop	I buy products (dog food & equipment) from
Customer analysis	Finding out customer “problems” with the online market	What are your biggest pain points with the current online market offering?
	Finding out customer “problems” with physical stores	What are your biggest pain points with the current offline (physical store) offering?
	Rating the importance of pre-defined dimensions (purchasing criteria) based on a respondent vision	For me, it is important to have an opportunity for advice from the shop
		For me, it is important to consider many models from the same product type to make a purchase decision
		For me, it is important to have high-quality durable stuff
		I am loyal to brands (products) I use, and I do not want to discover unknown alternatives
For me, co-creation and equipment customization (i.e. collars, harness) is important		
Competitor analysis	Identify a competitor based on consumer preference	Name the shop you mostly buy from
		From them, I can easily receive consultation regarding a product

	Rate the named shop on pre-defined dimensions; according to respondent experience and perception	<p>The store has enough different products to choose from</p> <p>From them, I can have high-quality durable products</p> <p>From them, I can find all brands (products) I need</p> <p>With them, I can adjust and adapt products/product features to personal needs</p>
Customer analysis	Understand the respondent's openness to try alternatives to the existing boutique(s)	How likely you are to consider visiting a new online & physical shop opening in Sweden?

The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions. The first 3 questions were directed to segment the respondents into categories. The second 4 questions inquired respondents to evaluate critical factors that they take into account while assessing the purchase. The third 2 questions were designed to discover competitors within the market space. Here, customers answer where they usually make purchasing and assess the shop on the same critical factors. This is the part of competitor analysis that lays a road to perceptual mapping and further positioning analysis. The remaining question was related to respondents' interest in visiting the new online/physical shop in order to understand its openness and loyalty to visited shops.

The questionnaire was piloted and tested before on 3 Swedish speakers in order to avoid misunderstanding mistakes. Notably, questions were translated from English to Swedish because the survey was spread in a Swedish market. For convenience, both versions were available for response. When the survey received answers, they were translated back to English for analysis. Finally, the survey attained 44 answers from (16.10.2020) till (31.10.2020); and there is a lack of participants that

possess more than 10 dogs at their place, hence the research gives limited data on the market experience of this particular segment.

In detail, the results are analyzed and discussed in the next chapter.

4 EMPIRICAL STUDY – ANALYSIS & RESULTS

The theoretical framework finds reflection in the conduction of the following section. This is a continuation, the chapter that represents the empirical part of research, analysis, and results. The theoretical exploration of the positioning unravels the puzzle of the concept and its connection to the beginning of brand management, - the brand identity. This thesis unit awakens the response by dint of quantitative and qualitative methods combined. First, the quantitative method in a form of survey results and a detailed description of them is presented. Afterwards, the qualitative method closes up the analysis of the topic. The qualitative approach depicts the brand identity of Company X and bridges it to the ultimate position. Finally, reliability and validity draw a line under the empirical study.

4.1 Quantitative

Response quantity

Facebook boost post reached out 49064 targeted users that live with their dogs in Sweden; 50 Swedish Polar dog kennels were contacted individually via e-mail or Facebook, 8 Swedish dog clubs (Swedish sled dog racing club, Nordskånska kennel club, Swedish Agility club, Swedish working dog club, Swedish hunting dog club, Swedish musher club, Swedish kennel club, Swedish working kelpie club) were addressed via e-mail. Several clubs refused to spread the questionnaire, they are the Swedish kennel club and Swedish working kelpie club. Others never answered. As a result, it worked to obtain only 44 responses (from which 2 were received as the English version and the rest as the Swedish translation sheet).

Background information, segmentation

There are 21 Swedish countries inside Sweden. Figure 11 shows the response rate by percent across those countries/provinces (the right picture) and demonstrates visually the number of answers by each canton (the left picture). From both figures, it appears so most answers were received from southern Sweden. Same time, many

areas such as Gävleborg, Dalarna, Örebro, Kalmar, Gotland accounted for 0 response rate at all, but overall, the response rate is quite dispersed across all countries.

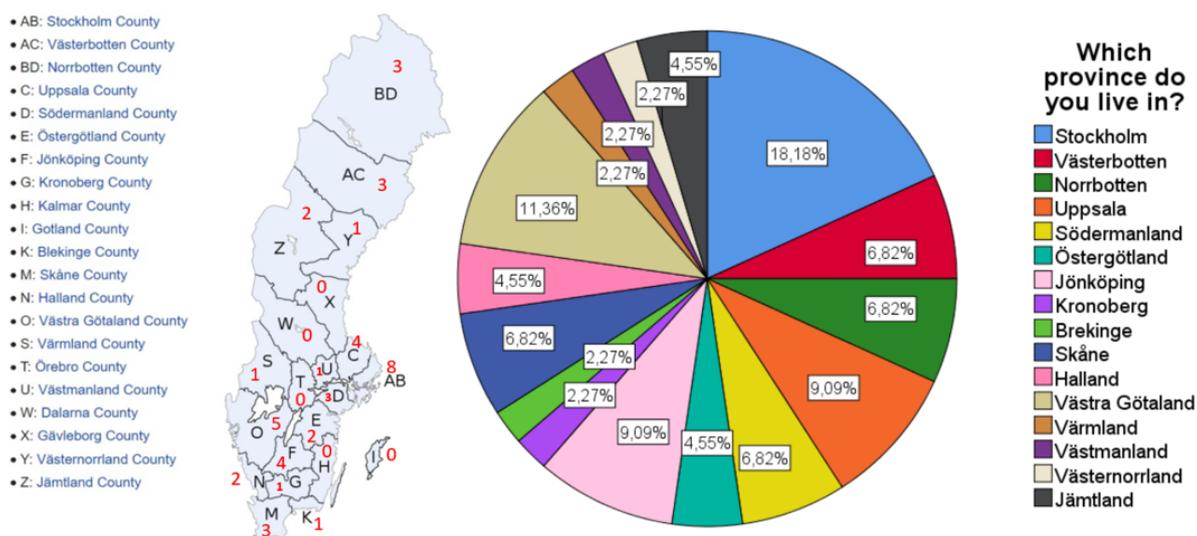


Figure 11 Provinces respondents live

The population density is different from localities and urban areas. Most dense ($100+$ people per km^2) countries are Uppsala, Stockholm, and Skåne; medium dense areas take location also in the South of Sweden and by the coast ($25-99.50$ people per km^2). Such of them are Västernorrland, Gävleborg, Värmland, Västra Götaland, Halland, Jönköping, and countries circled Stockholm (Wikipedia: Geography of Sweden, 2020). It was assumed that the number of dogs per person could depend for example on the region in the reason that southern Sweden is hotter, and it is less attractive for tourist activities and sport; as a result, a lot of dogs per person ($6-10$; >10) would be located above Uppsala country because upper that there are subarctic and tundra climates. However, it was difficult to extract accurate correlation on these variables because one of them (name of the province) is coded as nominal. It would be possible to make a Chi-Square test on these two variables to find dependence, but the test requires a sample of each answer more than 5, which is not the

case here. The third way to see dependence is to conduct a Fisher's test using cross-tabulation. Compared to the Chi-Square test, it does not demand the minimum sample, but the constraint is that the university SPSS version does not provide this function in a program, so eventually, the bar chart was chosen to measure the number of dogs by a person against the location. Figure 12 below shows this data.

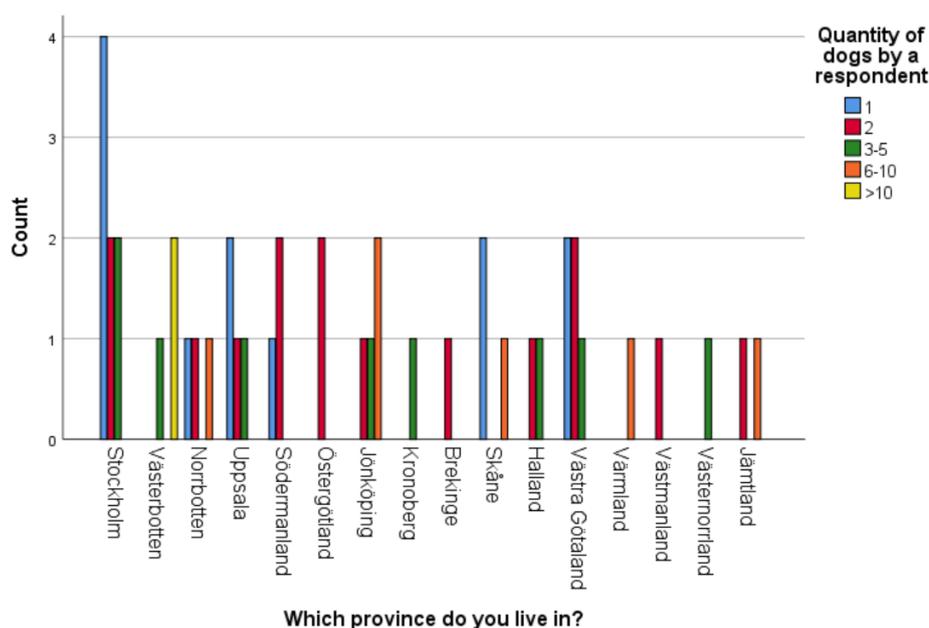


Figure 12 Quantity of dogs per owner by the province of living

It appears that there are 12 responses that informed owners possess only 1 dog. 15 responses indicate 2 dogs per person, 9 people have got 3-5 dogs at home, 6 respondents keep 6-10 dogs and lastly, only 2 people marked they have more than 10 dogs at a place. Evidently from the bar chart, there is no clear difference between the regions. Both south and north have an approximately equal number of options on dog quantity per owner. Nonetheless, the result might be different if more varied responses would be submitted from the north. Anyway, under these circumstances, the majority of respondents owe 1 or 2 dogs at most and 3-5 as the next average. In like manner, the region does not influence the most preferred purchasing channel by country. Figure 13 describes the way respondents prefer to do shopping by area.

Indeed, the choice is distributed ambivalently and there is no clearance on preference to do shopping online or in a physical shop with respect to specific geography.

		Where a respondent buys products from					Total
		Online store	Mainly online and sometimes physical store	Equally online and physical store	Mainly physical store and sometimes online	Physical store	
Which province do you live in?	Stockholm	0	2	4	2	0	8
	Västerbotten	1	1	0	0	1	3
	Norrbottn	0	0	1	1	1	3
	Uppsala	1	0	2	1	0	4
	Södermanland	0	0	1	2	0	3
	Östergötland	0	0	1	0	1	2
	Jönköping	3	0	0	0	1	4
	Kronoberg	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Brekinge	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Skåne	0	0	0	3	0	3
	Halland	0	1	1	0	0	2
	Västra Götaland	2	2	0	1	0	5
	Värmland	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Västmanland	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Västernorrland	0	0	0	0	1	1
Jämtland	0	0	1	1	0	2	
Total		7	6	12	13	6	44

Figure 13 The preferred way to do shopping by province

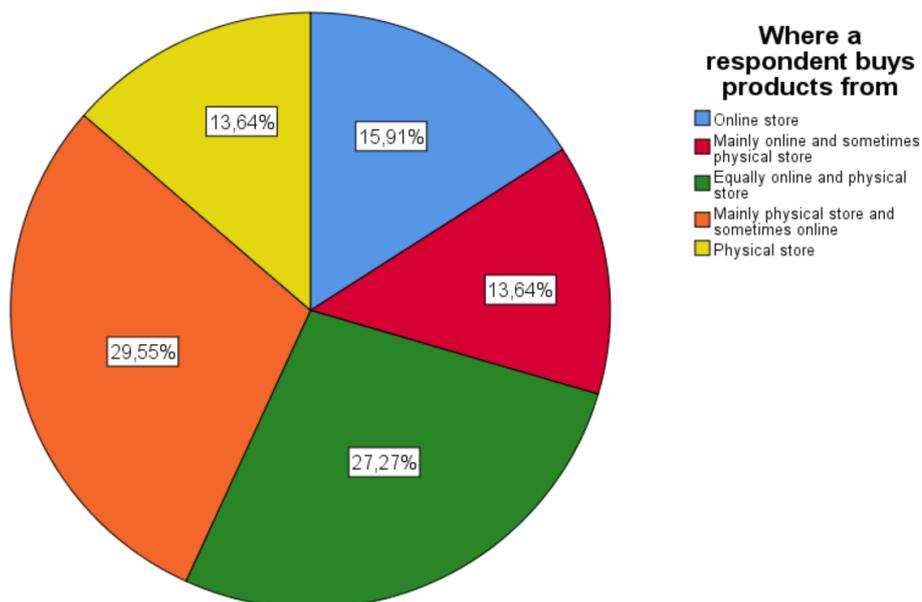


Figure 14 The preferred way to shop in per cents

The pie chart above confirms the ambiguity dog owners do shopping. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that there is a substantial tendency to visiting physical stores. Consequently, it is difficult to hardly recommend regarding the opening of a physical shop or stay online. This issue deserves a deeper investigation.

Moving to dog exercises, the data on the number of dogs per owner finds a reflection in activities dog owners do with their pets. Figure 15 is composed of these activities, each of them presented in percentage. In the event interviewees ticked the box utmost under 1, 2, or 3-5 dogs, this choice brings forth the following activities requiring exactly this quantity of dogs to take part in. The upshot on the most popular activity is agility which stands out 15,24% of the total. Hiking seems to be fallen slightly behind and it comes out at 13,21% of other activities. Skijoring (6,9%), bikejoring (8,13%), and canicross (6,9%) took third place as the most picked up sports. The rest is dispersed on nearly equal slices. Nobody from respondents picked the option “none of above”. As a result, the shop catalogue may consider the current outcome and pay closer attention to the individual needs of small packs and seasonal trends on equipment.

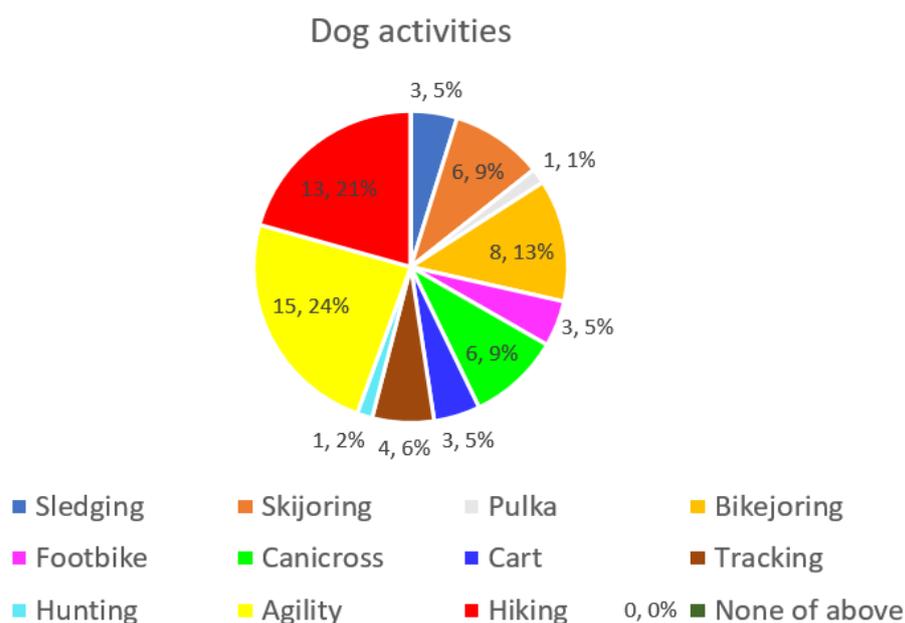


Figure 15 Activities respondents do with their dogs

Customer analysis

Customer analysis is the part of intended brand-market oriented positioning. In the reason that Company X considers an option of opening a physical store, and this decision would reflect further marketing campaign and actual positioning process,

it was decided to detect the problematic aspects of customers when they acquire products. For this purpose, respondents were asked to tell the biggest “hot” points connected with online and physical shopping separately. The purchasing obstacles were pre-defined and discussed with the owner-manager of a case company. They are presented in the figure for online shopping and figure that demonstrates troubles on general outlets.

Customer "hot" points on online shopping

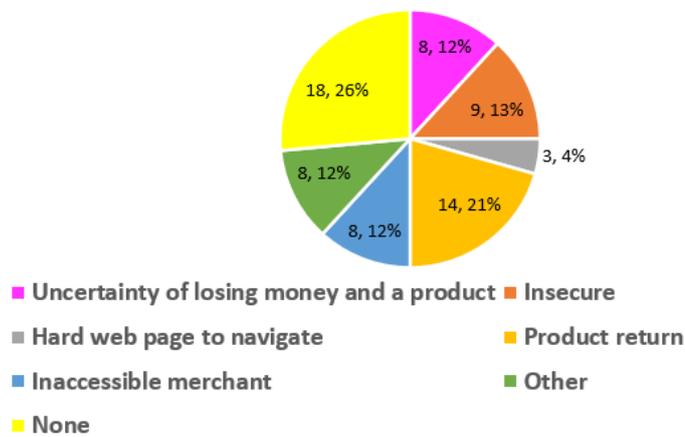


Figure 16 Customer problems with online shopping

Figure 16 demonstrates the pie chart on customer problems with online shopping. The considerable slice tells that respondents do not have worries about web shopping. However, there are still some troubles for other respondents. Product return scored at 14,21% out of total which means there are some constraints when a customer wishes to return his/her order. Feeling insecure about giving private information accounts at 9,13%, so probably some web pages may look suspicious and unprotected or it might be a psychological issue. Inaccessible merchant, the uncertainty of losing money and another concern keep the same percent rating, 8,12%; which is only one percent less of “insecure” slice. The negligible part takes the pain point on difficulty with web site navigation. Seems to be that technologies progressed so far so a modern and easy to use web site is a broadly accessible possibility for companies nowadays.

Customer “hot” points on using the service of a physical store are a bit different. In contrast to online shopping, product return is a minor concern when consumers buy something in a general outlet. The result on the option “none”, which means a respondent does not have any problem doing shopping in a physical shop, is approximately double size less, meanwhile other concern comes up at 5,7% which is also quite a small share. Hence, there is a ground for other “hot” points. The one fifth from total belongs to a poor assortment that consumers find as a disadvantage. In practice, there are a lot of small shops and it unprofitable to store a lot of material, when there is high uncertainty on which product is wished by customers and which one is not. Possibly this problem should have been included also in online shopping, but generally online business does not have high storage costs due to logistics solutions; even if then, poor assortment can be estimated to take the part from “other” category and anyway cannot outperform other sections. To continue, inconvenient shop location is the second category that makes shopping less comfortable or perhaps discouraging at all. Inconvenient opening hours are less puzzled according to respondents' perception, but still have the place to exist and thus compose 9,13% of the total. Unprofessional staff that might be simply not helpful in understanding what a customer needs shares the same percentage with the previous customer concern.

Customer "hot" points on shopping in a physical store

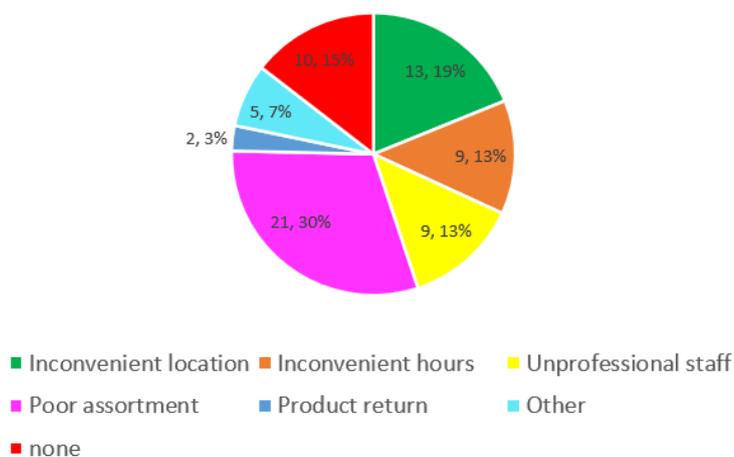


Figure 17 Customer problems with shopping in physical outlets

When making a purchasing decision, customers value many things to a certain degree thus it makes sense to rate key purchasing criteria. There are a few papers that studied purchasing criteria and it is possible to find several lists of

them. Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is complicated or even impossible to catch the perfect criteria table due to considerable differences in the field of business and its environment, the research ground, and purpose. Michael J. Baker suggests alternative practice to appoint relative criteria. One way is to inquire the target audience to select the most important factors influencing the purchasing decision. Another one is to select those criteria inside the company, for example, via a team meeting. In this thesis case, the theoretical practice was not successful to provide purchasing determinants that would fit the thesis client and thesis problem. Likewise, the next method, a two-stage customer interview demands a vast of time to conduct and analyze; so it does not fit the paper timeline and causes limitations. Finally, purchasing criteria were discussed with the owner-manager of Company X. As Michael J. Baker offers, in the end, five were chosen to rate. Customers evaluated the importance to have an opportunity of advice from the shop, considerable assortment, high quality and durability of offerings, the availability of brands they used to buy, customization of material (i.e. collars, harness). Listed factors were rated against the actual experience customers gained in the shop they mostly buy from. Figure 18 shows the result of the difference between the importance rating and experience one.

It is noteworthy shopping experience exceeds customer needs in the possibility to

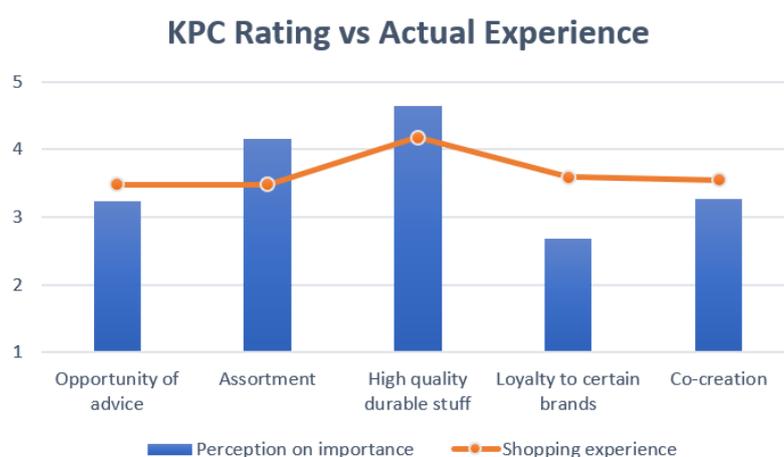


Figure 18 Customer Key Purchasing Criteria and Actual Shopping Experience

receive a consultation and stuff co-creation. It appears that respondents are not as loyal to specific brands and they can find on the market what they need. However, they wish

to explore more. The assortment column indicates customers would like to discover more material when they do shopping. It explains the phenomena that dog owners have to make a profound search to compare different products before they buy equipment/food. All in all, it arises in a customer problem regarding the product portfolio. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why respondents are open to exploring an alternative. In other words, visit a new online/physical store opening in Sweden (Figure 19). 2/3 of respondents are extremely likely and likely to visit the new premises. This result may strengthen the inclination to open up a shop. Moving back to the KPC, a similar issue to assortment occurs with high-quality durable stuff. The actual experience is slightly negative compared to the expected one. On average, respondents do not have the expected quality product even from the shop they mostly buy from. Forthwith, it worth paying attention to this dissatisfaction and then source different high-quality models from the same product type.

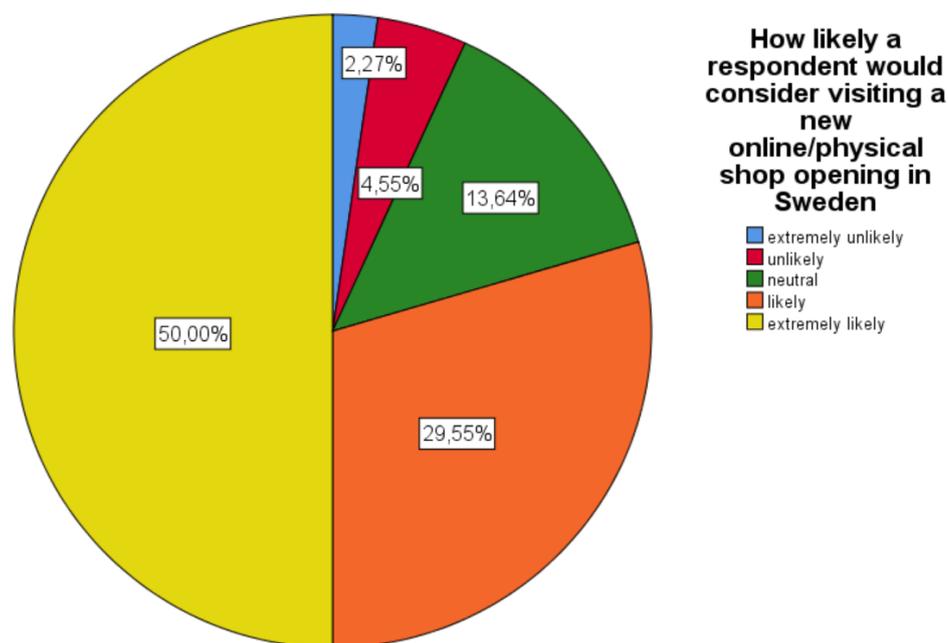


Figure 19 The openness of respondents to visit new premises

Competitor analysis

Competitor analysis is the process of identifying and evaluating competitors' companies. It is recommended to conduct when it comes to the positioning of a startup. The most accessible way to conduct a competitor analysis is internet research together with an observation which supposes to compose a checklist with certain competing criteria that are turned into the analysis based on the gathered portfolio. However, the disadvantage of this method is that it is not laid on customer perception. This research is about positioning, which is “the perception targeted consumers have of firms offerings relative to that of competitors” (Kinnear T.C. et al, 1995). Henceforth, the consistent way is to address to the targeted group. For Company X, any dog shop that serves or aims to serve the same targeted groups will be a competitor. Thus, raising this question in a survey made sense. The perceptual map of potential competitors (named by respondents) was chosen as the method to have a clue in a competing environment. As a result, there is Figure 20 demonstrating this environment in relation to customer problems.

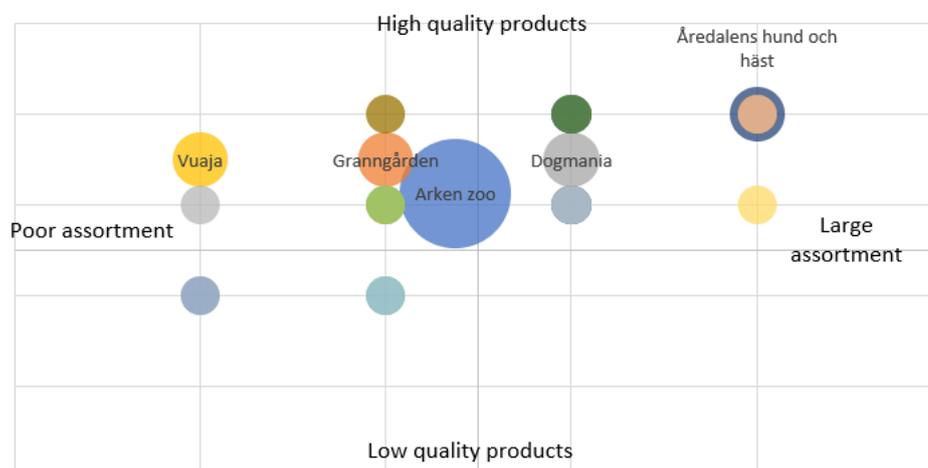


Figure 20 Perceptual map

Figure 20 is a competition map that is built upon customer KPCs. Here KPCs are the customer problems that were associated with lack of assortment and product

quality. The map confirms this statement, and it is apparently seen that most companies possess a small product range, meanwhile quality in general terms is still high. In total, 49 companies were named from which Arken Zoo referred 8 times. Åredalens hund och häst, Dogmania, Granngården, Vuaja were mentioned by 2 respondents each. The other 33 companies were named only once, and they are not visible on the map. The full list of competitors is provided to the thesis client. With attention to competitor's position, many of them share the same place in the reason that they are measured against only 2 dimensions and are rated just one time which means it is impossible to gain an average perception. Full and by, it worth examining primarily the profiles of those 5 companies with the biggest market share (based on a survey) and the rest in a follow-up.

4.2 Qualitative

On 01.10.2020. the case company was interviewed regarding the corporate brand identity matrix (CBIM) in Company X. The questions used in the interview were extracted from the original paper of CBIM authored by Mats Urde. When it was needed, unclear terms (i.e. mission & vision, value proposition) were also explained in the process in order to receive a valid answer. Hereby what the final result is about the scheme:

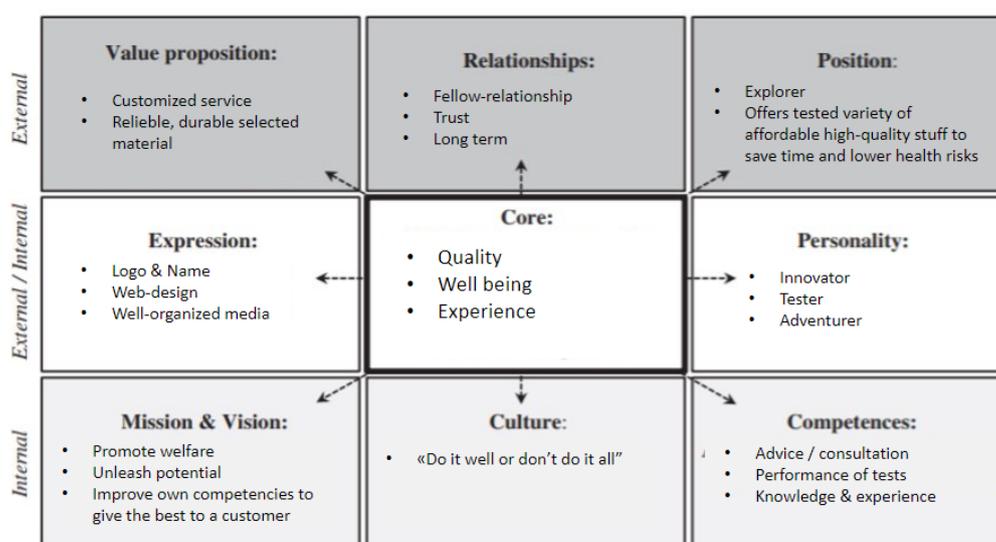


Figure 21 Company X CBIM

To begin with brand roots, reasons why the company exists, and where it intends to move. Company X sees its mission in empowering owners with their four-legged friends to feel liberated. It means that the company wants to promote and ameliorate a happy life together with a pet. An energetic and dynamic way of life is essential for dogs, especially mushing breeds. Thus, doing activities makes dogs satisfied with their needs. The vision of the company is to improve its competencies and serve the Swedish market with exceptional high-quality material that saves animals' and their owners' health. The organization's culture is to "do things well or do not do them at all", which means that the company prefers to offer full service and equipment it is able to provide on time, rather than just sell without quality chain control. One of the main competencies of the company is knowledge and seven years' experience of undertaking dog outdoor activities. Easily, it can conduct in-house tests of material and give individual consultation and advice to the client. Externally, competencies are transformed into several value propositions. A customer receives customized service and reliable product to use. With its customer, Company X wishes to build long term fellow-relationships that are supported by trust. The company is eager to become a friend who can advise on finding the right equipment, and which can listen and help to solve a problem. For a personality Company X will seek to appear an innovator, be passionate and creative; a tester, be curious and problem-solving; an adventurer, be courageous and opportunity focused. To express its personality, the retailer seeks to create a corresponding web page that is easy to surf, effective communication channels to have a dialogue with a customer and well-organized media that can illustrate material tests and lay the ground for collaboration. Finally, all parts are gathered into the core. The brand core consists of values that thereafter conduce the brand promise. Company X's values respectable quality (i.e. quality of products, service, advice); well-being, the company highly esteems the welfare of clients and dogs; experience, the firm values

deepening proficiency and making customers experience new things with dogs to share those life moments.

4.3 Summary: Intended brand-market position

The elements of a brand positioning statement gather what consumers need and what a brand does best relatively to competitors. As it is found from the quantitative research, at first the targeted market might be those people with 1-5 dogs that do agility, hiking, and bikejoring since these segments gain the major share compared to other activities. Skijoring and canicross can be considered as following. It is recommended to focus on mentioned prior groups and explore those who did not leave a sufficient percent of the response, namely owners with more than 6 dogs and who might do different activities such as carting and sledding. All of the groups anyway have some trouble with shopping online and in physical outlets. In general, online shoppers have complications with a product return, and who buys in physical stores do not have enough assortment to choose from. The majority is not loyal to a certain brand or product, so it is not the strict case that most people come to visit the shop with an aim to find a specific model and only, without any wish to try something else. On the contrary, almost 80% are likely to explore new premises which also indicates their interest in other products. Regardless of the shopping channel (physical or online) consumers are slightly dissatisfied with the quality of products and their range. All in all, Company X can emphasize this market weakness and try to supply a variety of high-quality choices for potential buyers. Keeping in mind numerous small companies that operate in a Swedish market, branding is not something of a fail idea. Effective branding and positioning can help to stand out from the crowd and bring brand awareness that helps to overcome competition. Finally, here is a brand positioning statement that summarizes who Company X serves, where it plays and can win, and why consumers should believe the company.

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|
| 1 | For... | An active dog owner who seeks to feel liberated from problems that are caused by inappropriate equipment & food |
| 2 | Company X is... | The reliable retail store providing welfare, safety, and comfort |
| 3 | Which gives the most... | Broad variety of affordable high-quality stuff to save your time and lower health risks |
| 4 | Because of... | In-house product test (showcase), thorough sourcing |

As a proposition, Company X should emphasize its position on the benefit or promise it provides for the targeted market. Specifically, “broad variety of affordable high-quality stuff to save time and lower health risks”. In other words, benefit positioning strategy. Other positioning ways were described in the “intended positioning” section and derived from David A. Aaker and J. Gary Shansby (1982). They are positioning by attribute, by price/quality, by-product user, by application, positioning concerning product class, and with respect to a competitor. It would be difficult to compete if to emphasize mainly on the price-quality ratio since it is not a distinctive feature for this market arena. To make the feature obvious and distinctive for customers, it requires dropping prices or in contrast rising them. If prices are low, it may cause doubts in product quality, and if high, then customers should know what they pay for. Even though, low prices require huge networks and thorough logistics and justification of that; high prices are usually charged by popular brands, luxurious or innovative products which is not the exact case of a retail store Company X. Now the proper option would be the leveraging between both, which means the company cannot make emphasis on it. Moving on, positioning by product user could be the further development of an attribute, or it can go together with it in a way personality is proved by its attribute and the reason to believe. To be more specific, the company can create a picture of its brand personality: innovator, tester, adventurer, and associate it to the buyer. To start positioning only with product user might not win because now there are a lot of products and firms just with a picture

and nothing behind it. Consequently, a benefit would be an attractive point of reference. With respect to a competitor, there is a need then to conduct a deeper competitor analysis. There is no enormous multinational player on the market to make an obvious comparison in the mind of customers (i.e. 7Up or Pepsi vs Cola). However, it is possible to find a common weak market point that Company X can solve, so in the end, the company can position on an attribute that competitors have ignored. Lastly, the positioning with respect to a product class simply cannot be applied to a retail store. There could be many other positioning alternatives as it was seen in Table 2 but all of them are branches from David A. Aaker and J. Gary Shansby (1982) work. So far as it goes benefit or value position fits the context of the case company, resonates with customers, and differs from the competition. User position can be considered as a supplement to it, and competitor positioning can be an extension idea to strengthen the image in long run.

4.4 Validity and reliability

Deborah Lee (2004) defines validity as the ability of results to accurately measure what they are supposed to measure. To put it simply, validity is about a coherent connection between the actual research, results, and the initial research objectives. In contrast, reliability refers to how consistent data is collected. Research is considered reliable if other researchers can use it under the same conditions and receive logical outcomes (McMillan J.H. & Schumacher S., 2006). Both are important concepts in research because they measure paper quality. In terms of this thesis, the research rests upon the single case company and its position within Sweden. Therefore, the research might be invalid for another company and probably other countries because in common enterprises and their situations are different. Nevertheless, as a whole, it can generate ideas for other industries. The theory is based on many kinds of sources: articles, books, web pages; from different timespans. Positioning is a vague concept that was developed through decades and seen in varied perspectives thus it was necessary to delve into its essence over history. Branding is a rel-

atively young and quite wide-spread notion, so the literature regarding this phenomenon is up to date. Besides, it was important to study positioning phenomena within the European context since the positioning establishment was aimed at Sweden. It was successful to originate the theoretical framework based on writings of a Swedish professor Mats Urde, whose contribution to a field of study might heighten the validity and reliability of this work. The theoretical framework helped to originate qualitative (interview) and quantitative questions (survey). The evaluation of the qualitative approach is different because of its uniqueness. To exclude wrong theory interpretation, brand identity questions were extracted from the author's research (Urde M., 2013) and which he utilized in the identity investigation of ABB and Cargotec. When needed, the explanation of certain concepts was provided based on the theory used. With regard to the validity and reliability of the quantitative method, survey issues (i.e. customer KPC's) were discussed with an owner-manager of a case company to make sure the work answers the thesis client problem. The survey was piloted by 3 Swedish speakers, 2 of which had dogs at home. In the end, it was offered to respondents in both languages (Swedish and English). Even though, survey size appeared quite small. There is no public information on how many people in Sweden possess dogs, but there is data on the number of dogs in Sweden, and there are 947 733 of them there by 2019 (Statista, 2020). It is assumed that there are thousands of people having a dog/dogs at home. The questionnaire reached out to 49 064 individual Facebook users, 50 Polar kennels, and 8 Swedish dog clubs. In the end, 44 obtained responses prove low reliability. Moreover, the result does not sufficiently represent the group of owners that have got more than 10 dogs in their yard, and there are only 2 answers regarding this segment. Overall, if to repeat the research under the same conditions, the validity would stay high, reliability — low since this research did not receive high sized data. However, it is stated that “a valid measurement is generally reliable: if a test produces accurate results, they should be reproducible” (Middleton F., 2019). To collect more data, it is needed to contribute more attempts to reach the target audience, which means

time. All in all, the research is reliable with its conditions and consistency and unreliable in relation to the actual market size.

5 CONCLUSION

The conclusion refers back to the research within its limitations and restates an answer to the thesis problem. The chapter summarizes findings highlighting novelty, new knowledge contributed to the field of study, and examines recommendations for future work.

Effective positioning is considered as a creation of the distinctive image, positive associations, and values in consumers' mind that establishes a sustainable trademark image and ensures consumers' attachment to this trademark (Fayvishenko D., 2018). It helps to find "the proper location in the minds of a group of consumers or market segment so that they think about a product or service in the "right" or desired way" (Lakshimi K et al, 2017). Consumers evaluate and position companies whether firms implement some positioning strategies or not. This is why not making any positioning decision can also be considered as a positioning choice that might lead to a misguided marketing mix and undesirable business path. At this point, the importance of positioning is underlined. Notwithstanding the significance, positioning literature lacks actual application and the concept operationalization. From the theory, it was found that there is no mutual agreement among scientific scholars on what exactly positioning stands for, and hence the term must be observed and explained within the specific situation how it is done in this thesis. Moreover, no paper studies empirically intended positioning of a small retail firm in conjunction with branding; even though the positive relationship between both has been already found (Blankson C., 2016). The research gap and the case company problem initiated this study with an aim to position Company X in a Swedish dog wear market in a way that the company addresses the right problems of a customer and wins a competitive advantage over competitors – the positioning core that should be investigated with an emphasis on branding.

As a result, the research segmented customers by equipment usage detected customer problems and dissatisfaction points on doing shopping in online/physical stores. The positioning proposition with relation to the competition and branding is

about image creation of such an exploratory and down to earth company where customers find a broad variety of affordable high-quality stuff that saves time and lowers their health risks. The openness to communication, being an advisor, and a friend with a customer can win over the interest and help to investigate new material.

Below, the table demonstrates the main findings and suggestions for each of them.

Table 4 Main findings and suggestions

Main findings	Suggestions
<p>Most dog owners do agility and hiking; skjoring, bikejoring, canicross follow in a second row</p>	<p>Primarily target these groups when forming a shop catalogue. Investigate deeper groups that have got more than 10 dogs at their place. Consider uniting the previous experience of selling military and camping stuff. Possibly could be interesting both for touristic kennels and individuals. -> creation of an adventurous brand personality</p>
<p>More than half of interviewees shop equally online and in physical stores (27, 27%), and mainly in a physical store and sometimes online (29, 55%). Shopping in physical stores, online, and mostly online and sometimes in a physical store is almost equally shared</p>	<p>The analysis shows there is no clarity on which way a respondent prefers to buy the product from dependence on a region. However, because the sample was quite small and it was impossible to make a correlation or Chi-square test (that requires a minimum of 5 answers from each segment), it is recommended to investigate it again, if to consider opening a physical store. Besides, the</p>

	<p>correlation between the number of dogs per owner and its shopping habit can be investigated. This might help to find the proper location and understanding of which products to offer there. In general, results show people are fond of buying in physical stores and this possibility should be considered.</p>
<p>Customers experience complications with product return online; poor assortment and inconvenient location with general outlets</p>	<p>Tester personality can significantly decrease the problem with product return. By doing showcases people can visually understand how the material is applied and which quality it is. In conjunction with the problem, make an organized and simple procedure for product return. The assortment should be extended so customers can have a choice. Especially, if it comes to a physical store. High-quality material is considered to be wanted and can be underlined in a branding campaign.</p>
<p>Even with the most frequently visited stores, consumers have a lack of assortment and high-quality products</p>	<p>Tester personality can significantly decrease the problem with product return. By doing showcases people can visually understand how the material is applied and which quality it is. In conjunction with the problem, make an organized and simple procedure for product return. The assortment should be extended so customers can have a choice. Especially, if it comes to a physical store. High-quality material is considered to be wanted and can be underlined in a branding campaign.</p>
<p>There are a lot of small-sized competitors</p>	<p>Emphasis on branding and customer problems. Aggressive brand positioning implementation through a thorough marketing mix (4Ps) and positioning strategy. Monitoring competitor activities.</p>

More than three fourth express their wish to visit new premises	Opening a shop, monitor customer experience and their wish to come back
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5.1 Study limitations

This research is conducted as single-case research and results cannot be generalized universally. The case study is limited to a small retail firm that seeks a position within the Swedish market. Nonetheless, it was noted in the validity and reliability paragraph, the study can give some ideas for other small businesses on where to start the positioning and branding of an organization. Concerning the methodology, the limitation can be identified in the number of clubs contacted. It remains possible to explore more clubs that contain members of the target audience. Moreover, the limitation in time and season suggests that 2 weeks during the autumn when it is the season of intensive training among kennels and hunting does not guarantee a high level in response quantity. The sample size obtained from the electronic questionnaire consists of 44 responses and can barely give the full picture of market experience and customer perceptions. Based on it, research suggestions were made in the preceding table. Regarding competitor analysis, it is limited to competitor identification and its market position from the client's points of view. It is limited to the point that the analysis does not go deeper, for example, analyzing competitor strategies. At the same time, there is a stable ground with the relevant information on whose profiles look.

5.2 Recommendations

The suggestions with regard to the company case are presented in Table 4. Concerning the field of study, it is recommended to conduct empirical positioning studies. It is accepted that positioning is useful and important, but there is a lack of understanding of how to implement it. Moreover, business to business positioning and positioning among small firms also miss attention from scientific scholars. The connection between branding and positioning was theoretically studied, and this thesis is probably one of the first that bridged concepts empirically. Further, more

analysis of actual brand positioning and perceived brand positioning can be suggested to be made. Lastly, it is appropriate to study the tendency in the positioning process, its change, meaning, and operationalization in reference to small and large organizations.

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Appendix 1

1. Which province do you live in?

- Stockholm
- Västerbotten
- Norrbotten
- Uppsala
- Södermanland
- Östergötland
- Jönköping
- Kronoberg
- Kalmar
- Gotland
- Brekinge
- Skåne
- Halland
- Västra Götaland
- Värmland
- Örebro
- Västmanland
- Dalarna
- Gävleborg
- Västernorrland
- Jämtland

2. How many dogs you have?

- 1
- 2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- >10

3. Choose an activity/activities you do with your dog(s)

- Sledging
- Skijoring
- Pulka
- Bikejoring
- Footbike
- Canicross
- Cart

- Tracking (Sniffing)
- Hunting
- Agility
- Hiking
- None of above

4. I buy products (dog food & equipment) from

- online store
- mainly online and sometimes physical store
- equally online and physical store
- mainly physical store and sometimes online
- physical store

5. What are your biggest pain points with the current ONLINE market offering? Choose main 2 points or none/other

From online:

- Uncertainty of losing money due to a defect product or due to not receiving any product at all
- Feeling insecure of information (such as credit card number, name, address) that can be used for identity theft etc.
- Hard to navigate web page
- Buying online, difficulty with product return
- Merchant is inaccessible
- None
- Other online concern

6. What are your biggest pain points with the current PHYSICAL market offering? Choose main 2 points or none/other

From a physical store:

- Inconvenient location
- Inconvenient opening hours
- Unprofessional staff
- Poor assortment
- Buying offline, difficulty with product return
- None
- Other concern

7. Choose on a scale from 1 to 5 what you agree with when you do shopping (where 1- totally disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5- totally agree)

For me, it is important to have an opportunity of advice from the shop 1 2 3 4 5

For me, it is important to consider many models from the same product type to make a purchase decision 1 2 3 4 5

For me, it is important to have high quality durable 1 2 3 4 5

I am loyal to brands (products) I use, and I do not want to discover unknown alternatives 1 2 3 4 5

For me, co-creation and equipment customization (i.e. collars, harness) is important 1 2 3 4 5

8. Please, name the shop you mostly buy from

The shop name: _____

9. Rate the named shop on the following criteria (where 1- totally disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5- totally agree)

From them, I can easily receive consultation regarding a product

1 2 3 4 5

The store has enough different products to choose from

1 2 3 4 5

From them, I can have high quality durable products

1 2 3 4 5

From them, I can find all brands (products) I need

1 2 3 4 5

With them, I can adjust and adapt product / product features to personal needs

1 2 3 4 5

10. How likely you are to consider visiting a new online shop opening in Sweden? (where 1- extremely unlikely, 2 – unlikely, 3 – neutral, 4 – likely, 5- extremely likely)

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix 2

1. Vilket län bor du i?

- Stockholm
- Västerbotten
- Norrbotten
- Uppsala
- Södermanland
- Östergötland
- Jönköping
- Kronoberg
- Kalmar
- Gotland
- Brekinge
- Skåne
- Halland
- Västra Götaland
- Värmland
- Örebro
- Västmanland
- Dalarna
- Gävleborg
- Västernorrland
- Jämtland

2. Hur många hundar har du?

- 1
- 2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- >10

3. Välj en aktivitet som du gör med hundarna

- Hunting Jakt
- Turer med hundsläde
- Med skidor
- Med pulka
- Med cykel
- Med sparkcykel
- Med Canicross

- Med vagn
- Med hinder (Agility)
- Att spåra
- Hiking Vandring
- Inget här ovanför

4. Jag köper hundmat och utrustning från

- internetbutik
- oftast på internet och ibland i butik.
- fördelat jämt mellan internet och butik
- framför allt i butik och ibland på internet
- i butik

5. Vad är det svåraste när du ska köpa mat och utrustning? Välj 2
FRÅN INTERNET

Från internet:

- Osäkerhet över att förlora pengar på grund av att det är fel på produkten eller att inte alls få produkten (att den inte levereras)
- Osäker över att den information som lämnas, kreditkort, namn, adress kan stjälas
- Svårt att navigera på hemsidan
- Svårt att få skicka tillbaka produkten när man köper på internet.
- Det går inte att få tag i säljaren
- Inget
- Andra orsaker

6. Vad är det svåraste när du ska köpa mat och utrustning? Välj 2
FRÅN EN BUTIK

Från en butik:

- Dåligt läge på butiken
- Opassliga öppettider
- Personalen är inte professionell
- Dåligt sortiment
- Svårt att lämna tillbaka produkten
- Inget
- Andra orsaker

7. Välj på en skala mellan 1 och 5 vad du tycker om när du handlar (där 1 är håller inte alls med, 2 håller inte med, 3 neutral, 4 håller med, 5 håller absolut med)

För mig är det viktigt att få råd från butiken 1 2 3 4 5

För mig är det viktigt att välja mellan olika modeller för att göra ett bra val 1 2 3 4 5

Det är viktigt att det är bra kvalitet som är hållbar 1 2 3 4 5

Jag är lojal med märken som jag använder och vill inte upptäcka några nya 1 2 3 4 5

För mig är co-creation och anpassning av utrustning (t.ex. colars, sele) viktigt 1 2 3 4 5

8. Namn på butiken du mest köper från: _____

9. Betygsätt den namngivna butiken enligt följande kriterier(1 – håller inte alls med, 2 – håller inte med, 3 – neutral, 4 – håller med, 5 – håller absolut med)

Jag kan lätt få råd om produkten

1 2 3 4 5

Butiken har tillräckligt med produkter att välja från

1 2 3 4 5

Hos dem kan jag få bra kvalitet på produkterna

1 2 3 4 5

Hos dem kan jag få de produkter jag behöver.

1 2 3 4 5

Hos dem kan jag få produkter som passar just mig.

1 2 3 4 5

10. Hur troligt är det att du besöker en ny internetshop i Sverige? (1 – inte alls troligt, 2 – inte troligt, 3 – neutral, 4 – troligt ja, 5 – absolut troligt)

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix 3

Interview Guidelines

- 1) Competencies. As a company, what are you particularly good at, and what makes your company better than the competition?
- 2) Culture. What are your attitudes and how do you work and behave?
- 3) Mission & Vision. What engages your company, beyond the simple aim of making money (mission)? What is your direction and inspiration (vision)?
- 4) Value proposition. What are your key offerings and how do you want them to appeal to customers and non-customer stakeholders?
- 5) Relationships. Which relationships you want to have with customers, your code of conduct?
- 6) Personality. What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms your corporate character?
- 7) Expression. What is unique or special about the way the company communicates and expresses itself making it possible to recognize the firm at a distance?
- 8) The core. What do you promise, and what are the core values that sum up what your brand stands for?