Brand Positioning

Contents

While on the treadmill, Sam looks out the window and comments on the people passing by outside who probably think the reason they are exercising is to keep fit. Code agrees, but adds that some people might not perceive that as what they are doing. Alex says that for their brand it's important to be mindful of the fact that people have different perspectives and might not grasp their message. This is why they always treat people fairly and be prudent with their spending. Code responded, saying it is not always easy to change people's perceptions but that individuals need to keep up the good work, nonetheless. Sam, Alex and Code are in a gym. There are certain perceptions about people you see in a gym. There is an association between gyms and keeping fit. Now imagine seeing someone sitting on the treadmill and eating unhealthy food. That would be completely unexpected.

Consumers have certain perceptions about brands. Often there is no second chance to make a first impression. It is therefore important for brands to exceed expectations and do more than what the customers expect from them, while recognising that customers are different. Alex, starting a new charity (and as the charity brand's owner) will have different resources to shape the perception of donors and the public about their charity, compared to Sam, who is managing a multinational brand. This does not however stop them both from taking action to enhance their brand positioning through service delivery, product development, effective communication and engagement.

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Overview

The perception of a brand is in the minds of the consumers. This perception may make them associate innovation with a brand, and likewise, they could associate poor service with a brand. Brands will have to keep their standards and improve on innovative product development and quality service provision to convince the consumers about their positions. Brands may be placed on pedestals by consumers, but if these same brands do not do well, they will be replaced. This chapter will explore the basic concepts of brand positioning and how it can be conceptualised. We emphasise the importance of brand positioning, in order to justify the creative, hard work required for this. While recognising that brand positioning can change as consumer engagement increases or decreases, we will explore ways to enhance a brand's position in the minds of customers. The brand owners and brand users are the responsible stakeholders for brand positioning—the brand adopts brand position strategies while consumers engage with those strategies. We will conclude with some key considerations for brand positioning.

❓ Key Question

How is the brand perceived in the minds of consumers?

😊 Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this chapter, you will be able to
- describe the concept of brand positioning;
- give examples of brand positioning strategies;
- recognise how brand position can be conceptualised;
- describe the challenges of brand positioning; and
- explain the key considerations for brand positioning.

4.1   Introduction

As individuals and customers, we have unique feelings and attachment to some brands. We feel special when we use the brand, and often have a sense of pride in being associated with the brand. Even though there could be many alternatives, there is always a special place for that brand in our heart. You visit that bar every Friday because of the beautiful memories you have of time spent there. You buy those sneakers as a symbol of your personality. You reserve that perfume for that special occasion. These brands have made a conscious effort to make their products and services appealing to customers. The bar has made sure that every day people come into the bar and have an enjoyable experience. The sneaker has been positioned as a symbol of luxury and the perfume for special occasions. These perceptions keep the brand going and make you, as a brand user, keep using or associating with that brand.

These positive perceptions of the brand by the brand user help the brand beat the competition and increase their sales. The positive perception is based on how well the consumers have positioned the brand in their mind. Even though there might be many other brands, the consumers have positioned this brand on a higher pedestal which suggests that despite all other options, they will always go to that bar or use that perfume. Brand position is the perception of the brand user, but the brand owner must make every effort possible to reinforce that positioning. The brand owner needs to continually work on the brand management process in other to retain their position on that high pedestal. This is the only way that the brand can retain brand users and make them continue to support the brand with their patronage. It means that for a brand to continually keep the brand users, gain more brand users and retain their loyalty, the brand must ensure they maintain a positive identity at all times and must ensure their philosophy aligns with that of the brand users.

4.2 What Is Brand Positioning?

Brand positioning is a proactive and conscious process by the brand owners to ensure that the consumers have a positive perception of their brand. It has been defined as the act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market (Kotler 2003). Brand positioning represents all the creative effort and strategic ideas that have been implemented to make a brand unique and stand out.

Brands want consumers to always think well of them. Some of their names have become verbs for our daily tasks:

- When we want to get from A to B, we Uber.
- When we want to find information, we Google it.
- When we need to send a document, we FedEx it.
- When there is dirt on the carpet, we Hoover it.

These brands have captured the hearts of consumers, making it difficult for other brands to take that position.

Brand position is dependent on consumers. Brands will try, but consumers have the final decision about the place of a brand in THEIR MINDS (and hearts). It has been described as the battle for a place in the consumer's mind. Sengupta (2004) describes the idea of brand position as renting a space in the minds of the consumers. A brand can hope to occupy that space for as long as possible by changing the quality and quantity of the brand positioning strategies, which includes marketing and advertising. Likewise, many other prospective brands are also seeking to rent that space—putting up tempting offers to attract the owner of the mind, the consumer.

I describe brand positioning as "brands on pedestals in the minds of consumers." Consumers have decided to put a brand on a high pedestal, and perhaps that pedestal can only accommodate one brand at a time. While there may be many other colourful and more prominent alternatives, the consumer will
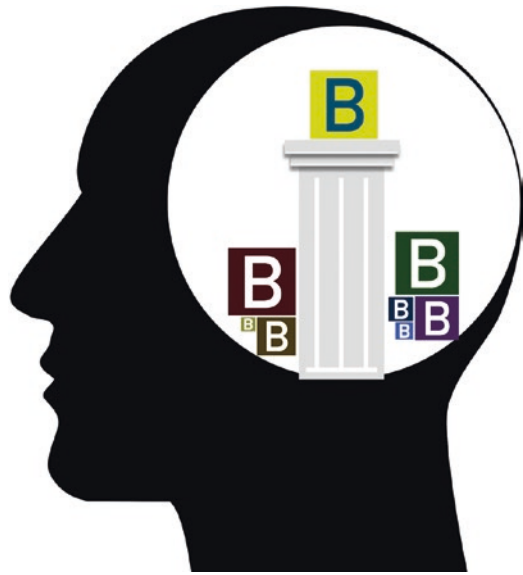
Fig. 4.1 Selected and preferred brand on pedestal and other competing brands in the mind of the consumer. (*Source*: Author)

more likely engage with the brands they have placed on that pedestal. That is the brand they like and prefer. However, there are many reasons that the brands on that pedestal may be replaced. The preferred brand may become lackadaisical and no longer care about that highly coveted position, the consumer may be exposed to a better brand or compelling position strategies from other competing brands (Fig. 4.1).

This then suggests the need for brands to recognise they must keep improving their product development and service quality and be aware that other brands are vying to take their position in the mind of the consumer. This further reiterates that brands needs to take full control of their rented space and keep out "squatters"—other brands coming around. Positioning is very central and critical for brand management, and should be considered at the level of a mission statement as it comes to represent the essence of a brand (Aaker and McLoughlin 2010).

How would you like your friends to see you? How would you like your employers to see you? What type of image of you do they have in their mind? When they see you, what are they seeing? A hardworking student who

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will graduate with good grades? Even though you have your own ethics and ways of doing things, you probably believe your friends see you as a good person. They probably do but you cannot control and shape what is in their mind. You can, however, control your actions when you are together—you go to the library and attend lectures together, and they form a perception of you based on their engagement with you. Likewise, brands cannot shape the way consumers perceive them, but brands can act—to be good, work with values, communicate trust, in order to improve their positioning in the minds of the brand users.

While brand positioning is predominantly determined by hard criteria such as pricing, service delivery and product quality, other considerations such as company structures, geographical coverage, type of business also play an essential role in brand positioning (Kalafatis et al. 2000). A newer brand will have many hurdles to scale to become well-positioned, compared to a more established global brand. Similarly, the type of business can influence the positioning in the mind of the consumer. If technology brands are renting the space in the mind of the consumer, there may be limited spaces for charity organisations which need donations to be commercially viable. Even among charity organisations, bigger ones may be well-positioned than smaller ones in people's minds. These challenges are real. Individual brands, therefore, need to recognise that and make a little effort to differentiate themselves and carve a niche.

4.3 Conceptualising Brand Positioning

Keller et al. (2002) present three questions that brand owners and managers need to ask about their brand as they consider developing a suitable positioning strategy. They call for the move beyond concentrating on points of difference in developing a brand position, suggesting that brand positioning should be more than just highlighting the benefits that set each brand apart from the competition.

The three questions shaped the idea of conceptualising a brand position. These questions recognise the challenges for a new brand and even a more established brand extending its product line.

4.3.1 Stage 1—Frame of Reference

Brands are to meet needs to ensure their commercial viability and sustainability. There is a certain gap in the life of an individual (prospective brand user), which a brand is expected to fill. It is, however, necessary for the brand to recognise the need they want to meet. Keller et al. (2002) noted that brands should understand the frame of reference within which their brands work and address the features that brands have in common with competitors.

As illustrated in ◘ Fig. 4.2 at the end of this section, imagine a new brand trying to replicate Uber in a different country. They recognised the frame of reference, which is a niche gap that overlaps public transportation, fast travel, the gig economy and mobile application. This frame of reference signals to consumers the goal they can expect to achieve by using the new brand. There should be a recognition of the target market, and the brand will make an impact. The brand needs to recognise who the customers are in this frame of reference and rent a space in their minds.

The benefit the brand can bring into the frame needs to be highlighted. Likewise, the brand needs to be aware of competitors (like taxi drivers). For a charity organisation, the founder needs to know the needs to be met. Perhaps if it overlaps with another charity, what are the differentiating factors? It is necessary to recognise the points of parity and points of difference.

4.3.2 Stage 2—Point of Parity

Recognising a unique need is not enough to conceptualise a brand position; the need must be met uniquely. Starting another Uber in another country is not sufficient. What is the
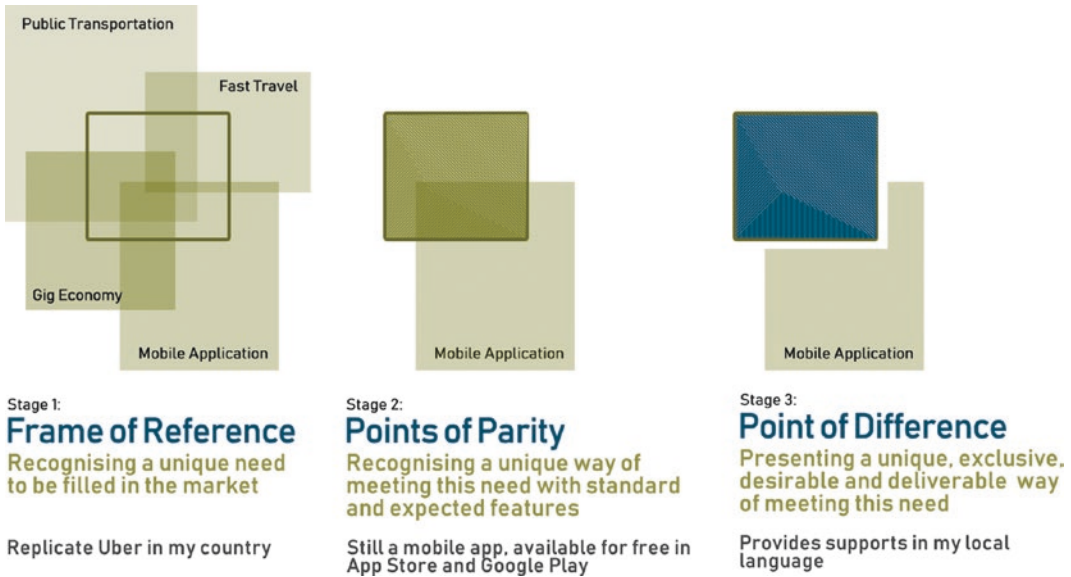
Fig. 4.2 Conceptualising brand positioning. (Adapted from Keller, Sternthal & Tybout (2002))

country's unique and specific need? The brand needs to recognise how best to provide that service. Keller et al. (2002) suggest that brands must offer to give consumers reasons why their product should be considered a legitimate and credible player within that frame. A brand needs points of parity to be considered in the eyes of the consumer. There are associations that are not necessarily unique to the brand but may be shared with other brands. If the brand does not have these associations, they will not be considered. The quality of solutions within the frame of reference and in comparison with competitors will influence their chance of winning customers (Aaker, Points of Parity and Consumer's Brand Preference 2013).

The point of parity is about being a part of a group, having the required features of the group and knowing there is the need to stand out and be different. A new app may be developed to ease transportation in a location, but if they charge the user to download the app, there is no point of parity as in most cases, such apps are available for free download. Apple iPhone and Samsung Galaxy both have camera, touchscreen and run on an operating system. Therefore, a new mobile phone without those basic features will fail. Companies are now adopting more ethical practices, and

a new brand not considering those features will not be well received by consumers.

These points of parity can either be based on the category of the brand, something unique to the category of the brand (driver signs up on app to indicate availability, users sign in on app to book driver) or competitive points of parity which are designed to negate a competitor's point of difference (Aaker 2013). This could be a function on the taxi app to allow a consumer to make an emergency call or iPhone and Galaxy running on different operating systems. This feature is an effort towards standing out in the crowded market, even though the brand is still part of the market.

4.3.3 Stage 3—Compelling Points of Parity

The standing out should, however, not be to the detriment of the brand and make financial sense. This means, any decision a brand makes to shine among equals must have a positive impact on the brand and the brand users. It must be a win-win situation for both. You may want to make a mobile phone with a battery that lasts for 48 hours, that makes you unique but if the phone weights 0.5 kg, it will

not be appealing (Apple's iPhone 11 Pro Max is perhaps the most cumbersome smartphone, weighing 0.2 kg). People will instead spend time charging their phone rather than carry a massive brick around.

Therefore, in positioning their brand, the brand owner must ensure that their solution is not just unique, but that it is

- relevant to the problem,
- desirable to the customers and
- deliverable by the staff.

This desirable and deliverable unique solution highlights points of difference (PODs) for the brand in strategic positioning. It emphasises the features and attributes of the brand that consumers can associate with the brand. Consumers can say that this is not just another Uber or Lyft app; it is different because of this and that. Brands can take ownership of these exclusivities over other brands in the category. They can take pride in the fact that they are the only brand with such benefits when compared with all others brands in the market.

Balancing these conceptualising stages is essential for brand positioning. While the gap and need have been established, the point of parity should convince the buyer that it has the essential feature to meet their needs and at the same time has the point of difference to make it unique, stand out and be desirable. While we all need mobile phones with a camera (point of parity), we need a camera of a particular quality (point of difference). While we all need soft tissue paper (point of parity), we still want the tissue paper sources from a sustainable source (point of difference). Point of parity tells the customer that the product or service meets their basic needs. Point of difference tells them why the product is the best option over other brands that have basic features.

4.4   Brand Positioning Statement

There is always a call for brands to have a brand positioning statement; this is closely related to the idea of the brand philosophy. This is known to exist for big brands but not very often in the public domain, unlike their values and mission. While documenting a positioning strategy is relevant, it is important to note that brand positioning is more than just having a statement. It is about acting and taking responsibility.

I advocate for the inclusion of the brand positioning statement in the brand philosophy. This is a way for the brand to have control of the positioning. Since companies has limited control over how consumers perceive their brand, the companies need to provide a brand positioning statement to encourage and motivate their staff. The statement highlights what the company wants to achieve in terms of their position in mind of customer and at point of purchase. The statement should address the customers (target audience), the market (and how the brand differs from competitors) and it should be backed up by evidence that the positioning strategy is achievable.

Here are some examples:

- Disney provides *unique entertainment* for *consumers seeking magical experiences and memories*. Disney *leads the competition* by *providing every aspect of related products and services* to the world and appealing to people of all ages.
- Starbucks *offers the best coffee* and espresso drinks for *consumers* who want premium ingredients and perfection every time. Starbucks not only values every interaction, making each one unique, *but the brand commits itself to the highest quality coffee in the world.*
- For *individuals looking for high-quality beverages*, Coca-Cola offers a wide range of the *most refreshing options*—each creates a positive experience for customers when they enjoy a Coca-Cola brand drink. *Unlike other beverage options, Coca-Cola products* inspire happiness and make a positive difference in customers' lives, and the brand is intensely focused on the needs of consumers and customers.
- Alaska Airlines is creating an *airline people love*. Each day, we are *guided by our core values of own safety,* do the right thing, be kind-hearted, deliver performance and be remarkable at work and in our communi-

ties. *Alaska Airlines also fosters a diverse and inclusive culture and is an equal-opportunity employer*.

In these examples, you see the audience—consumers seeking magical experiences and memories, consumers who want premium ingredients and perfection every time and individuals looking for high-quality beverages. You can also identify the market and the competitors—Disney leads the competition, Starbucks offers the best coffee and creating an airline people love. These are promises that the brands are making and instilling same into their staff to make sure every customer benefit from the promise.

It is important not to get tied down by the strategic need for a brand positioning statement, but to put actions in place to enhance positioning in the mind of the consumers. To make sure the promises are fulfilled. For those who want to have a brand positioning statement, that is all well and good, but it is important to note that it is more than just making a statement but rather, taking action to ensure that consumers are getting what they have been promised.

4.5 Importance of Brand Positioning

Often brand managers and owners may not fully appreciate the benefit of securing a place on that pedestal in the mind of the consumer, and they may think creating an appealing product and brand identities like a logo and a website are all that is needed for effective brand management. It is, however, paramount to recognise that securing a place in that coveted spot can add value to the brand. Though brand positioning takes effort, it is essential for brand management.

4.5.1 Direction

As with the brand philosophy and core values, brand positioning provides direction for the brand. It provides a common goal to appeal to the consumer and retain that space on the ped-

estal; the stakeholders can all work together to achieve that goal. This gives direction to everyone involved. For a brand that wants to position itself as an innovative and customer-centric brand, position strategy ensures that the brand's core values are communicated, they remain innovative and keep developing quality products, retail staff are well trained to provide quality service when engaging with customers in stores, and the aftercare team responds promptly (Mogaji and Erkan 2019). The objective is achieved when everyone follows the direction as described by the brand positioning strategy. The consumer experiences all this positivity at the touchpoint and begins to have a better perception of the brand. Even when things are not going as planned, the brand position strategy offers reassurance and a reminder of the brand direction.

4.5.2 Reputation

A brand that is well-positioned in the minds of consumers is considered reputable. This means, brand reputation has to do with views, opinion, beliefs and feelings of brand users towards a brand. Brand reputation refers to the way a certain brand (human or a company offering services) is viewed by other brands and their users. A favourable brand reputation simply means that brand users, people in the society, regulators and proprietors trust a brand, and feel satisfied using the brand's products, services or goods. It is also about brands wanting to associate with the consumers because they have shared ideas, worldviews or philosophies. Brand positioning helps the brand to articulate how the value they offer is different (Mogaji and Danbury 2017). Their reputations can create demand for the product and more positive associations. Other brands that recognise the positioning can develop a partnership to aid the brand. Adidas and Kanye West worked together because of the positioning of the Kanye Brand. Likewise, Adidas and Beyoncé worked together for the Blue Ivy clothesline. Reputable brands are trustworthy and reliable. Consumers can retain the brand in their mind with the assurance that it will never disappoint.

4.5.3   Increased Sales

If a customer has a positive perception of a brand, it becomes easier to make a choice. If you like it, you will always automatically go for it, even though there could be many alternatives. Brand positioning makes it easier for consumers to choose because they can rely on the positive image they have of the brand. Brand reputation also helps brand users make informed decisions. The brand has highlighted its unique values, it has differentiated itself from others, and these features appeal to consumers. If consumers have a brand in their mind, they will recommend it to others, buy it for others and continually use it. This highlights the benefit of securing that space in customers' minds as it brings continuous and repeat purchases, thereby increasing sales and brand value.

4.5.4   Distinguished

Brand positioning strategies ensure that brands break through market clutter. With its points of parity and points of difference, its values and benefits are well highlighted and recognised. When consumers are swamped with options, a well-positioned brand becomes the preferred brand. Positioning ensures that the brand is easily distinguished among other competing brands. The brand can use their point of difference as a distinct feature. This makes the brand stand out in the market as well as in the customer's mind. These distinguishing features can also aid recall, especially at the point of purchase. It enables the brand to compete on value and not on price.

4.5.5   Meeting a Gap in the Market

Strategic positioning of a brand allows it to recognise and possibly meet a gap in the market. To explore its value and how it differentiates itself from others, the brand can look at the saturated areas of the market and areas which need attention. As illustrated in ◘ Fig. 4.3, a university positioning itself on distance (from the country's capital) and UCAS points for admitting students might discover that they are in the top right quadrant which is for those who are farther away from the capital and still requesting considerably high UCAS points. The university may, therefore, recognise a gap in the market for universities closer to the city and still accept-

◘ **Fig. 4.3** University brand positioning and market gap recognition. (*Source*: Author)
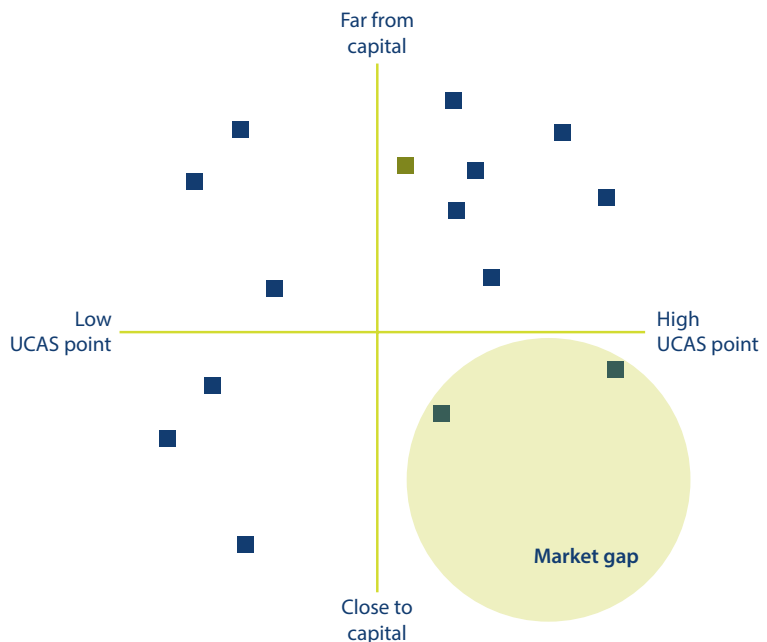
ing high scores. It is not surprising to see universities in Sunderland and Newcastle, up in the north of England, opening campuses in London.

Filling the gap could also be a form of product extension. Nivea started as a skin cream which is "gentle" and "protective." They recognised their point of difference but were also able to see a gap in the deodorant market. They were able to build on the positive brand positioning to extend their brand and develop deodorant. Similarly, Shell is known for extracting crude oil, their negative impact on the environment is well known. They, however, have extended into the UK energy industry and provide 100% green energy. This brand is known for causing damage to the environment, but now, they have identified a gap in the market and are supplying sustainable energy.

Case Study 4.1: Beyoncé

Beyoncé is an American singer, songwriter, record producer and actress. She is one of the most recognisable figures in contemporary music. She is a brand. She has a position in the minds of people. In 2016, she launched the Athleisure clothing brand alongside Sir Philip Green, the chairman of Arcadia Group, a retail company that includes Topshop, Topman, Wallis and Dorothy Perkins. The arrangement was that the Athleisure clothing brand, Ivy Park, would be sold at Topshop.

In 2018, there were allegations that Sir Philip had taken legal action to prevent publication of complaints of sexual harassment of staff. There are indications that this may have affected the business relationship between the two partners.

Beyoncé had pressure from her fans and campaign groups to withdraw from the commercial partnership in response to the allegations against the businessman, arguing it was at odds with her stated principles. She had to end the business venture by buying him out of Ivy Park.

Beyoncé as a brand is well-positioned in the mind of the fans. She is well-liked. To maintain her position on that pedestal, she had to recognise and respect the wishes of her fans. This enhanced positioning has also brought other associations. In 2019, she partnered with Adidas to design and sell a gender neutral clothesline which includes shoes, clothes and accessories, mostly featuring signature Adidas triple-stripes and maroon, orange and cream.

Beyoncé recognised her brand position, and she did not take it for granted. She was able to manage the process of buying out a partner who may have affected her reputation. Her position remained intact and she was able to build another relationship with another brand. Adidas recognised her reputation and was able to associate with her to launch the Ivy Park clothesline.

Reflection Questions
- Why do you think it was important for Beyoncé to end the business venture?
- Do you think consumers and fans would appreciate Beyoncé's decision to end the business venture?
- How important was the brand positioning of Beyoncé in starting another partnership with Adidas?

4.6 The Changing Brand Positioning

While taking into consideration that brands may try to conceptualise their brand positioning, the actual position of the brand lies in the minds of the consumers. This location, however, does not stop brand owners from improving their effort to ensure a better brand position. There are possibilities for the brand position to move.

Here I describe the changing position along a spectrum from −100 to +100. While brands are making an effort to be innovative
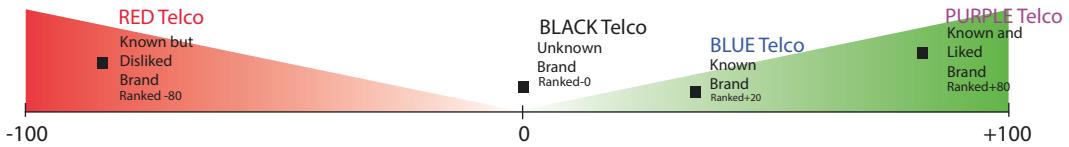
Fig. 4.4   The changing brand positioning—Stage 1—no action. (*Source*: Author)

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and offer quality service, they have the potential to move along the spectrum and become more desirable. On the other hand, if brands are not improving their services, communicating their positioning and demonstrating their values at every touchpoint, they have the tendency to be disliked and ignored by people, especially the brand users.

4.6.1   Stage 1—No Action

Figure 4.4 illustrates four different types of brand that have not taken any action to enhance their positioning and how they are perceived in the minds of consumers.

— RED Telco—Known but Disliked Brand

The consumer is aware of this brand, remembers it, but has a negative memory of it. The customer may have used the service of RED Telco before but felt disappointed by the quality. The customer complained, but no action was taken. Again the customer asked for a refund, but the request was ignored. These actions banished RED Telco to a red and dangerous corner in the mind of the consumer. The customer disliked the brand because of their customer services, and the customer might not hesitate to share their negative opinions on social media. Even though the brand may keep advertising their offers and update their brand philosophy on their website, they are wrongly positioned in the mind of the customer.

— BLACK Telco—Unknown Brand

The consumer is not aware of this brand. With a lack of awareness, the brand does not have a space in the mind of the consumer. Perhaps this is a new brand entering the market or the country, and they have not done much publicity about their offering.

— BLUE Telco—Known Brand

The consumer has seen this brand around. There have been advertisements on social media and billboards to present unique features of this telecommunications company. Friends and family are using the mobile network, but they sometimes complain of poor network. The brand needs to improve its services to convince the consumer and move higher on the spectrum. The awareness and connection through friends and family may have helped the brand retain that positive perception in the mind of the consumer.
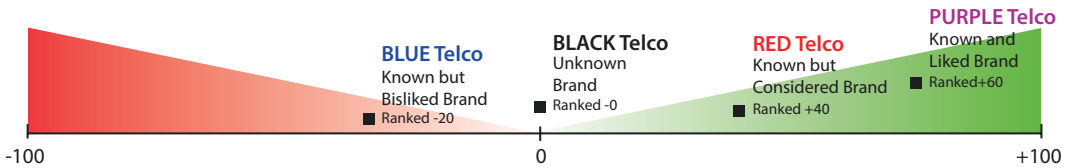
— PURPLE Telco—Known and Liked Brand

After a disappointing experience with RED Telco, the consumer has switched to PURPLE Telco, and it has been great so far. The consumer liked their offering, their customer service and the freebies that they offer. Even though they are more expensive, the consumer is receiving good value for the price. The brand is well-liked, and the consumer is willing to share their experiences with friends and family.

4.6.2   Stage 2—Action by Brands

In Fig. 4.5, the changes in brand positioning are presented after the brands have taken action to enhance their brand positioning. We can assume this to be after a year. It is important to note that these actions could have both positive and negative impacts on the brand.

— RED Telco—Known but Considered Brand

Hypothetically, last year, this was a known but disliked brand, however, things have changed with the brand. New management

BLUE Telco
Known but
Bisliked Brand
■ Ranked -20

BLACK Telco
Unknown
Brand
■ Ranked -0

RED Telco
Known but
Considered Brand
■ Ranked +40

PURPLE Telco
Known and
Liked Brand
■ Ranked+60

-100   0   +100

🔵 **Fig. 4.5** The changing brand positioning—Stage 2—action by brands. (*Source*: Author)

came on board and started a new strategic direction. The brand reached out to their previous customers; the brand informed them about the changes that had occurred within the organisation. They communicated their new position to the stakeholders. The brand was able to further integrate their brand through advertising, marketing communication, public relations and engaging in social responsibilities. The customer recognises these changes, starts reading reviews and comments to friends on how RED Telco has changed. The brand that was in the red zone last year can then move to the green zone and become a considered brand. Remember PURPLE Telco is still on the pedestal as the preferred brand, but RED Telco will have to be consistent with their brand positioning strategy to retain a favourable position in the mind of the consumer.

▬ BLACK Telco—Unknown Brand

The consumer is still not aware of this brand. They have not done much to position themselves. Therefore, while others are moving along the spectrum, they have not moved.

▬ BLUE Telco—Known but Disliked Brand

This was the brand that was previously in the green zone of positive attitude last year. Perhaps because of their poor customer service and mobile phone network, the consumer no longer likes the brand. The fact that family members had to change their lines because of the company's bad network may have contributed to this dislike. Unlike the previous RED Telco, which was in a deep red, Blue Telco is not in the deep dislike zone, but the brand needs to be strategic in their positioning lest they get ignored.

▬ PURPLE Telco—Known and Liked Brand

Still, the liked and preferred brand, but their position on that pedestal is being challenged. Their positioning is reducing in the mind of the consumer. This reduction could be because they are not innovative and creative with their product development and service quality. They are getting lackadaisical about their services and not providing excellent value for the high price they are charging. The consumer is watching, waiting for the contract to expire and they may consider an alternative.

4.7 Enhancing Brand Position

Brand position is the brand user's perception. Brand positioning can mostly be seen as the conceptual place or position that a brand wants to own in the target brand users' mind — the benefits or advantages that a brand wants the brand users to think they could get from the brand whenever they think of a particular brand. It should be realised that an effective brand positioning strategy will maximise customer relevancy, offer competitive distinctiveness and maximise brand value. This will help the brand to continually grow and make more profit. The brand owner must try to ensure that the brand is well-positioned in consumers' minds. The brand owners may not know their exact positioning, but they should aspire to make sure their brand is well received. The brands cannot create this brand position, and they do not have access to the pedestal in the customer's mind. Instead, the brand can work on enhancing their position. For a new brand, like BLACK Telco in the previous illustration, the consumer does not know about it, and therefore they have not placed it on any pedestal. As brands move along the spectrum, they

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have the responsibility to enhance positioning. Here are a few steps brand owners can follow in order to do this.

4.7.1 Brand Philosophy

This follows on from the previous chapter where we saw brand philosophy as a guiding principle and foundation of the brand. For a brand to stand out from the competitors, they must have a philosophy that reflects this. They must be able to show that they are striving to be different. The brand philosophy can reflect creative and innovative product development and quality service delivery (Hakala et al. 2011). The brands make promises, they publicly declare those promises, and stakeholders are on board to deliver them. The more those promises are delivered, the more experiences are enhanced, thereby ensuring a positive attitude towards the brand and better positioning.

4.7.2 Research

Research is an integral part of brand management. At every stage of the management process, research is needed. Likewise, in enhancing the brand's positioning, it is essential to recognise the role of research. To identify the uniqueness of their brand, to understand how consumers are perceiving and recognising their brand, the brand needs to understand its present position. The brand needs to know if it is desirable to customers. The brand needs to know if they are recognised in the market, liked or disliked. The research should uncover a lot of insights about the company, which will be relevant in developing their positioning strategy. The brand needs to know how they can beat their competitors in product design or service delivery. They need to recognise their capabilities, and how to meet those demands. Perhaps they will require extra staff in the store or need to hire more designers to work on the product.

4.7.3 Critical Evaluation of the Brand

The brand manager needs to take responsibility for the critical evaluation of the brand to develop a positioning strategy. This may follow on from the research which explores the consumers' perception of the brand. The brand managers need to recognise their present position and know where they want to be. The brands need to know what they offer and how they can be shaped to enhance their position. This critical evaluation should involve talking to the stakeholders to understand what the brand stands for and what is unique about it. For example, there could be many charity organisations providing support for developing countries, how would a new charity position itself to work in that sector? It is essential to make sure that such questions are answered before moving forward.

4.7.4 Product Development

Brands that want to be perceived as reputable brands must have evidence of their worth. They can demonstrate this with product development. By being creative and innovative and. offering products that no one else is. Their design might be unique, so everyone wants to be associated with it. One of the reasons why Apple is well-positioned in their customers' minds is because of their innovative products. The iPhone is recognised and appreciated for its design and functions. While there may be other mobile phones on the market, the iPhone has a special connection with people. The phone symbolises luxury and modernity, hence users continue to key into the brand's philosophy and buy its products.

4.7.5 Service Delivery

For those brands that may not be creating products, they can enhance their brand positioning through quality service delivery. This

is about creating an experience for the customers. The consumers engage with these brands, and they feel satisfied with their experience, and so are willing to tell their friends about it. Why do you always want to go to that bar, fly that airline or go to that salon? It is about how they made you feel, the aura and experience of their service. The conscious effort of the brand owner to go beyond the usual service offering is an effort towards creating that brand positioning. An example here could be the service experience at Starbucks, there is a sense of belonging and association with the brand, while there may be many coffee shops, there is something different about Starbucks' coffee served in comfortable surroundings by attentive staff and ensuring a personalised experience.

4.7.6 Consumer Engagement

This positioning strategy goes beyond product development or service delivery, price development or service delivery; it is about how the brand engages with the consumers. Understanding the customer's experience and behaviour, tailoring the engagement and recognising the consumers as individuals. Patterson et al. (2006) define customer engagement as the level of a customer's physical, cognitive and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organisation. Vivek et al. (2012) argue that customer engagement is a relationship beyond purchase, highlighting the intensity of the consumer in participating and connecting with the brand's offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or the brand. Hollebeek (2011, p. 786) describes "customer brand engagement" as "the level of a customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in brand interactions."

It is necessary to ensure consumers are happy and feel positive while engaging at different touchpoints. This engagement could be ensuring that the delivery is sent out on time,

and emails and phone enquiries are promptly attended to. Consumers want brands that are responsive even within the busy schedule. Brands that can offer this personal and adequate level of engagement are better positioned in the mind of the consumers. These are brands that are more likely to be recommended and revisited by customers or brand users because they have a positive perception of the brand developed from their previous positive experience with it.

4.7.7 Brand Identity

This is a physical representation of the brand which can also enhance a brand position. The consumer needs to feel a sense of connection with the elements of the brand in order for the brand to gain a position in the consumer's mind. The identity could be a form of luxury, and consumers may find this appealing. The identity is not just about the logo, but it could also be the product design or the store layout (Wayne et al. 2020). The Tesla Cybertruck may have an awkward shape, different from the usual truck that the consumer has seen, but that is a unique identity for Tesla, which makes the vehicle more valuable than others. The sustainable packaging used by a brand may be what is required for the brand to be positioned on that high pedestal in the mind of the consumer (Magnier and Schoormans 2015). The identity of the brand can indicate how much effort the brand is making to ensure a positive positioning in the minds of consumers.

4.7.8 Communication

This is a creative strategy to influence the brand's positioning. If the message is not clear, and consumers do not feel any connection, the position is not established in their mind. The brand invests resources in creating marketing communications to convey the value of the brands (Keller, Unlocking the power of integrated marketing communica-

tions: How integrated is your IMC program? 2016). The aim of these marketing communications is to remind and reassure the consumers about the place of the brands. They can be very expensive, and this gives the global brand an advantage as they can advertise around the world and keep people aware of their product. This should not, however, limit a brand with a smaller reach to effectively plan their communication strategy and engage with the consumers. This marketing communication can also involve other forms of promotions such as using social media influencers, celebrity endorsement and public relations (Wang et al. 2020; Gökerik et al. 2018). Managers can use these strategies to influence consumers' perception of their brands.

4.8 Who Is Responsible for Brand Positioning?

The brand positioning is in the mind of the consumers; however, both the consumer and brands are responsible for enhancing and shaping this position.

4.8.1 Consumers

Consumers are the entities that buy and use the products or services of an organisation. Consumers determine the position of the brand. They have experience in comparing the brand with many others, they have engaged with the brand's staff and messages, and they have formed an opinion about the brand. It is also important to note that this brand position may not be for a homogenous customer base. While some individuals may not like a brand due to their personal experiences, many may like the brand.

Mogaji (2018) illustrated this with a survey of attitudes towards financial services. Participants from China who had come across HSBC had a positive attitude towards HSBC when they got to the United Kingdom. Likewise, participants from Nigeria had a

positive attitude towards Barclays Bank because of their past experiences in their home country. It was not surprising, however, to see that some people in the United Kingdom had a negative perception of these banks. Barclays was forced to pull out of South Africa in 1986 after protests against its involvement during the apartheid regime. While some may like Barclays, many still do not like the brand because of their experience. Consumer perceptions are relative and depend on their experience. Nevertheless, it is essential to ensure that the majority of the consumers have a positive experience at every touchpoint in order to enhance positive attitudes towards the brand.

4.8.2 Brand Owner

While recognising that consumers dictate the position of the brand, the brand owners/ brand managers have the responsibility to ensure that they do everything possible to ensure that their brand's position in the mind of the consumers is high, right on that covered pedestal. This involves ensuring effective communications of the brand positioning, engaging effectively with stakeholders and making sure every customer at different touchpoints is served very well.

The brand manager is also responsible for dealing with any issues that may affect the reputation of the brand. The brand manager is expected to avoid scandal and anything that may tarnish the image of the brand. It is important to note that once the reputation of the brand is damaged, a customer might replace the brand with another one on the pedestal. The staff also contributes to the positioning of the brand, and they are expected to follow the brand's guiding principles, to ensure that consumers are well served, and that innovative products and services are designed and delivered. These actions can shift a brand position from a disliked brand to a considered brand, and similarly, such an action can move a little known brand to a disliked brand.
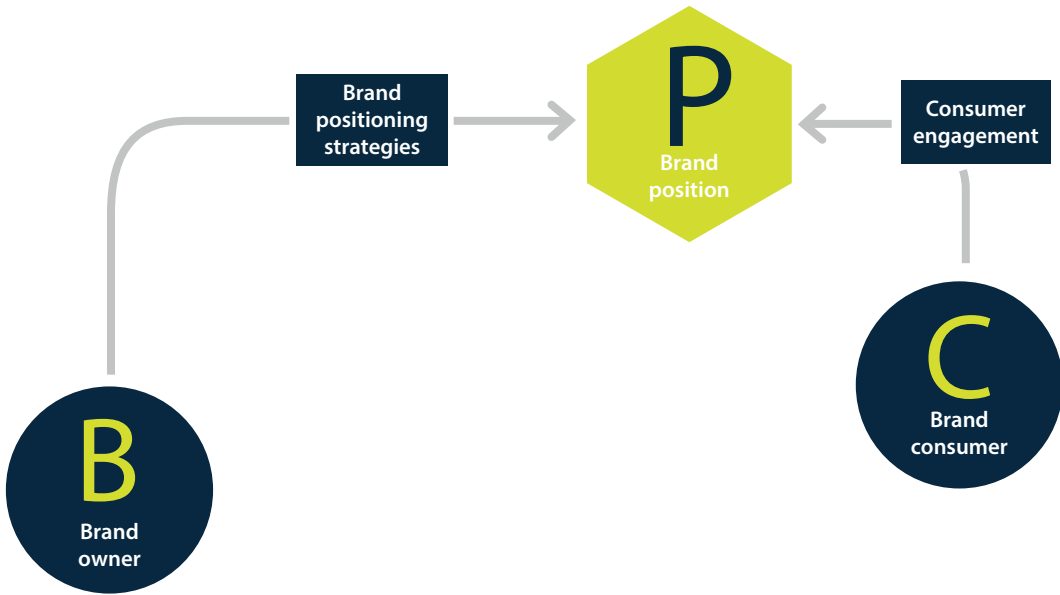
As illustrated in Fig. 4.6, both brand owner and customer have a role to play in developing the brand position. The brand comes up with various brand positioning strategies such as product development and marketing communication. The consumer, on the other hand, engages with these brand position strategies presented by the brand owners. From those engagements, the brand position is shaped. It is essential to remember that this act tilts more towards the consumers and their level of engagement. Brands may have to keep trying, and consumers have the final say of the position.

4.9 Challenges of Brand Positioning

It is not possible to satisfy every consumer. That is why not everyone in the world is using an Apple iPhone. Though it might be sleek and beautiful, some people have vowed never to use an iPhone, and likewise, some people have stopped using the iPhone. This highlights challenges for the brand position, especially as brand managers must deal with customers who are human and are bound to change. The brand must however try always to satisfy their brand users at all times. Some of the challenges are discussed below.

4.9.1 Consumers Are Subjective

Consumers may not necessarily be convinced by a brand positioning strategy. Humans are not easy to satisfy; there are changing consumer behaviours, lifestyles and expectations which present challenges for brand managers in their effort to position their brands. While effort may be made to enhance the brand's perception, this may not always go down well with the customers. There could be those who feel they cannot trust the brand's strategy and therefore convince others not to trust them either. Likewise, there are situations whereby a little effort from the brand can ensure a better brand position.

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Case Study 4.2: Fitness Central, Nigeria

A Twitter user shared a video of the CEO of Fitness Central, located in the Lekki area of Lagos State Nigeria, yelling at a supposed customer. @ChallengerNG tweeted: "Here is the CEO @FitnessCentNG Lekki, Apparently, a customer had a complaint and took it forward to him, but he did not like the way he went about it. So, he reacted as seen in the video by being dramatic, loud and close to being violent in front of other customers."

Instead of the Twitter users complaining and boycotting the fitness centre, it was the other way around. Twitter users instead questioned the handle that tweeted the video, asking for an explanation of what transpired between the CEO and the supposed customer, which led to the outburst. The handle that posted the viral video received backlash, and many people belied the handle has not released the customers' altercation with the CEO. There were comments which suggests that the CEO would not have reacted like that unless he has been very provoked. Many people decided to follow the @FitnessCentNG account. Within 24 hours, the number of followers moved from 600 to over 6000. Twitter users were in solidarity with the brand. Twitter users tweeted that people should stop telling a one-sided story. Asking for the full story, they commended the CEO's energy and confidence.

A typical video of a CEO yelling at a customer would have gone viral and caused massive damage to the reputation of the brand, but in this case, people demanded the background to the story. They were more eager to know what exactly transpired between the customer and the CEO. The increase in followers demonstrates that the Fitness Central brand has been placed on a higher pedestal; the brand is now even better positioned in the mind of the consumer than before the video went viral. This suggests that customers may be subjective in their engagement with brands and how they position the brand in their mind. After all, we are all humans.

Reflective Questions
- How do you understand the subjective nature of consumers?
- For what reasons could a brand owner get angry with a customer despite the impact this could have on his brand?
- A typical video of a CEO yelling at a customer would have gone viral and caused massive damage to the reputation of the brand, but why do you think consumers wanted more background to the story?

4.9.2 Competing Attention

Brands need to recognise changing consumer behaviour. There are many things competing for consumers' attention. Many consumers do not even have a pedestal for any brand, and they cannot be bothered to be loyal to any one brand. Many other commitments squeeze out the position of the brands in the minds of consumers and in some cases, the brands are removed. Advertisements try to raise brand awareness and consumers skip them. There are opportunities to try products before buying, and consumers may feel they are being tempted into spending their money. While brands are making this effort, consumers are mindful of how they engage with brands, especially those that do not align with their values.

4.9.3 Competing Brands

In addition to many other factors competing for consumers' attention, there is brand competition. Even as many brands are trying to stand out and improve the brand position, many other brands are doing likewise (Bagga et al. 2016). This competition brings a challenge for brands with regards to their positioning. Some brands may want to deliver on price and feel they are compromising on quality,

while some may focus on quality at the expense of price. With that, consumers are therefore spoilt for choice of what and where to buy.

The now-discontinued OS Symbian was the first popular smartphone operating system in the world. However, they were driven out of the market as new operating systems were released. Google introduced android in 2007, and it has become the most popular smartphone operating system in the world. Since its release, sales of smartphones running on android have grown sharply over the years. Apple's iOS is the second most popular operating system for smartphones. These competitors posed a challenge for OS Symbian, which it could not withstand, and it was discontinued.

4.9.4 Financial Limitation

It takes financial commitment to ensure quality service delivery and product development. For brands that do not have the financial resources, it could be a challenge for them to position themselves and compete with more prominent brands. Amazon ranked as America's fourth-largest advertiser in 2017, up from number 8 in 2016 and number 70 in 2010. In 2018, Amazon spent an estimated $3.4 billion on US advertising and promotions, up 28%. Amazon spent more money advertising itself in the United States last year than General Motors, Ford and Walmart (Doland 2018). These are examples of effort towards creating awareness of the brand and enhancing its position. It may not be financially viable for small brands to spend so much on advertising. However, it is better to start small, be consistent and remain faithful to the core values and philosophy of the brand. Most of the big brands also started with limited financial resources.

4.10 Considerations for Brand Positioning

Here are some key considerations for brand managers working on the process of improving their brand's positioning in the minds of consumers.

4.10.1 Process

The brand manager needs to recognise that brand position is a process (Koch and Gyrd-Jones 2019). This process does not stop at any point in the brand management cycle. It requires regular monitoring, research and evaluation to know how the brand is being perceived and how it can be further enhanced. This is an integral part of the brand management process (Maarit and Keränen 2014). The brand manager must recognise that it is a team effort; many other people will be involved in the process (depending on the size of the brand). It is hard work and results may not appear immediately; consistent and proactive effort is, however, encouraged.

4.10.2 Consumers' Expectations Can Change

While taking into consideration that the consumers make the ultimate decisions about the brand position (Priporas et al. 2017), it is essential to keep in mind that humans can change. Consumers' expectations can change as well. Perhaps if the consumer does not have the financial capabilities to buy a preferred brand, they might consider another one. If the considered brand serves the purpose, and it is further enhanced through effective communication and service delivery, that brand may end up replacing the initially preferred brand on that pedestal. Likewise, the brand integration strategies of the brands, including their product development, customer service and communication can also influence the expectations of the consumers. When a brand begins to demonstrate capabilities, consumers' expectations may change.

4.10.3 Brand Position Changes

This is also closely related to the changing expectations of consumers. Brand position can change as a response to consumers' changing behaviour. Brand positioning is dynamic. It is, however, essential to recognise

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that while a brand position can increase, it can also decrease. Recognition and respect for that brand placed on that pedestal in the mind of the consumer may be lost and not regained. Many years ago, the Blackberry Messenger was on that coveted pedestal, but for many people, it was replaced by WhatsApp. This messenger, once positively received, now no longer exists. These changes should be an indication for brand managers that they ought to regularly evaluate the position of their brands, work with stakeholders, be innovative and respond strategically to changes. If they do not do this, the brand will be forgotten.

4.10.4 Brand Reposition

Managers should be aware of the possibilities of repositioning their brands in the minds of consumers (Jowitt and Lury 2012). This may be due to mergers or acquisitions or due to a new strategic direction. Many car manufacturers like Volkswagen (with the e-tron brand) are investing in electric cars because they want to reposition their brands through product development, responsible business practices and sustainability.

4.10.5 Positioning Statement

It is essential to recognise the value of a positioning statement. I recommend its inclusion as part of the brand's philosophy. The positioning statement builds on the idea of the brand philosophy and demonstrates to the stakeholders how the brands want to be seen. This is useful for the staff who are working with the brands and the consumers engaging with the brands. There are, however, possibilities that these positioning statements may not align with the expectations of the consumers (Woods 2020). The brands need to identify this possible incongruity through research and shape their business practices to address it to the best of their capabilities.

4.11 Conclusion

A well-positioned and successful brand must try to stand out in a competitive marketplace. To be well-positioned in the minds of the consumers, brands need to keep improving on their product development and service quality. They need this progress to retain a space in the minds of consumers. Many brands are competing for the attention of consumers and brands need to recognise that it is about building up experiences, brand trust and loyalty. They need to be aware of what makes them unique and effectively communicate and demonstrate it. Consumers must see that the brand's promises are being fulfilled.

Regardless of the brand's actions, the positioning is what the consumers' think of it. Human nature is a limitation; brands must recognise that they cannot be everything for everybody. They need to rely on their brand philosophy, core values and beliefs to deliver products that consumers can engage with.

There may be limitations due to the size and age of the brand. While more established brands may have a better position in the minds of consumers, brands can evolve and improve on their position. Though it may take a long time, it is worth doing. This is because the positioning will ensure a unique brand, it will build a positive association and ensure the brand's reputation.

The process of brand positioning is not an easy task, and it is a long-term project. The brand works towards recognising their sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) and integrate their values over a continuous period (Mahdi et al. 2019). Even though a consumer's behaviour may change, communication is essential (Miao 2019). The brand should not hesitate to work on its brand positioning strategies continuously. Consumers are watching, and they are observing brands that align with their values; they are considering other brands as well. Very soon, they may replace the brands on that coveted pedestal in the consumers' mind.

▶ Student Activities

1. Which brands would you consider to be on the pedestal in your mind?
2. Can you identify examples of brand positioning strategies?
3. Can you differentiate between point of parity and point of difference?
4. How would you expect a new brand to compete with more established brands in the minds of consumers?
5. How vital is communication in brand positioning? ◀

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