The Role of Actual Brand Positioning: An Analysis of Digital Advertisements

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Abstract 2021-061
Mode: Synchronous
Thursday June 3, 2021, 2:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Brand positioning is an attempt to create, establish, and strengthen specific brand associations in consumers’ minds. Effective positioning not only maximizes differentiation from competitor brands but also positively affects financial performance (Devlin et al., 1995; Watkins & Gonzenbach, 1913) and consumer behavior (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010; Kalra & Goodstain, 1998). Therefore, companies seek to establish an effective positioning strategy. Previous researchers have claimed that the effectiveness of brand positioning can be assessed by the degree of position congruence (Crawford, 1985; Hooley et al., 2017; Porter, 1996), indicating how well consumers perceive the company’s intended positions in the positioning process (Blankson & Kalafatis, 2001, 2004). The process begins with companies’ intended positions (IP), or how the firms desire to be perceived by consumers, and moves through actual positions (AP) as communicated through various mediums before concluding in perceived positions (PP), which refer to consumers’ perceptions.

Despite the importance of position congruity for effective positioning strategy, little is known regarding the model's entire positioning process (i.e., IP à APà PP) as the majority of previous studies have examined these positions separately. Moreover, although the characteristics of digital AP differ from traditional AP (Acar & Puntoni, 2016), the role that digital AP plays between IP and PP in the positioning process remains unknown. Thus, the purposes of the study were to (a) investigate the AP in digital communications; (b) assess the relationship between position congruity among IP, AP, and PP; and (c) understand the role of AP in the positioning process.

A content analysis was conducted to analyze digital advertising in terms of actual positions in digital editions of Golf Digest magazine from 2014 through 2018. A total of 1,358 golf-related and non-golf-related digital advertisements were identified in the 53 issues from the 5 consecutive years, with 657 advertisements (49.5%) being golf-related digital AP. Given the purposes of examining AP in Golf Digest magazine's digital advertisements, the different AP positions were sorted into four positions and frequencies, and percentages, percentage differences, and regression analyses were conducted for all positions for each research brand.

The authors found that more than half of AP positions were associated with great quality (51.8%), followed by innovation (36.8%), equipment for professionals (6.5%), and tradition (5.0%). However, the authors found no positive relationship between the degree of congruence between IP and AP and the degree of congruence between IP and PP (F(1,7)=.00, p>.05; adj R2=-.5). The results implied that the congruence between IP and PP can be achieved regardless of AP and the congruence between IP and AP. Thus, our results shed light on the mediating role of AP in the positioning process model and suggest the need to modify the previous positioning process model. Whereas the original model would continue to work for newer or start-up brands, the modified model would work for all brands regardless of level of brand equity.