Brand positioning strategies and their effectiveness: A case of high street fashion retail brands in Pakistan

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Keywords
Brand Positioning; Brand Positioning Strategy, Brand Positioning Effectiveness

Abstract

Brand positioning has been acknowledged by practitioners and academics to be an important element of brand management. Firstly, this study aims to investigate the relationship between three brand positioning strategies (benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy and surrogate brand positioning strategy) and joint effect of the five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness, namely, favourability, dissimilarity, uniqueness, credibility, and sustainability. Secondly, this study investigates the separate relationship between the three brand positioning strategies and the five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness in the case of high street fashion apparel retail brands. To empirically test the proposed framework adapted measurement scales were used. Data from 607 young consumers in Pakistan were collected. Empirical findings confirm that benefit brand positioning strategy and surrogate brand positioning strategy have a greater effect on brand positioning effectiveness. However, a significant positive relationship was found between all three brand positioning strategies and brand positioning effectiveness. These findings also indicate varied yet insightful relationships between brand positioning strategies and five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness. Marketers can benefit from these findings as a means to understand brand positioning strategies from a consumers' perspective thereby making use of these results in articulating branding strategies as a way to generate and communicate a distinctive competitive perception for their brands.

Introduction

The Fashion industry is saturated with brands and even the best among these brands lacks a point of differentiation (Clancy & Trout, 2002). The foundation of branding revolves around the concept of brand positioning (Anderson & Carpenter, 2005). In this sense, all marketing initiatives are based upon the positioning strategy of a brand (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Myers, 1996; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brand positioning is described as "the act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market. The result of brand positioning is the successful creation of a customer-focused value proposition, a cogent reason why the target market should buy the product" (Kotler, 2003). The core aim of brand positioning is to create strong brand associations for your brand in the consumers' minds which include physical attributes, benefits, or life-style image of the consumer of the brand as distinct from the competition (Aaker, Batra, & Myers, 1992).

Pakistan's fashion apparel retail brand industry is expected to experience a decline from 9.1% to 7.5% compound annual growth rate from 2015 to 2019 (Apparel Retail in Pakistan, 2015). Brand positioning can make two similar products look different; and two dissimilar products look like substitutes (Evans, Moutinho, & van Raaij, 1996). Brand positioning is a central component in branding (Anderson & Carpenter, 2005) as most of the marketing initiatives are based on the positioning strategy of the brand (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Myers, 1996; Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

Globalization has changed the way consumers think, fierce competition and ever-increasing needs of marketers to make their brand outsmart all others has highlighted the need to create a holistic marketing

strategy that is targeted towards strengthening the position of a brand. One important problem in brand positioning research is related to the question of which brand positioning strategy is most effective for a certain product category. Do brands positioned on features perform relatively better when compared with the brands which are positioned on intangible attributes, for example, an image of the user? Noticeably, prior literature has not addressed these questions (Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The purpose of this study is to compare the effectiveness of three different brand positioning strategies from a consumers' perspective and find for the benefit of brand managers which brand positioning strategy is more suitable for fashion retail brands. This study aims to empirically explore two major research questions; (a) What is the relationship between each of the three brand positioning strategies with brand positioning effectiveness? (See Figure 1.1); (b) What is the relationship of each of the three brand positioning strategies with each of the five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness? (See Figures 1.2-1.4); (c) Are the three brand positioning strategies distinctly different from each other in terms of their effectiveness?

Literature Review

Brand Positioning Strategies

The importance of brand positioning has long been agreed upon by both practitioners and academicians (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Kalafatis, Tsogas, & Blankson, 2000; Kotler, 2003; Hooley, Piercy, & Nicoulaud, 2012; Trout & Revkin, 2010). Brand positioning has become increasingly important in today's competitive fashion markets (Clancy & Krieg, 2007; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010; Pike, 2012) as this market is characterized by homogeneous and me-too products offered by competing brands in the marketplace (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). Furthermore, Fuchs and Diamantopoulos (2012) emphasize that even the strongest fashion brands such as Gucci and Apple are confronted with the challenge of competing within an over-communicated and complex consumer market. Having selected a brand positioning strategy for the brand, the firm attempts to translate the brand's intended brand positioning into tangible and/or intangible attributes by tailoring different elements of the marketing mix (Kaul & Rao, 1995). Brand positioning strategy can be defined as "an attempt to move brands to a particular location within a perceptual product space" (Dillon, Domzal, & Madden, 1986). Sair and Shoaib (2014) are the latest to empirically measure brand positioning effectiveness from consumers' perspective using an instrument developed by Fuchs (2008). Table 1 shows different brand positioning strategies.

Table 1 Types of Brand Positioning Strategies

Brand Positioning Strategies	Literature	Description
Benefit Positioning	Aaker and Shansby (1982); Tybout and Sternthal (2005); Vriens and Hofstede (2000)	"Communicate advantages of a brand; the personal value consumers assign to good or service features, psycho-social consequences; not directly observable; functional nature; reflect whether a brand works as intended; mostly attribute-based benefits, refer also to problem solutions".
Surrogate Positioning	Aaker (1991); Bridges, Keller, and Sood (2000);	"Designed to create consumer associations about external aspects of a brand; says something about the brand that allows the consumer to come to individual conclusions; not attributes and benefits; refers to intangible aspects of the brand".
Features Positioning	Aaker and Shansby (1982); Crawford (1985); Vriens and Hofstede (2000)	"Company highlights the concrete attributes of the brand to create a differential advantage; concrete attributes are characteristics of the brand; they are objectively measurable, mostly tangible".

The aim of the implementation of brand positioning strategies is to create a brand image and communicate competitive advantage (Park, Jaworski, & McInnis, 1986). Brand positioning strategies are targeted towards either creating close associations (moving the brand closer to the competition in the perceptual map) or disassociation (moving the brand further away from the competition) (Keller, 2003). Specifically, this study hypothesizes that:

H_1 - H_3: There is a relationship between benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy, and brand positioning effectiveness.

Sengupta (2005) said: "consumers buy benefits and not features". Fashion retail brands are saturated with products that have closely similar features (Ries & Trout, 1986). Thompson et al., (2005) suggest that "consumers experience feature fatigue". Benefits created by feature positioning might only last for a short period of time (Moe & Fader, 2001). Previous research says, "benefits are felt to be more effective than features as positioning approaches" (Crawford, 1985). Benefit and surrogate positioning strategies are aimed at producing relatively more self-relevant meanings with consumers (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989). Indeed, "consumers should be more persuaded by thoughts about what products can do for them and a product's relevance to personal goals or objectives than my thoughts about physical product characteristics" (Graeff, 1997).

There are weaknesses associated with benefits as well as surrogate positioning strategies. One potential drawback of benefit positioning is that it is, along with feature positioning, the most frequently used positioning strategy among fashion brands (Crawford, 1985). Consequently, consumers may become bored with hearing the same feature versus benefit debate drawing to the superiority of these fashion retail brands. On the contrary, surrogate positioning strategies are considered to be riskier than benefit positioning strategies (Aaker & Shansby, 1982) as they likely lead to a confused brand image (Bridges, Keller, & Sood, 2000). The main justification for this argument is that surrogate positioning information may be interpreted completely differently by consumers (Crawford, 1985).

Marketers have always faced a dilemma concerning which brand positioning strategy is the best (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Past literature, surprisingly, has not paid much attention to this thorny issue in brand positioning (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). There is a dearth of research about the nature of surrogate positioning strategy and hence demands clarification (Fuchs, 2008). After considering the aforementioned discussion, this research proposes to answer the following research question (RQ):

RQ: Does benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, and feature brand positioning strategy differ in terms of their effectiveness?

Brand Positioning Effectiveness

It is expected that a well-positioned brand will make a brand profitable (Blankson, Kalafatis, Cheng, & Hadjicharalambous, 2008; Blankson & Crawford, 2012). Brand positioning effectiveness is based on the very "essence of brand positioning as emphasizing the distinctive characteristics that make a brand different from its competitors and appealing to the public" (Kapferer, 2004). Table 2 shows the dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness.

Table 2 Dimensions of Brand Positioning effectiveness

Author	Year	Brand Positioning Effectiveness Dimensions	Definition
Mahajan and Wind	2002	Favourability	"Brand must be accompanied with positive associations; the brand needs to appeal to the head and/or heart of consumers".
Sujan and Bettman	1989	Dissimilarity	"How similar or distinct the brand is perceived to be in comparison with other brands in the product category".
Chaturvedi and Caroll	1998	Uniqueness	"The differentiation that a brand enjoys in the marketplace vis-à-vis its competitors by virtue of perceptions unique to that brand, or other perceptual brand-specific effects".
Erdem, Swait, and Valenzuela	2006	Credibility	"The believability of the product position information contained in a brand, which depends on the willingness and ability of the firms to deliver what they promise".
Keller	2003	Sustainability	"Brand position, which is hard to attack from competitors, defensible, and pre-emptive".

Favourability is considered to be the most basic of all the other dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness dimensions (Dacin & Smith, 1994). Favourability also determines whether consumers have developed favourable associations with the brand or not (Dillon, Thomas, Kirmani, & Mukherjee, 2001;

Keller, 2003). It is important for marketing managers that consumers acknowledge the brand to be favourable (Keller, 2003). Favourability encompasses both brand-specific associations (Dillon, Thomas, Kirmani, & Mukherjee, 2001). Favourability assures that value is created for consumers and that brand association that is important for consumers are communicated with the help of marketing communications (Brooksbank, 1994). Marketers' prime concern should be the selection of that particular brand positioning strategy which will lead to greater brand favourability. Therefore, the hypotheses that:

H4(a) (b) (c): Benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy andsurrogate brand positioning strategy have a relationship with favourability dimension of brand positioning effectiveness.

Consumers have a set of expectations towards a brand (Keller, 2003) hence dissimilarity is driven by whether the brand under consideration meets those expectations or not. Attributes of a fashion brand that have importance and are considered comparable with competitors will create perceived similarity amongst fashion brands, whereas attributes that are different will cause the brand to be perceived as dissimilar (Bijmolt et al., 1998). Therefore, the hypotheses that:

H5(a) (b) (c): Benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy and surrogate brand positioning strategy are likely to have a positive relationship with the dissimilarity dimension of brand positioning effectiveness.

Uniqueness as a dimension of brand positioning effectiveness is the trickiest of all the dimensions because it is industry-specific, for example, feature brand positioning strategy is more suitable for the mobile phone industry (Fuchs, 2008). This study intended to find the relationship of uniqueness dimension of brand positioning effectiveness in the fashion retail industry with the selected three brand positioning strategies. Prior studies show support that uniqueness can be a consequence that can be achieved by any of the three brand positioning strategies (Fuchs, 2008). Therefore, the hypotheses that:

H6(a) (b) (c): Benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy and surrogate brand positioning strategy are likely to have a positive relationship with uniqueness dimension of brand positioning effectiveness.

Products and their uses that are considered outside of the norm can serve as recognizable ques of uniqueness (Tepper-Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Trustworthiness and credibility allow the consumer to have reduced feelings of skepticism for a brand as it makes strong and convincing claims which have more meaning (Yoo & MacInnis, 2001) and thence the hypotheses that:

H7(a) (b) (c): Benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy and surrogate brand positioning strategy are likely to have a positive relationship with credibility dimension of brand positioning effectiveness.

Sustainability highlights that the brand positioning strategy should be difficult to replicate by the competing brands (Cravens, 2000) and must create a long-term competitive advantage (Czepiel, 1992; De Chernatony, 2006). Therefore, the hypotheses that:

H8(a) (b) (c): Benefit positioning, feature positioning, and surrogate positioning have a relationship with the sustainability dimension of brand positioning effectiveness.

Fuchs (2008) conceptually defines brand positioning effectiveness as "the extent to which a brand is perceived to occupy a favourable, dissimilar, unique, and credible position in the minds of (target) consumers". This study, however, adds sustainability as the fifth crucial dimension to its measurement model and hence measures brand positioning effectiveness as a multidimensional construct (Edward, 2001; Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002). Brand positioning effectiveness has been the researchers' favourite area of interest in recent times especially in the fashion retail industry where new communication challenges will keep fashion brands in a constant struggle to outshine competitors (Camiciottoli & Ranfagni, 2015). instrument was re-worded and adapted from previously published literature (Fuchs, 2008). Data were collected via URL embedded, online questionnaires (Wiedmann, Walsh, & Mitchell, 2001). To assess whether the measures reflected the respective constructs, content validity of the adapted instrument was measured (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). Content validity for individual items was established by calculating content validity index (CVI) developed by Martuza (1977). Items with individual CVI of 0.80 or higher are acceptable (Grant & Davis, 1997; Polit & Beck, 2004). In this instance, CVI came out to be 0.871. Common method bias can affect research analysis. Common latent factor test was used as a statistical remedy for common method bias (Aulakh & Gencturk, 2000). A single factor explains 37.5% of the variance

in the model. The goodness-of-fit statistics indicators suggested a bad model fit since they fall outside the commonly accepted cut-off points; CMIN/ DF = 7.01 (cut-off point, 2 and 5), normed fit index (NFI) = 0.510, adjusted Methodology

The target population for this study was graduate and undergraduate university students residing in Pakistan. The sample was however restricted to students of randomly selected eight private universities in Pakistan. The decision of choosing a pool of private university students was based on three factors; firstly, they have a greater familiarity of the product category (high street fashion); secondly, private university students are regular shoppers of fashion retail brands (Anderson & Gregory, 2005); and thirdly, they have access to internet since the mode of survey data collection was online (Boatswain, 2015). This research differentiates from the past research where brand positioning strategy and brand positioning effectiveness were measured from the company's perspective which measured brand positioning intended by the marketing executives rather than the perceived brand positioning as reported by consumers (Fuchs, 2008; 2010). Out of all the surveys emailed to students by the program offices of the respective universities, 607 were received back.

For this study, the data collection goodness of fit index (AGFI) = 0.389, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.517, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.383, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.181. All the indicators other than CMIN/ DF have a cut-off point of 0.7 and RMSEA should be less than 0.10 (Yang & Green, 2010).

Another concern regarding bias in results is non-response bias in questionnaire research resulting as a consequence of missing data which can lead to incorrect results about the sample representing a population (Lineback & Thompson, 2010). Early respondents were compared with late respondents on key demographic indicators (gender, income, marital status, city of residence and education). Linear extrapolation method is based on the assumption that early respondents of the survey (W1) are different from late respondents of the survey (W2) and that the late respondents are non-respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). Statistical significance was estimated by Chi-square test in SPSS 22.0 (Atif & Richards, 2012). Statistically significant differences were not seen in all four demographic indicators indicating no systematic bias exists between W1 and W2. No association was found between W1 and W2 based on gender, marital status, city of residence and education ($x^2_{\text{gender}} = 3.17$, $p = 0.20$; $x^2_{\text{marital status}} = 5.61$, $p = 0.18$; $x^2_{\text{city}} = 3.11$, $p = 0.35$ and $x^2_{\text{education}} = 4.76$, $p = 0.25$) respectively. These analyses indicate that the non-response bias problem was not present.

The purpose of the study was empirically tested in two parts: Model 1 (M1) and Model 2 (M2). Model 1 was aimed at analyzing the relationship between benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy and brand positioning effectiveness as a second-order construct. Model 2, on the contrary, tests the relationships between benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy and brand positioning effectiveness as a first-order construct having five dimensions (namely, favourability, dissimilarity, uniqueness, credibility, and sustainability).

With the help of confirmatory factor analysis, measures were purified (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). All items were reliable because their factor loadings were greater than the cut-off point of 0.71 (Comrey and Lee, 1992) (see table 2.8). The sources of scale items used in this study are summarized in table 2.5. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) helped in examining the unidimensionality of items (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). CFA was used to determine the fit of the proposed measurement model along with an estimation of the validity and reliability of the latent constructs (Shah & Goldstein, 2006)

Table 3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	M2: When BPE is a first-order construct			M1: When BPE is a second-order construct		
Item	**F.L.[a]**	**C.R.[b]**	**V.E.[c]**	**F.L.[a]**	**C.R.[b]**	**V.E.[c]**
Brand Positioning Effectiveness						
Dissimilarity		.822	.742	.741.811	.724	
DSS1	.812					
DSS2	.772					
DSS3	.802					
DSS4	.811					
Favourability		.869	.771	.812.973	.799	
FAV1	.787					
FAV2	.801					
FAV3	.949					
FAV4	.817					
Uniqueness		.910	.717	.775.825	.713	
UNQ1	.787					
UNQ2	.818					
UNQ3	.790					
UNQ4	.823					
Credibility		.874	.673	.792.876	.855	
CRE1	.871					
CRE2	.781					
CRE3	.793					
CRE4	.693					
CRE5	.820					
Sustainability		.893	.736	.799.915	.777	
SST1	.800					
SST2	.924					
SST3	.911					
SST4	.813					
Brand Positioning Strategies						
Feature Positioning		.922	.699	.735	.811	
FP1	.783			.817		
FP2	.821			.743		
FP3	.922			.719		
FP4	.862			.716		
Benefit Positioning		.817	.913	.810	.792	
BP1	.771			.764		
BP2	.815			.812		
BP3	.788			.765		
BP4	.881			.788		
BP5	.911			.835		
BP6	.788			.797		
Surrogate Positioning		.906	.764	.897	.761	
SP1	.855			.744		
SP2	.911			.891		
SP3	.852			.780		
SP4	.814			.701		
SP5	.880			.729		

M1: Goodness-of-fit statistics; x^2/ df = 1.67, NFI = .91, GFI = .88, CFI = .96, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .04	
M2: Goodness-of-fit statistics; x^2/ df = 2.05, NFI = .91, GFI = .88, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .05	

Note: All are statistically significant, p< 0.05; n = 607. [a] Standardized factor loading. [b] Composite Reliability. [c] Average Variance Extracted. Labels: M1, Model 1; M2, Model 2; BPE, Brand positioning effectiveness; CFI, Comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker lewis index; GFI, Goodness of fit indices; NFI, normed fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

Model Estimation

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Knott & Bartholomew, 1999) was followed by path analysis (O'Rourke & Hatcher, 2013). Structural Equation Modelling was performed in Amos 22.0 with maximum likelihood estimation. Composite reliability is a superior internal consistency measure having a recommended cut-off level of 0.70 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). The average variance extracted (AVE) has been used to assess the convergent validity of the latent constructs (John & Reve, 1982). AVE for all the constructs should be greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) confirming that the constructs have items that reflect the latent constructs (Segars, 1997; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). To analyze discriminant validity for M1 (see table 4), correlations between constructs helped to confirm for each construct whether they were smaller than the square root of the AVE (Chin, 1998). Numbers in parenthesis on the diagonal show the square root of AVE. For discriminant validity to hold, numbers in each row and column should be smaller than the numbers in the parenthesis in that row and column (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To analyze discriminant validity for M2 (see table 5), correlations between constructs were estimated separately to confirm for each of the five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness whether they were smaller than the square root of the AVE (Chin, 1998).

Table 4 Correlations Matrix

Construct	BP	SP	FP	BPE
BP	(.955)			
SP	.509**	(.874)		
FP	.344**	.654**	(.836)	
BPE	.590**	.418**	.257**	(.806)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Labels: BF, Benefit positioning; SP, Surrogate positioning; FP, Feature positioning; BPE, Brand positioning effectiveness; DSS, Dissimilarity; FAV, Favourability; UNQ, Uniqueness; CRE, Credibility; SST, Sustainability.

Table 5 Correlations Matrix

Construct	BP	SP	FP	DSS	FAV	UNQ	CRE	SST
BP	(.955)							
SP	.509**	(.874)						
FP	.344**	.654**	(.836)					
DSS	.285**	.222**	.170**	(.861)				
FAV	.396**	.514**	.450**	.330**	(.878)			
UNQ	.261**	.639**	.311**	.433**	.404**	(.846)		
CRE	.455**	.592**	.632**	.333**	.598**	.443**	(.820)	
SST	.244**	.544**	.379**	.512**	.361**	.334**	.282**	(.857)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Labels: BF, Benefit positioning; SP, Surrogate positioning; FP, Feature positioning; BPE, Brand positioning effectiveness; DSS, Dissimilarity; FAV, Favourability; UNQ, Uniqueness; CRE, Credibility; SST, Sustainability.

Given the known sensitivity of the x^2 statistics test to sample size, other than x^2/df ratio several widely used goodness-of-fit statistics showed that for M1, the confirmatory factor model fit the data well; x^2 = 1019.63; df = 611; p = .00; x^2/df = 1.67; CFI = .96; TLI = .96; GFI = .88; NFI = .91; RMSEA = .04 (Hu & Bentler,

1998). Likewise, for M2, goodness-of-fit indicators suggested a good model fit since they fall within the commonly accepted cut-off range; x^2 = 1257.81; df = 611; p = .00; x^2/df = 2.05; CFI = .96; TLI = .95; GFI = .88; NFI = .91; RMSEA = .056.

Results

The hypotheses have been tested in two models; M1 and M2 (see figure 1.1 – 1.4). The estimated path coefficients, *p*-value and decision rule are summarized in table 6. These results indicated statistical support for most of the hypotheses. Path analysis for M1 (H_1 – H_3) produced the following model fit statistics: x^2 = 1934.42; df = 598; p = .00; x^2/df = 3.23; CFI = .86; TLI = .87; GFI = .77; NFI = .81; RMSEA = .05. The results fully supported the hypotheses about the effect of benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy on overall brand positioning effectiveness (H_1, β = .211, p < .001; H_2, β = .442, p < .000; H_3, β = .201, p < .001 respectively). However, the effect of each brand positioning strategy on brand positioning effectiveness varies in strength.

Path analysis for M2 (H_5 – H_8) produced the following model fit statistics: x^2 = 1897.15; df = 667; p = .00; x^2/df = 2.84; CFI = .931; TLI = .844; GFI = .817; NFI = .736; RMSEA = .071. M2 estimated the relationships of three brand positioning strategies with five individual dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness. Significant relationships were found between benefit brand positioning strategy and favourability, uniqueness, credibility and sustainability dimensions ($H_{4a,}$ β = .300, p < .011; $H_{6a,}$ β = .411, p < .002; $H_{7a,}$ β = .166, p < .000; $H_{8a,}$ β = .200, p < .000). However, relationship of benefit brand positioning strategy with dissimilarity dimension of brand positioning effectiveness was not significant ($H_{5a,}$ β = -.081, p < .235) thus implying that brand managers while marketing their brand should communicate benefit brand positioning strategy by focusing more on favourability, uniqueness, credibility and sustainability attributes of the high street fashion apparel brand.

The relationship of feature brand positioning strategy with favourability, dissimilarity, uniqueness and credibility dimensions has shown empirical support ($H_{4b,}$ β = .155, p < .000; $H_{5b,}$ β = .241, p < .005; $H_{6b,}$ β = .141, p < .000; $H_{7b,}$ β = .201, p < .000), however, feature brand positioning strategy was not found to have a relationship with sustainability ($H_{8b,}$ β = .340, p < .068). Therefore, brand managers focusing on product features must take into account that attribute. Feature based brand positioning is not considered novel by consumers and that it can be easily copied by competitors in the marketplace.

The relationship of surrogate brand positioning strategy with favourability, dissimilarity, uniqueness and sustainability has shown empirical support ($H_{4c,}$ β = .241, p < .000; $H_{5c,}$ β = .251, p < .013; $H_{6c,}$ β = .107, p < .000; $H_{8c,}$ β = .461, p < .000), however, relationship of surrogate brand positioning strategy with credibility dimension was not found significant ($H_{7c,}$ β = -.041, p < .007). This implies that marketers who choose to base their marketing communications on surrogate brand positioning strategy need not emphasize on the trustworthiness of the brand. Brand positioning based on surrogacy will have a negative impact on the credibility of the fashion retail brand.

Table 6 Structural Parameter Estimates

Hypothesized Path	***β*** *	***p***	**Comments**
M1			
H_1: BP→ BPE	.211	.001	Supported
H_2: SP→ BPE	.442	.000	Supported
H_3: FP→ BPE	.201	.001	Supported
M2			
H_{4a}: BP→ FAV	.300	.011	Supported
H_{4b}: FP→ FAV	.155	.000	Supported
H_{4c}: SP→ FAV	.241	.000	Supported
H_{5a}: BP→ DSS	-.08	.235	Not Supported
H_{5b}: FP→ DSS	.241	.005	Supported
H_{5c}: SP→ DSS	.251	.013	Supported
H_{6a}: BP→ UNQ	.411	.002	Supported
H_{6b}: FP→ UNQ	.141	.000	Supported
$H_{6\,c}$: SP→ UNQ	.107	.000	Supported
H_{7a}: BP→ CRE	.166	.000	Supported

H_{7b}: FP→ CRE	.201	.000	Supported
H_{7c}: SP→ CRE	-.04	.079	Not Supported
H_{8a}: BP→ SST	.200	.000	Supported
H_{8b}: FP→ SST	.340	.068	Not Supported
H_{8c}: SP→ SST	.461	.000	Supported
M1: Goodness-of-fit statistics; x^2/df = 3.23; CFI = .86; TLI = .87; GFI = .77; NFI = .81; RMSEA = .05			
M2: Goodness-of-fit statistics; x^2/df = 2.84; CFI = .931; TLI = .844; GFI = .817; NFI = .736; RMSEA = .071.			

*Standardized regression co-efficients.

To address the research question; does benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy differ in terms of their effectiveness? This study tests the difference between beta co-efficients by demonstrating that the point estimates are likely to be statistically different from each other when the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (via bootstrap with 3000 re-samples) overlap by not more than 50% (Cumming, 2009). If the confidence intervals (lower and upper) overlap by less than 50%, the standardized beta co-efficients would be considered significantly different from each other (Cumming, 2009). Table 7 summarizes the results of the test to estimate the difference between beta co-efficients. As seen in figure 1.5, there appears to be no overlap in the confidence intervals implying that benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy differ statistically significantly from each other in terms of their effectiveness.

Table 7 Bootstrap for Co-efficients

			Bootstrap[a] 95% Confidence Interval	
Constructs	**β***	**Significance**	**Lower**	**Upper**
Benefit positioning	.211	.001	.194	.315
Surrogate positioning	.442	.000	.326	.560
Feature positioning	.201	.001	.083	.208

*Standardized regression co-efficients

Discussion

The position of a brand is important for the success of marketing initiatives (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004; Singh, Kalafatis, & Ledden, 2014), the results of this study offer important insights into how a fashion brand can proactively enhance its position relative to competitors' brands. Data analysis provides support for the presence of a significant positive relationship between benefit brand positioning strategy and overall brand positioning effectiveness. Marketers focusing on marketing communications strategy explaining the benefits of the consumption of a brand such as benefits related to social-image and benefits are more likely to build an effective brand positioning in consumers' minds (Wind, 1982; Crawford, 1985). The relationship of surrogate brand positioning strategy with overall brand positioning effectiveness was found to be positive. This can be attributed to consumers' association with a fashion brand based on image and personality as opposed to the actual product offering. Feature brand positioning strategy was also found to have a positive relationship with overall brand positioning effectiveness. This finding implies that consumers do take an interest in the tangible features of a brand.

Out of the three brand positioning strategies, surrogate brand positioning strategy and benefit brand positioning strategy were found to have a relatively stronger relationship with brand positioning effectiveness, thereby lending support for marketing communications portraying the symbolic meaning of brand use. Sengupta (2005) also provides support for the result by stating that consumers are more interested in the benefits provided as a result of product use rather and features. Benefits that are realized from the use of a brand have a greater relevance in the consumers' evaluation of the brand than the tangible attributes of the brand (Bagozzi, 1986) because benefits of product consumption are intended to solve a problem. Especially in case of fashion brands it is more relevant on a conceptual plan because it becomes increasingly difficult to offer new products, with added features to consumers, which can add value to their product consumption behaviour. Fashion retail industry is saturated with brands which provide identical

features of the product (Ries & Trout, 1986), therefore, standing out among the competitors in the marketplace with marketing geared towards feature brand positioning strategy may be difficult (Aaker, 2003), with special reference to product categories where the performance of products is perceived to be similar (Vriens & Hofstede, 2000; Majahan & Wind, 2002).

Findings indicate that the relationship of feature brand positioning strategy with all five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness was not significant; the relationship with favourability, dissimilarity, uniqueness and credibility dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness were significant but not with the sustainability dimension. This can be attributed to the fact that features in the fashion retail industry can easily be replicated by competitors in the marketplace (Moe & Fader, 2001), therefore, sustainability as a dimension of brand positioning effectiveness does not seem to have a relationship with feature brand positioning strategy. This may also mean that consumers are smart decision-makers when they choose a fashion brand. Feature brand positioning strategy does not seem to have a relationship with sustainability dimension of brand positioning effectiveness; it may imply that feature brand positioning strategy may not be suitable to sustain a strong brand image in consumers' perception about a fashion brand.

Benefit brand positioning strategy was found to have a positive relationship with favourability, uniqueness, credibility and sustainability dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness. Advertisements that help a brand build consumer-brand associations portraying uniqueness of the brand and communicate favourability benefits about the brand are likely to be more effective. Benefit brand positioning strategy also shows support for a brand in maintaining effective brand positioning which is difficult to copy by competitors because it is sustainable. Brand positioning based on highlighting the benefits of the brand seems highly unlikely to create a perception of dissimilarity of a particular brand as compared to other brands.

The findings of the study lend support to the relationship between surrogate brand positioning strategy and favourability, dissimilarity, uniqueness, sustainability dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness. Surrogate brand positioning strategy tends to produce more self-relevant meanings for consumers (Fuchs, 2008). Marketing communication initiatives showing the intangible attributes of a brand are more likely to create favourable image in the in the minds of the consumers. Surrogate brand positioning strategy was also found to be likely to help a fashion brand create a strong sustainable perception in the minds of the consumers. Fashion brands must aim to market their brands with the help of surrogate brand positioning strategy because the perception developed as a consequence of surrogate positioning is difficult to replicate. Surrogate brand positioning strategy of a brand was not found likely to be viewed as credible by the consumers as the relationship was insignificant but negative.

Statistical estimates for RQ (see table 7) show that benefit brand positioning strategy is less likely to be effective than surrogate brand positioning strategy. This result is in contradiction to what Fuchs (2008) proposed i.e., benefit brand positioning strategy is more effective than surrogate brand positioning strategy. These opposing results were likely to be present because of the type of industry under consideration. This study tested whether the difference in beta co-efficients was statistically significantly different and estimates show that benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy are statistically different in terms of their effectiveness. There seems to be no overlap in their respective perception in the minds of the consumers. Consumers were found able to identify different fashion brands whose marketing initiatives were based on benefit brand positioning strategy versus those whose marketing communication was based on surrogate brand positioning strategy.

In conclusion, for fashion brands, marketing efforts must be focused on generating content targeted less towards highlighting the benefits of the products and more so on expressing how product consumption will lead to surrogacy (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Moreover, benefit brand positioning strategy is more effective than feature brand positioning strategy (Azmat & Lakhani, 2015). This study lends support to the proposition that fashion brands can better create consumer-brand associations if their brand positioning is based on surrogacy and not on tangible attributes of the product. Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) have reported opposing results, as they found that benefit brand positioning strategy was more effective than surrogate brand positioning strategy.

Managerial Implications

This study proposes that marketing managers should know which of the three brand positioning strategies is likely to result in better brand positioning effectiveness in the case of fashion apparel retail brands in Pakistan. In high street fashion industry, brand positioning strategy based on the associations created by intangible external aspects of the brand and by intangible aspects of the brand (i.e., surrogate brand positioning strategy) is likely to be more effective in creating a positive perception in consumers' minds than brand positioning strategy based on tangible attributes of the brand i.e. feature brand positioning strategy (Keller, 1993; Bridges, Keller, & Sood, 2000). This study makes suggestions to brand managers that if they are to survive the anticipated decline in the fashion industry growth, they may prioritize by basing brand positioning on either surrogate brand positioning strategy or benefit brand positioning strategy. Marketing campaigns communicating surrogate brand positioning strategy are likely to develop brand associations if the emphasis is placed on communicating that the brand is favourable, dissimilar and sustainable but brand does not necessarily have to be credible. Marketers must make their brands into personalities. Their image must be based on intangible benefits of product consumption. The role of a fashion brand should go beyond selling clothes, it should have a larger purpose with an emphasis on creating consumer-brand associations based on heroism and symbolism.

Benefit brand positioning strategy might be opted as a second-best option for brands to build an effective perception in the minds of the consumers. Marketing campaigns focused towards visually communicating social benefits of the product offering are likely to perform better among the consumers. This study looks further into the individual effects of Benefit brand positioning strategy on the five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness. Results indicate that if a fashion brand's marketing goal is to create a unique perception, then managers must highlight the intangible benefits of product consumption. While communicating benefits of the brand, it is highly likely that brand managers can develop a relative perception which will be difficult to copy, thus preventing a fashion brand from becoming a 'me too' brand.

The acknowledgement of the significance of five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness may facilitate brand managers to; 1) get informed insights into the soundness of the position of the brand relative to competition in the marketplace, and 2) support marketing managers in creating relevant brand positioning strategies and hence marketing communications. More specifically, the brand positioning effectiveness measure enables brand managers to detect the relative strength of the five dimensions of brand positioning effectiveness. In conclusion, this study consolidates means by which marketing managers can take proactive strategic decisions to strengthen the relative position of the firm's offering amidst the fierce competition present in the fashion industry.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research is not free of limitations which restrict the generalizations of its findings. Future research may consider fashion retail brands which include other product categories, for example, kids wear brands, ready-to-wear brands, made to measure brands, wholesale brands and others (maternity wear and clothes for working women). The scope of this study was restricted to three brand positioning strategies (benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy and surrogate brand positioning strategy), however, researchers might consider the possibility of employing a hybrid brand positioning strategy in which "elements from more than one positioning strategy are used" (Wind, 1982; Chernev, 2007; Ozcan & Sheinin, 2008).

The main purpose of the brand positioning effectiveness measurement scale is to estimate how effectively a brand has been positioned in the consumers' mind based on the choice of brand positioning strategy, however, it does not analyse whether a brand manager has identified and targeted the right audience of consumers based on the classical STP theory of brand positioning (Crawford, Urban, & Buzas, 1983). Perhaps a combination of segmentation tools and brand positioning analysis would be a better approach towards understanding the effectiveness of brand positioning strategies (DeSarbo, Grewal, & Scott, 2008, Natter, Andreas, Udo, & Alfred, 2008). Such integrated models can help give in depth insight by simultaneously studying positioning and segmentation issues.

In this study, three brand positioning strategies that are commonly used in high street fashion retail industry were analysed. No attempt was made to study brands which are positioned on radically unique

features or benefits (Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994; Aaker, 2003; Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003; Desai & Rathneshwar, 2003). Further areas of investigation about the success of brand positioning strategies would involve collection of data from brand managers as well and making inference about the efficacy of a brand positioning strategy by using such data.

Figure 1. 1 Brand Positioning Strategies and Brand Positioning Effectiveness

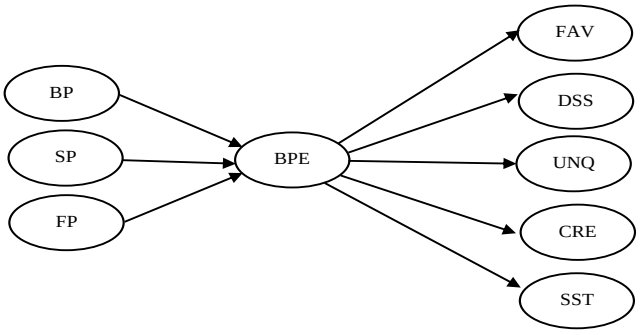


Figure 1. 2 Benefit Brand Positioning Strategy and Dimensions of Brand Positioning Effectiveness

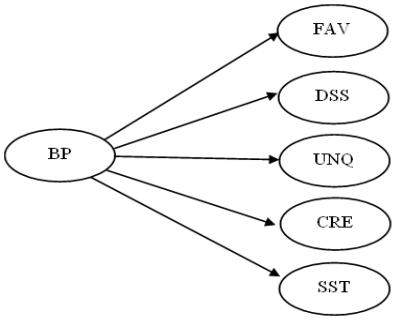


Figure 1. 3 Feature Brand Positioning Strategy and Dimensions of Brand Positioning Effectiveness

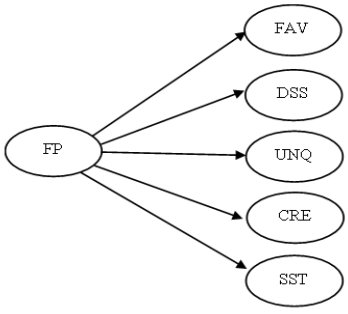
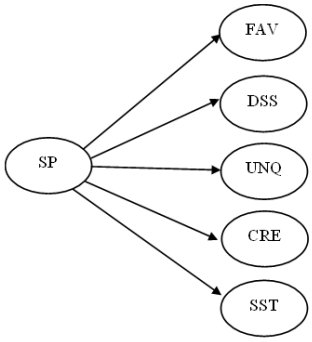
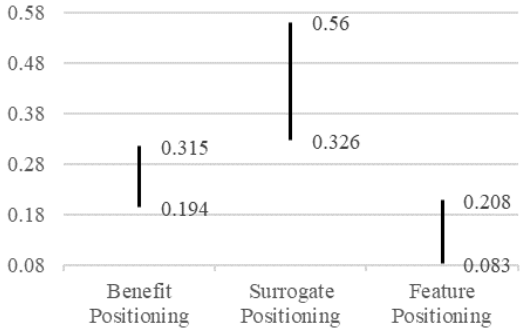


Figure 1. 4 Surrogate Brand Positioning Strategy and Dimensions of Brand Positioning Effectiveness



Key: BP, Benefit brand positioning strategy; SP, Surrogate brand positioning strategy; FP, Feature brand positioning strategy. FAV, Favourability; DSS, Dissimilarity; UNQ, Uniqueness; CRE, Credibility; SST, Sustainability

Figure 1. 5 Standardized Beta Co-efficients: Showing no Overlap in the Confidence Intervals



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