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POSITIONING BRAND “MARUTI”: ETHICAL AND CULTURALLY ADAPTIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

In the past decades, increasing amount of attention has been devoted to culturally and ethically sensitive approach in business in general and marketing in particular. Marketing managers have become ethically more sensitive, and they are largely convinced that customers and the public expect them to act in a morally acceptable way. This paper revolves around one fundamental quest to position brands in an integrated way addressing ethical and cross-cultural issues. The basic problem premise of this paper is to empirically explore the strategy used by “Maruti” in positioning their brand in an Ethical way. The methodology is that Five basic elements of brand positioning are identified (Brand Identity, Brand Image, Brand Personality, Brand Awareness, and Brand Communication).and these elements of brand positioning and their consisting variables are defined and blended with ethical & cross-cultural issues. After generating a statistically significant framework a predictive model is developed. Here the core idea is that “Maruti” has used ethics and cultural variables as product differentiators and has created a strategic advantage for the brand , this paper restates the importance of ethics as the basic variable of business and delivery of promised benefit by the brand to the consumer. The study of Maruti’s Strategy is important from both academician and managerial point of view as it suggests that the brand can use various implicit and sublime variables of culture and can create a differential positioning. The study contributes a new concept and terminology in the field of brand management that is “Ethical Brand Positioning” (EBP) and is part of a bigger research agenda undertaken by authors of this article.

Keywords: Brand positioning, Ethics, Brand identity

Introduction

Marketing has been a more frequent target of criticism for unethical business activities than any other functional area of business .One source speculates that higher the frequency of public interaction, higher the tendency to focus on marketing as a target of criticism (*Ferrell and Gresham 1985*). As marketing involves more direct contact with high public visibility than the other functional areas, it remains in the focus for unethical practices (*Swan and Nolan 1985; Swan, Trawick and Silva 1985*). Another reason for this disproportionate reception of criticism may come from the nature of marketing itself.

In the past decades, an increasing amount of attention has been devoted to ethics in business in general and marketing in particular (*Malhotra 1998*) Marketing managers have

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become ethically more sensitive, and they are largely convinced that customers and the public expect them to act in a morally acceptable way. Most marketers express their moral commitment as well as the conviction that ethical conduct is mandatory to establish trust. This is consistent with general marketing theory, which holds that all exchanges are based on trust (Kotler 2003), and that conflicts are likely to result if buyer and seller are not in agreement with respect to their ethical mindsets (Lee 1981). Here conflicts exist, trust will not grow. Without trust, in turn, the exchange process ceases and marketing relationships cannot develop (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

Compatibility of ethical values held by the exchange partners is thus a central prerequisite for trust and persistent relationships (Ferrell, Gresham, and Fraedrich 1989) The behavior of brand marketers is affected by general societal trends. These trends include shifts in values, culture, or ideology one of the most recent, interesting, and controversial trends today is that of Ethical Positioning. This ideological position is changing the way marketers craft brand and product strategy, from product features to advertising messages. Brands are among the most valuable assets that a company possesses. In fact, much of the goodwill companies receive is a direct result of positive attitudes and association's consumers have toward their leading brands. Any negative controversy surrounding a brand's image can adversely affect its brand equity; and thus, overall company performance. Ethical correctness cannot simply be dismissed as the activities of special interest groups who object to isolated incidents of allegedly questionable judgment on the part of marketing managers.

Definition of Ethical Positioning

Ethics does not mean some moral discourses but rather it means that ethics is a one word to describe complex interdependence of culture, religion society, and business, these interdependence results in the various undisclosed but yet very clear set of pattern and behaviors in the society, these behaviors and patterns of the society results in the judgmental aspect of something as acceptable or unacceptable, a brand which identifies these acceptable reference points and positions the product on them is able to outclass the competitors and also wins the market.

It is important to distinguish between an ethically correct product versus a unethical brand. It is possible for an entire product category to be labeled unethical, such as cigarettes, alcohol and fur coats, without reference to specific brands. Typically, products in this category are seen as harmful to oneself or others, either directly or indirectly. Sometimes, the product category is not controversial, such as ice cream, or athletic shoes; however, a brand within the category may be viewed as ethically correct or incorrect. Like Coke and Pepsi as they contain pesticide or Maggi as it contains mono sodium glutinate which is carcinogenic or even liberty and Raymond's for there pricing strategy, in west Nike brand athletic shoes has been singled out as promoting racism.

A brand positioning is ethical if it is sensitive various issues of concern, such as consumer satisfaction, environment protection or even for price sensitivity to these issues is a key feature of Ethically correct brands Very few brands fall into this category. The companies, which market them, see themselves as "merchants of values", such as TATA and Infosys. Ethically incorrect brands are viewed as marketed in a manner ignorant to these issues of race, consumer satisfaction, gender and the environment. In fact, they are seen as deliberately selecting questionable subjects for advertisements; choosing vulnerable target markets; and highlighting harmful product features. Like the AC black juice advertisement on television and media campaign of various brands like kingfisher, or Amul inner wear.

Elements of Ethical Brand Positioning

On the basis of exploratory research of literature *Sagar Mahim., Singh Deepali., Agrawal.D.P.(2003)* identified five fundamental tools of brand positioning namely Brand Awareness, Brand Identity, Brand Image, Brand Personality, Brand Communication as tabulated in *Table 1*. All these elements of brand positioning can be then blended with the ethical element as shown in the *Table 1*

On this basis five hypothesis H_{0a} , H_{0b} , H_{0c} , H_{0d} , H_{0e} were formed, for testing the relationship between *EBP* and various elements of brand positioning.

H_{0a} : Ethics in Brand Awareness does not have a significant role in developing Ethical Brand Positioning

H_{0b} : Ethics in Brand Identity does not have a significant role in developing Ethical Brand positioning.

H_{0c} : Ethics in Brand Personality does not have significant role in developing Ethical Brand Positioning

H_{0d} : Ethics in Brand Communication does not have a significant role in developing Ethical Brand Positioning

H_{0e} : Ethics in Brand Image does not have a significant role in developing Ethical Brand Positioning.

These null hypotheses if negated will lead to validation of alternate hypotheses, which will mean that, Ethics in every element of Brand positioning has a significant role in developing *EBP*. Pictorially we can represent the above proposed hypothesis by *Figure 1* This hypothetical frame work states that all these hypothesis H_{0a} , H_{0b} , H_{0c} , H_{0d} , H_{0e} are the basic premise for developing the framework.

Testing Procedure of Hypotheses: To test the hypotheses following steps are involved:

a. *Construct Validity Scales for Various Elements of Brand Positioning* Validity is the ability of an instrument to measure what it is designed to measure *Yin (1994)*. In order to reduce the systematic errors, proven scales of brand positioning are used which are developed and tested in earlier research (*Aaker, 1996; Aaker, 1997; Kapferer, 1997*).

b. *Questionnaire Design*

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first Part consisted of four general questions about the respondent's personnel information like, age, gender, and what city he or she lived in. In the Second Part there were questions on five broad areas Brand Awareness, Brand Identity, Brand Personality, and Brand Communication & Brand Image and at last brand was rated by the consumer on likert scale. The questionnaire was customized on the basis of the brand in the investigation, but proven standard scales were taken from literature. The innovation done with scales was to use the ethics as the base on the above scales; this was necessary for testing the Ethical element in the individual variables of the Brand Positioning.

c. *Collection of Data*

Questionnaire is a written list of questions. When using a questionnaire, the respondent reads the questions, interprets what is expected, and then writes down the answers. Observation as a data collection method was not at all suitable due to the fact that perceptions are difficult to observe. Interviews is more suitable for this, Questionnaires were used in the investigation.

The reason for this was to convert peoples' perceptions of brands into numbers, and investigate a large number of respondents.

The disadvantage with questionnaires is, however, that they often involve a low response rate and a lack of opportunities to clarify issues this was solved by self-administrating the questionnaire in a public environment, instead of using mail, phone, or other means of communication. This procedure also gave the opportunity to clarify obscurities that emerged, instruct the respondents how to fill out the questionnaire in practical, and to ensure that all questions were answered so that no non-usable questionnaires were collected. As the research was conducted on Top Ten brands in India, it was required to have very large sample so that at the end forty consumers can be focused who are familiar with the brands in the study. To avoid the monotonous and uninvolved response of the consumer the survey period was spread for five months. The data was collected from three cities Gwalior, Delhi and Jaipur.

d. Sample Selection: Sampling occurs when a number of sampling units is drawn from a population and examined in some detail. A *Judgment sample* is selected on the basis of the *Judgment* of the researcher and those consumers are involved who are very well aware of the brands in the research. For this a primary survey was done to just find out the awareness of the consumer about the brands in the research and through this primary survey a sample of that forty consumer was decided that are very well aware about the brand. In the sample gender ratio was 14:26 that 16 were female and rest were male. Four age groups were chosen (a) 14-26,(b)26-36,(c)36-45,(d)45 above .Number of respondents in groups were 10,7,13,10 respectively.

Product Social Acceptability	Sincerity About Value Delivery	Top Of The Mind Brand Recognition	Associated Thoughts With The Brand	Advertisement Recall
Consumer Value Satisfaction	Committed To Brand Value Delivery	Brand Recall	Associated Social Metaphors Symbols	Socially Acceptable Advertisement
Ethical Issues Pricing Of The Product	Technically Competent	Brand Retention	Associated Imagery With The Brand	Culturally Relevant Advertisement Generation Of Emotional Bond
Company's Social Trust	Imaginative And Innovative	Generation Of Faith And Bond With The Brand	Associated Beliefs And Feeling With The Brand	No Unreasonable Cross Brand Comparison
Logo Name And The Peoples Acceptance Of The Brand	Cheerful And Socially Responsive	Rational And Emotional Metaphors Associated With The Brand	Affordable	Gender Sensitive Advertising
Acceptability In The Society In Terms Of Quality And Delivery Of Required Benefits	Reliable			No Fear Appeal
Culture And Geographic Relevancy Of The Product				Sensitive For The Children
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> Elements of Brand Positioning and Ethics Ethics </div>				
				No Subliminal Advertising
				No Surrogate Advertising
				No Propagation Of False And Elusive Claims
				Cultural Sensitivity
				Religion Sensitivity
				Cross –Cultural Sensitivity
				No False Association
Brand identity	Brand Personality	Brand Awareness	Brand Image	Brand Communication
Table 1 Source :Author's own				

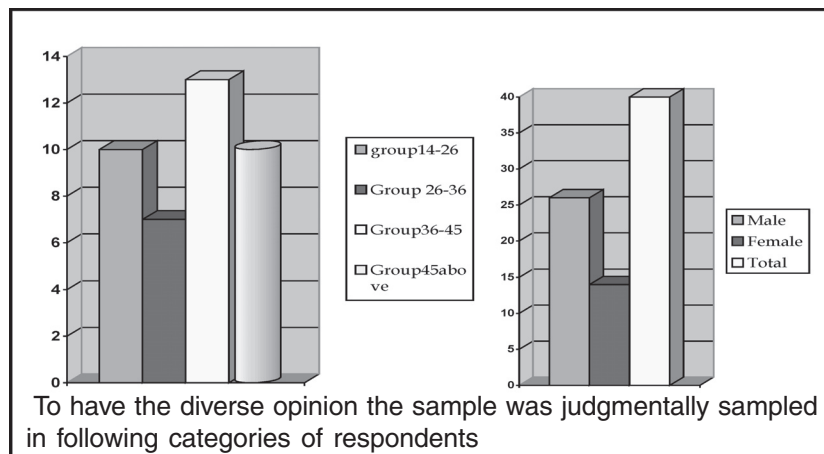
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*Ethical Brand Positioning Framework
(Hypothesis Validation & Statistical Significance)*

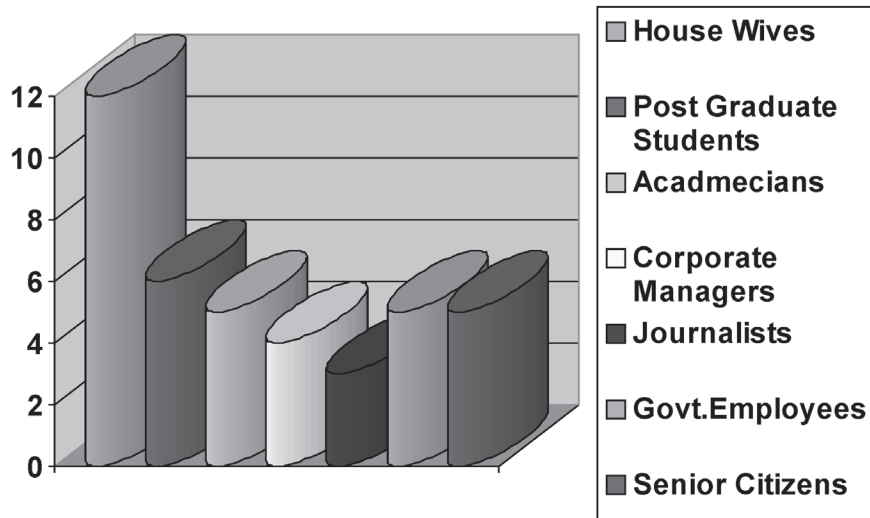
Statistical Testing of Hypothesis	Name Of Element	
$r = ?$ $H_{0a/}$	Brand Awareness	Ethical Brand Positioning
$r = ?$ H_{0b}	Brand Identity	
$r = ?$ H_{0c}	Brand Personality	
$r = ?$ H_{0d}	Brand Communication	
$r = ?$ H_{0e}	Brand Image	
		<i>Figure: 1</i>

e. Sample Size:

The size of the sample depends, on the basic characteristics of the population, the type of information required from the survey and the cost involved. The application of an arbitrary percentage to populations in calculating size fails to acknowledge the individual requirements of different surveys. This led us to choose a sample of 100 consumers in three cities of Gwalior, Delhi, and Jaipur Later on as discussed the sample was reduced so as to arrive to a consumer population who is very well aware about the brands in question.



CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
House Wives	12
Post Graduate Students	6
Academicians	5
Government employees	5
Corporate managers	4
Journalists	3
Senior Citizen	5



f. *Techniques used to test the hypothesis:*

Correlation measures the degree to which the change in one variable follows the pattern of change in the other variable. It cannot be said that that one variable caused the change in the other; in the sense that it can be guaranteed that a change in one thing will invariably produce another result. In fact, there may be a third variable that have not been considered that, may be the actual cause of both the variables we are studying.

Here the research objective was to find weather there is a significant correlation between Brand Positioning and Ethics exist or not, we can assume that the value of the one variable is a linear function of the value of the other variable. If this relationship is perfect, then it can be described by the slope-intercept equation for a straight line,

Y = a + bX. Even if the relationship is not perfect, one may be able to describe it as non perfect linear.

Correlation coefficients describe how well a straight line fits the data. If plot shows that the line that relates X and Y is linear, Pearson correlation can be used. If the plot shows that the relationship is monotonic (not a straight line, but a line whose slope is always positive or always negative), Spearman correlation coefficient can be used. Covariance is also one-way

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to measure the linear association between two variables it is an extension of the uni dimensional concept of variance into two dimensions.

In Pearson correlation we can get a standardized index of the degree of linear association by dividing covariance by the two standard deviations, removing the effect of the two-univariate standard deviations. This index is called the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, r

for short, and is defined as **Pearson r** may also be defined as a mean, $r = \frac{\sum Z_x Z_y}{N}$, where the Z-scores are computed using population standard deviations,

Pearson r will vary from -1 to 0 to +1. If $r = +1$ the relationship is perfect positive, and every pair of X,Y scores has $Z_x = Z_y$. If $r = 0$, there is no linear relationship. If $r = -1$, the relationship is perfect negative and every pair of X, Y scores has $Z_x = -Z_y$.

The correlation coefficient or r provides a numerical measure of the strength of the relationship between two numeric variables. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient can vary from 0, indicating no relationship, to 1, indicating a perfect relationship. Moreover, it can have either a positive sign or a negative sign. If the sign is positive, it means that the variables change in the same direction, i.e. when one goes up, the other goes up; when one goes down, the other goes down. If the sign of the correlation coefficient is negative, it means that the variables change in opposite directions, when one goes up, the other goes down and vice versa. When two variables change in the same direction, we characterize the relationship between the variables as a direct relationship. When two variables change in opposite directions, we refer to the relationship as an inverse relationship.

The rule of thumb for interpreting correlation coefficients is to divide the range of possible scores in five intervals: *0 to 0.20 corresponds to a very weak relationship; 0.21 to 0.40 corresponds to a weak relationship, 0.41 to 0.60 corresponds to a moderate relationship, 0.61 to 0.80 corresponds to a strong relationship, and 0.81 to 1.00 corresponds to a very strong relationship.* The rules apply whether the sign of the correlation coefficient is positive or negative.

In the social sciences, obtaining correlations in the range of 0.40 to 0.60 is often considered to be about the best we can hope for. Due to the complexity of social and psychological phenomena, it is unlikely that any two variables will have a more distinctive relationship. If the correlation coefficient is squared (multiplied by itself), it is called the coefficient of determination, or the r^2 statistic. r^2 is usually interpreted as the proportion of variance (differences among scores) on the dependent variable explained by differences among scores on the independent variable. While r^2 has a potential range from 0 to 1.0, high values are less probable. A very strong correlation coefficient of 0.8 corresponds to an r^2 of 0.64. Since the coefficient of determination is the square of the correlation coefficient, it has only positive values.

Application Of The Ethical Brand-Positioning Framework And Predictive Model On

Brand Maruti



Applying the Ethical Brand Positioning framework on Maruti was a also enriching experience as consumers have rated Maruti as the most loved car of the year in in ORG - MARG car survey year 2003



To test the framework five hypothesis five hypotheses namely H_{0a} H_{0b} H_{0c} H_{0d} H_{0e} were tested. For H_{0a} The coefficient of correlation r is **0.561**, that means it has a significant correlation, for Maruti Brand,

		EBP	Brand Awareness
EBP	Pearson Correlation	1	0.543(**)
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	-	.000
	N	40	40
Brand Awareness	Pearson Correlation	0.543(**)	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	-
	N	40	40

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Brand Maruti has used ethical ways to generate such awareness. Brand is a phenomenal success and has generated awareness as Indian Brand Hypothesis H_{0b} , was tested and it was found the value of $r=-0.051$, it clearly shows that there is a not significant relationship, between ethical issues in Brand Identity (BI) and EBP it suggests that consumer still believes that brand Maruti has not lived up to there own identity statements and has started to respect consumer only after facing tough competition.

		Brand Ethics	Brand Identity
EBP	Pearson Correlation	1	0.499(**)
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	-	0.001
	N	40	40
Brand Identity	Pearson Correlation	0.499(**)	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.001	-
	N	40	40

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

For H_{0c} that (relation with Brand Personality and Ethical Brand Positioning), the value of $r=-$

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0.073 which is very low and it is clear that no significant correlation exist, that is consumer perception about the Brand Personality of Maruti is very bad. The consumer feels that brand Maruti is trying to build the personality but feeling tough to find the elements correct for the brand personality.

But Brand communication Maruti Has shown that how an ethical Brand positioning it has especially in context to its latest advertisements that’s why $r = -0.478$ is very significant. Brand Maruti advertisement has also been very imaginative and socially acceptable and shows family as a unit going for ride in the car that’s why the value of r is very highly for brand communication and *EBP*.

		EBP	Brand Personality
EBP	Pearson Correlation	1	0.182
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	-	0.261
	N	40	40
Brand Personality	Pearson Correlation	0.182	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.261	-
	N	40	40

		EBP	Brand Communication
EBP	Pearson Correlation	1	0.478(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	0.002
	N	40	40
Brand Communication	Pearson Correlation	0.478(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	-
	N	40	40

Similarly the brand image is of Maruti is positive and the consumer are very appreciative about the brand Maruti and they feel that the brand Maruti family image shows that Maruti does not care about Indian values and systems and it clearly highlight the fact that consumer have a *EBP* in the mind. To test the predictive model the regression predictive mode was run. In this it was found that Brand value of $R=0.674$ and value of $R^2 = 0.446$ which is very good and clearly shows that for the Brand Maruti the predictive Model of Ethical Brand Positioning is a very good “fit”. It is a validation of the model and framework and such R^2 is fit enough for the validation of predictive model of *EBP*

		EBP	Brand Image
EBP	Pearson Correlation	1	0.364(*)
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	-	0.021
	N	40	40
Brand Image	Pearson Correlation	0.364(*)	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.021	-
	N	40	40

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

	R	R SQUARE	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error Of The Estimate	
EBP	0.674	0.455	0.375		0.63439	
		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	SIG.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
EBP	(Constant)	0.593	0.559		1.060	0.296
	Brand Image	0.099	0.140	0.112	0.706	0.485
	Brand Communication	0.257	0.172	0.247	1.497	0.144
	Brand Personality	-0.100	0.118	-0.117	-0.847	0.403
	Brand Identity	0.220	0.178	0.205	1.240	0.224
	Brand Awareness	0.311	0.113	0.393	2.738	0.010

High level of Beta estimates suggest the same thing as framework suggest that Maruti is really ethically positioned car, somewhat negative brand personality estimate Beta can be understood by the fact that Maruti brand personality is merged with brand image that is of a family car :to share one respondent views about the car I quote “When my family got bigger for my scooter, I decided to go for a car. But which car. Then the decision was simple to make because your first car is always Maruti 800. No two thoughts. We applied for a loan and soon we were riding APNA SAPNA MARUTI. Reasons are very simple. It is still the best looking small car. Easy on pocket. Five years gives me mileage and we go for long drives. Air Condition may not be great but still it is quite effective. For a family for 4 this was indeed the best I can offer. It is a full value car.”

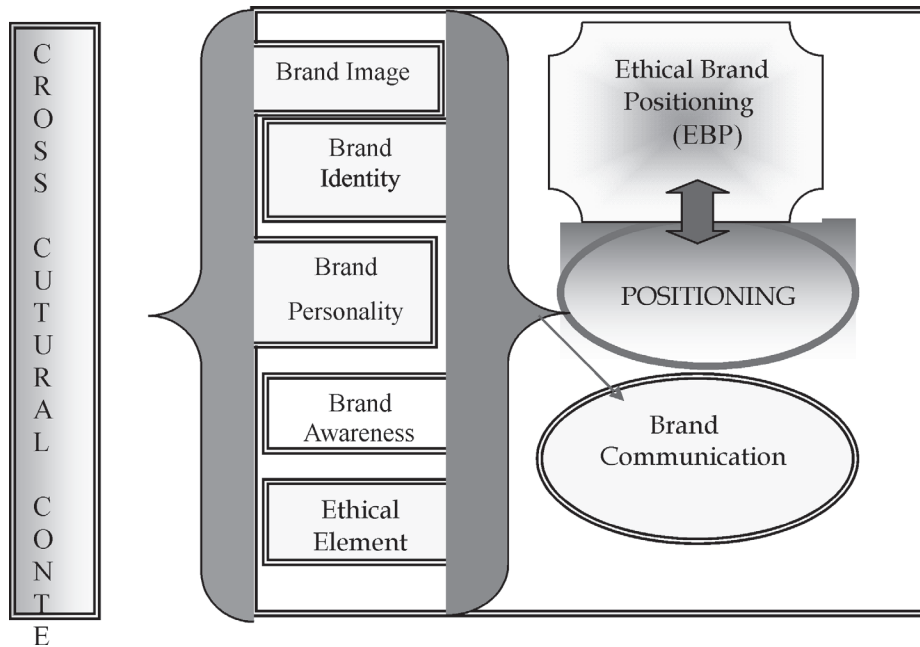
There have been a number of brands (some of them being pioneers in the respective category), which have not been able to sustain their success or the stranglehold they may have had over the market in the yesteryears. Whenever we talk about the Maruti, we feels that the Maruti’s success is based on not just perceived value by the customer but also by the *Ethical Brand Positioning* of Maruti. Maruti positioned itself in ethical periphery. All the components of ethical brand positioning “brand identity, brand image, brand awareness, brand communication and brand personality fulfills the criteria’s of ethical brand positioning.

Brand identity associated with the Maruti projects the value for satisfaction concept. Company’s effort was to position the Maruti in the angle of cultural relevancy. The brand personality of the Maruti is also positive for consumer’s consideration of ethical acceptance. In terms of Technical competency , Maruti commitment to value delivery is strong factor for making its personality as a component of its ethical brand positioning. Brand personality of Maruti is socially responsive and cheerful. Brand awareness associated with the Maruti always Positive with the recognition , recall and retention ideology for building EBP. Its customer care centers, services centers establishment of Awareness regarding the easiest availability of service anywhere anytime.

Brand communication of Maruti has shown that how an ethical Brand positioning it has especially in context to its latest advertisements. Associating with a star, however big he or she may be, in itself does not guarantee sales. The most it can do is generate interest in the

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product or create a buzz around it. Take the case of Maruti Versa, which was launched amidst a lot of fanfare about three years ago. In spite of Maruti signing up superstar Amitabh Bachchan and his son Abhishek Bachchan as brand ambassadors for Versa, the brand’s sales remained sluggish. To be fair, the Big B magic did work and the ads created significant interest, drawing people into the showroom. But perhaps the positioning itself was faulty as people were expecting a larger than life car, just like the brand’s ambassador. Last year, we saw Versa being re-positioned as a family car, with the core proposition being, “the joy of traveling together.” Maruti, Versa has started doing well and has witnessed an upswing since the new positioning. Last year, the average sales were 80-100 vehicles a month. Now they are selling 450 vehicles a month. If the celebrity used represents values that conflict with the brand values and positioning, the advertising will create a conflict in the minds of the target audience who may reject the proposition. Yet Maruti succeeded to position itself under the criteria of ethical brand positioning.



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