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Brand Positioning Unveiled: An Insider's Perspective from Industry Professionals

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Abstract

Title: Brand Positioning Unveiled: An Insider's Perspective from Industry Professionals

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Research Purpose & Aim: The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on how individual marketing- & brand-managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning. This study aims to vertically deepen the current knowledge of brand positioning in practice as well as horizontally broaden the literature by taking a unique managerial perceptual perspective.

Research Question: *How do brand- and marketing-managers conceptualise as well as approach brand positioning?*

Literature Review: The literature review outlines the theoretical lenses of brand positioning, including brand orientations and schools of positioning. A critical perspective on the difficulties of making sense of branding concepts is further presented. Together these parts provide the thesis with the necessary tools for analysing the empirical data.

Methodology: A qualitative multiple case study with an abductive reasoning method has been conducted. The empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews, nine interviews with brand- and marketing-managers were conducted. The data was analysed using a three-step approach: sorting, reducing, and arguing.

Managerial/practical implications: This pioneering thesis emphasises the importance of managerial perception and approach to brand positioning, suggesting discussions on market- and brand-orientation as well as positioning schools of thought for enhanced brand coherence and collaboration within teams.

Theoretical Contributions: This thesis contributes to theory in three key ways. Firstly, it addresses the lack of a unified definition of brand positioning by studying managers' conceptualisations, revealing correlations and shared strategic elements among their definitions. Secondly, it introduces a novel bottom-up approach to positioning, focusing on individual brand- and marketing-managers' perspectives and approaches. Lastly, it extends the existing framework of five schools of positioning by introducing a new school called "Positioning as a Chameleon", which blends multiple existing schools and adapts through strategic camouflage.

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1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the background information on the topics covered, accompanied by previous research and problematisation. Further, this chapter will cover the study's purpose, aim, contribution and research question.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Over-Communicated Society

Today, brands find themselves in an increasingly competitive business landscape where communication plays a more vital part than ever before (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010). Everyday the average consumer is bombarded with thousands of commercial messages which transcend human processing ability (Ries & Trout, 2001). Ries & Trout (2001, n.p.) argue that we live in a so-called “over-communicated society” and describe the marketplace as a jungle of impressions, attacking the consumer mind from every direction. The authors further refer to the consumer’s mind as a “defence” to the extensive volume of communication, which screens and rejects large parts of the information. For example, consider a consumer who is interested in outdoor clothing brands and intends to buy a new down jacket for the upcoming fall season. He or she can choose from a vast variety of brands: The North Face, Columbia, Marmot, Patagonia, Fjällräven, Haglöf, Jack Wolfskin, Mountain Hardwear, Mammot, Helly Hansen, among many others. The diverse array of brands available, all offering products that are relatively similar, aligns Ries and Trout (2001) viewpoint, suggesting that consumers are overexposed to commercial messages and choices within the marketplace. Kapferer (2012) states that:

It is a mistake to suppose that customers will find answers themselves: there are too many choices available today for customers to make the effort to work out what makes a particular brand specific. Communicating this information is the responsibility of the brand (p.154).

Ries & Trout (2001, n.p.) argue that the task and continuous strive of marketers should be to get “inside the minds” of the consumer, and do this through one simple word: *Positioning*. Ries & Trout (2001, n.p.) state that “(...) positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect.” Similarly to Ries and Trout’s customer-mind point-of-departure, Thompson (2004) asserts that if the brand should be valuable to the organisation, then its positioning in the minds of the consumer is crucial to the real value created. The consumer-mind emphasis on positioning is further stressed by Cheverton (2006, p. 75) who claims that successful long-term brands must locate, and if not found, generate “spaces” in the consumers’ mind and “cement” brand values there. Kapferer (2012) argues that brand positioning stresses the fundamental principle that all choices are comparative and thus aims to highlight the distinguishing features that make the brand stand out from its competition, simultaneously to make it appealing to the public. Kapferer (2012) further states that the task of positioning is to identify and utilise a certain purchasing justification or motivation that offers the consumer a real or even perceived advantage. To clarify, we can glance back at our outdoor brands: Even though there is a relatively insignificant physical difference (feature- and quality-wise) between a North Face- and Patagonia black down jacket – their places in the consumer mindspace differ significantly. So how can two price-matched, almost identical pieces of cloth and thread stuffed with feathers carry such different meanings? The answer is **brand positioning**: Despite both being in the outdoor clothing category, Patagonia holds a strong position in the consumer mindspace as a dedicated environmental steward, preaching and practising sustainable activism. The North Face, on the other hand, is positioned as a rugged explorer, always seeking outdoor adventure in extreme environments. So, even though these two brands offer an almost identical product – they occupy different spaces in the consciousness of the prospect. Accordingly, Kapferer (2012, p. 156) states that positioning can be treated as “the sum of every point that differentiates the brand”.

Positioning is a vital concept in building and maintaining a strong brand and constitutes a core pillar in brand management (Koch, 2014; Kapferer, 2012; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010; Azmat & Lakhani, 2015). In conformance with Ries and Trout’s (2001) over-communicated society agenda, Marsden (2002) and Manhas (2010) argue that in the overly-communicated world we live in, effective positioning is crucial for a successful brand. In the

over-communicated society, brand positioning carries significant importance, and to fully grasp the term it is thus imperative to explore the depth of the conceptual machinery. However, the positioning concept does not obtain a universal definition among researchers, but is subject to numerous interpretations and taxonomies (Saqib, 2020).

1.1.2 Positioning and its Definitions

To better understand positioning, it is important to clarify a significant distinction pertaining to positioning itself. Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan (2015) argue that positioning takes place on two levels: The first level occurs in the marketing plan, whereby an overall brand positioning is established. This level concerns if the brand is to be marked to a wide or a niche segment. If it, for instance, will be a luxury-brand or a price-brand. This refers to positioning as dealt with in the marketing discipline (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2015; Percy, 2008). Once this more general positioning is set, a second and more defined level of positioning “...designed to optimise particular benefits of the brand relative to competitors must be developed” (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2015, p.125). This level entails a stronger emphasis on brands’ strategic communication (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2015). Throughout this thesis, it is the latter positioning level which will be what is referred to when discussing the positioning concept. Academics from both the marketing- and branding disciplines have written extensively about positioning for more than half a century. In Table 1 below one are some definitions of positioning given by various scholars.

| <i>Positioning Definition</i> | <i>Publication</i> |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>The process whereby the brand is perceived by the consumer/stakeholder to be differentiated from the competition, to occupy a particular space in the market, and will achieve the business goals.</i> | Fill, 2013, p.190 |
| <i>Brand positioning is all about creating the optimal location in the minds of existing and potential customers so that they think of the brand in the ‘right way’.</i> | Keller, 1999, p. 44 |

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>The management process that seeks to establish a new position in markets, and minds or modifies (fortifies or changes) an existing one.</i> | Koch, 2014, p. 13 |
| <i>Positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect.</i> | Ries and Trout, 2001, n.p |
| <i>A 'supercommunication' effect that tells the potential customer what the brand is, who it is for, and what it offers.</i> | Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy & Pervan, 2015, p.127 |
| <i>It is via positioning that the company expresses and interprets the core values. Positioning takes place in relation to the competitors and asserts for example certain attributes or benefits that belong to the brands identity.</i> | Urde, 1999, p.127 |
| <i>Positioning a brand means emphasizing the distinctive characteristics that make it different from its competitors and appealing to the public.</i> | Kapferer, 2012, p.152 |

Table 1 - Scholars' Definitions of Brand Positioning

Evidently, some researchers define positioning by emphasising the place brands' have in relation to their competition and the market environment – while other scholars take on a more brand identity-centred approach to positioning. Moreover, some scholars lay more focus on the previously discussed consumer mind-cementing approach. These seven definitions represent a mere fraction of the existing ways the term positioning has been conceptualised throughout the literature. Though branding scholars have several common themes within their positioning definitions – it is thus evident that there exist points of difference regarding how the term is conceptualised (Saqib, 2020; Urde & Koch, 2014).

1.2 Problematisation

Throughout the branding literature, there are a fair number of studies that investigate the somewhat fuzzy concept of brand positioning. Much of the conducted research (Koch, 2014; Fuchs & Diamantopoluos, 2010; Falkala & Keränen, 2014; Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Azmat & Lakhani, 2015; Olsen, Samuelson, Pappas & Warlop, 2022) is focused specifically on brands'

positioning strategies. These studies generally investigate either drivers, outcomes or comparisons of brand positioning strategies. However with the exception of Urde and Koch (2014), who analyse positioning approaches by looking at brands' strategic orientation. When overviewing the brand positioning publications, it is evident that there exist numerous gaps of knowledge in the current literature. The authors of this thesis have identified two major gaps which call for being addressed. **Firstly**, Ries and Trout, (2001); Kapferer, (2012); Kotler and Keller, (2016); Kotler and Armstrong, (2011); de Chernatony and McDonald, (2003) are not seldom cited in relation to positioning definitions in numerous studies. Yet, these very same scholars have a certain tendency to understate the ambiguous nature of the positioning concept. Marketing- and branding researchers are namely not in consonance with the term (Saqib, 2020). In many, if not most positioning publications, Saqib (2020) argues, researchers tend to presuppose that the meaning of positioning is something practically and academically agreed upon. However, there are exceptions, for instance, Saqib (2020), Urde & Koch (2014), and Fayvishenko, (2018) who recognises and discusses that there exist varying levels of academic disagreement on the term. Saqib (2020) highlights the lack of mutual agreement and coherence between brand- and marketing-practitioners and academics when it comes to the actual meaning of positioning. This is suggested by Saqib (2020) after mapping out and comparing positioning definitions from 152 marketing and branding scholars' publications. Furthermore, Rigger cited in Saqib (2020, p. 144) states that "the absence of a rigorous definition is inhibiting both practitioner and academic scholars in developing appropriate means of measuring the operationalisation of positioning". One may argue that the academic and managerial discordance of a concept that is so central in the branding literature calls for further studies. An interesting approach is if and how this conceptual disharmony among researchers is reflected between practitioners.

Secondly, the brand positioning literature is generally conducted through a top-down approach. In most publications, brand strategies (as such) are in focus, apart from the role of individual brand- and marketing-managers, excluding their conceptual perception and approach to the term. This is the case in many studies, for instance in Urde & Koch (2014), where positioning schools of thought are developed by gathering insights from how positioning is written about in the literature. The authors exemplify the use of these schools, yet from a top-down perspective (i.e.

brands' positioning strategies from case examples, not individual managers' definitions and ways of dealing with the concept). This draws less focus on the role of the managers and their view of positioning. Given the foregoing considerations, Urde & Koch (2014) states that there might be a need for further empirical studies of how various schools apply in practice. The authors further state that "an in-depth theoretical and practical investigation of the dynamics of positioning would be valuable for the research field" (Urde & Koch, 2014, p.487). This issue is further discussed by Skålén and Hackley (2011) who argue that the lack of bottom-up empirical research is a major concern in marketing research. Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, and Laine (2011) further develop this concern by arguing that the branding literature is conceptually broad yet empirically thin. Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, and Laine (2011) emphasise the limited research dedicated to understanding the processes involved in developing branding strategies, by stating "consequently, there appears to be a need for empirically well grounded research on the praxis and practices of corporate brand building as well as on the managerial challenges that it involves" (Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Laine, 2011, p. 204). This manifested lack of a bottom-up perspective, along with suggestions from researchers, calls for the need of further studies.

1.3 Contributions

Through the identification of two gaps of knowledge in the positioning literature, this study will contribute with: **a)** A bottom-up, individual perspective on how brand- and marketing-managers define the concept of brand positioning as well as approach it in the context of developing positioning strategy. **b)** Insightful empirical data to further foster the academic discussion of the concept brand positioning, by evaluating and mapping the definition among practitioners.

1.3.1 Defining the term 'Approach'

The term 'approach' can be defined as "a way of dealing with someone or something; a way of doing or thinking about something such as a problem or a task" (Oxford Learners Dictionary, n.d.). It may also be used "to begin to deal with or think about [something]" (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.). In this thesis, the approach refers to how managers, in combination with their

positioning conceptualisation, deliberate upon and resonate around the term in the context of strategic brand management. Further, the approach refers to the one employed by individual brand- and marketing-managers, not the company itself (i.e. the brands' overarching strategy).

1.4 Purpose, Aim and Research Question

The **Purpose** of this thesis is to shed light on how individual brand- and marketing-managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning. This study **Aims** to vertically deepen the current knowledge of brand positioning in practice as well as horizontally broaden the literature by taking a unique managerial perceptual perspective. This study will be conducted by asking the following **Research Question**:

How do brand- and marketing-managers conceptualise as well as approach brand positioning?

1.5 Outline of Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduces the background information on the topics covered, accompanied by previous research and problematisation. Further, this chapter will cover the study's purpose, aim and research question.

Chapter 2: Presents a brand- and positioning literature review along with the theoretical framework which will be used in this thesis.

Chapter 3: Discusses the methodological design, structure and approach of this study. These include ontological and epistemological point-of-departure, data collection, analysis strategy, and quality assessment.

Chapter 4: Presents the collected empirical data of this study, without the interference of theoretical frameworks. By presenting the empirical data in its raw form, we aim to provide transparency and authenticity to the research process, allowing readers to gain direct insights into the participants' perspectives and experiences

Chapter 5: Integrates and discusses the empirical data with the theoretical framework presented in chapter 4. This chapter serves as a bridge between the empirical findings and the existing body of knowledge.

Chapter 6: Delves into an extensive discussion and reflection on the key discoveries and insights that have emerged from this study. This chapter serves as a platform for in-depth analysis and synthesis, enabling an understanding of the significance of our research findings

Chapter 7: Concludes the thesis by revisiting and answering the research question. This chapter further presents the thesis contributions, practical- and managerial implications, limitations as well as avenues for further research.

2.0 Literature Review

The following section presents previous literature essential for constructing the conceptual framework. It begins by introducing the concept of positioning, its background, and its initial motivations. This is followed by an exploration of theories addressing the complexities of making sense of brand concepts. A comprehensive literature review then encompasses various aspects of brand positioning, including image-driven, identity-driven, market-oriented, and brand-oriented positioning, as well as the five schools of positioning, culminating in the development of the conceptual framework.

2.1 Positioning

The concept of positioning has been discussed since the middle of the 20th century, which emerged from Reeves (1961) concept, unique selling proposition (USP). Reeves argued for the benefit of highlighting a specific benefit or feature that could set the product apart from its competitors. Positioning in itself, received more attention with the release of Ries and Trout's book "Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind" (1986). The authors' significance for the development of the concept of positioning is exemplified by Beverland (2021), who credits the term positioning to Al Ries and Jack Trout. The authors Ries and Trout (1986) describe the battle between brands to lock onto customers' minds and further state the importance of positioning as they argue for it to be the foundation which all brand equity is subsequently built from. Literature on positioning has since then continued to emphasise the importance of the concept, Aaker and Shansby (1982) view positioning to be as important to the organisation as the mission statement. While Dovel (1990) regards positioning as the backbone of the organisation's business plan, Keller (2009) views positioning for product brands as the foundation for the entire marketing strategy. Furthermore, positioning is said by Maggard (1976) to be a conceptual tool that can help with other marketing concepts such as market segmentation and product differentiation. The emphasis is stated by Richarme (2007) who argues that positioning should be added to the four "Ps" model and become the fifth "P" in marketing strategies. The importance of the concept is

clear, although Saqib (2020) highlights how the numerous definitions of positioning can create a potential problem.

2.2 Making Sense of Marketing Terms and Concepts

Making sense of marketing concepts is aggravated by the lack of agreed definitions in the subject (Duffy, 2017). The practitioner Sean Duffy explains how core marketing terms such as *brand* and *branding* lack agreed-upon definitions, which affects the practicality of the marketing concepts as efficiency and effectiveness are hindered (Duffy, 2017). Research on the marketing terms *brand* and *branding* highlights a large number of definitions, Cohen (2011) presents how 30 different experts all have their own definitions of the terms. Just like Saqib (2020), which was previously mentioned, a total of 152 articles yielded 152 different definitions of brand positioning. Using concepts that lack agreement of their meaning presents difficulties in practice, Duffy (2017, p. 243) states “We can’t talk in concrete terms about our marketing activities or the principles that govern them with any real precision, because none of us is speaking the same language.”. The confusion is stated not to be limited to just the terms of *brand* and *branding* (Duffy, 2017), the authors Saqib (2020), Urde & Koch (2014), and Fayvishenko, (2018) highlight how the term brand positioning lacks a shared agreement of its meaning.

The authors Kotler and Keller (2008) highlight how perception has an influence on understanding branding, both from an organisational perspective and from an individual's perspective. Further, the understanding and interpretation of information are influenced by an individual's perception of their surroundings (Burge, 2022). One's perception does not enable the creation of a coherent understanding but rather a truth for the individual (Aque, 2007). The perception people have is defined by Aque as "(...) it is the raw data that enters our mind to be processed through thought and action." (2007, n.p). Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasise the role of perception in shaping individuals' understanding of reality, stating that “Perception is the process by which we select, organise, and interpret information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world.” (p. 161). The following chapter covers the concept of positioning, and its

numerous definitions, as well as how brand-managers and the companies they work for, use the concept.

2.3 Positionings Numerous Definitions

The position of a brand is one way for a company to differentiate themselves in comparison to their competitors (Kapferer, 2012). They can use more or less distinctive features to stand out for its key stakeholders. The general idea of brand positioning is to indicate the brand's direction and show their intentions (Koch, 2014). Positioning has many definitions in the literature, Tybout and Sternthal (2005) give the following:

Brand positioning refers to the specific, intended meaning for a brand in consumers' (customers') minds. More precisely, a brand's positioning articulates the goal that a consumer will achieve by using the brand and explains why it is superior to other means of accomplishing this goal (p.110).

A less extensive definition is given by Wheeler who formulates it as "Positioning is identifying the real estate in a consumer's mind that the brand will and can own." (2013, p 37). To further understand the concept of positioning, Aaker and Shansby (1982) explain how positioning is constructed from the initial understanding of how a company is perceived. They explain that an organisation's associations form the impression of a company, and the concept of positioning emerges from these associations. Aaker and Shansby define positioning as the "(...) selecting those associations which are to be built upon and emphasised and those associations which are to be removed or de-emphasised." (1982, p. 56). Another perspective of positioning is presented by Aaker (1991), who states positioning is a tool for organisations to be perceived in the most beneficial way by customers. Having strong positive associations is explained as the goal when working with brand positioning according to Aaker (1991).

2.4 Positioning and Brand Management

Positioning has become a central part of marketing, branding, and strategy (Aaker, 1996; Esch, 2010; Kapferer, 2012; Keller 2012). Urde and Koch (2014) clarify the concept of positioning in brand management by defining it as “Positioning is the management process that seeks to establish a new position in markets and minds or modifies (fortify or change) an existing one.” (p. 479). Kapferer (2012) clarifies the need for four questions to comprehend the wanted position for a brand; “For whom?”, “In the market of?”, “Promising?”, and “Proven by?” (Kapferer, 2012, p.180). The questions articulate a foundation for understanding the company’s segment, the market they are in, the brand core, as well as what value proposition they are offering (Kapferer, 2012; Koch, 2014). Providing the questions for an initial analysis of what the brand’s perfect position would be. The authors Dibb and Simkin (1991) state that the segmentation a brand is located in, depends on variables such as price, channels, benefits, and socio-demographics. Understanding the segment is therefore one of the starting points when a brand tries to comprehend the most beneficial position for them (Kapferer, 2012; Dibb & Simkin, 1991).

2.4.1 Identity-Driven Positioning

Kapferer (2012) states that the process of positioning cannot be conducted without discussing the brand’s identity. Academics explains the importance of emphasising brand identity as it includes the vision, key beliefs, and core values of a product or service (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2003). These are aspects within the brand identity which the positioning strategy leans on, to enable the formulation of an advantage against competitors in the market (Koch, 2014). Viewing a brand’s position or planning on how to position a brand through the perspective of identity, it becomes evident that internal knowledge is central (Koch, 2014). This means “Emphasizing the brand’s identity supports more integrated thinking regarding several components that are comprised of vision culture, positioning, presentation, personality, and diverse form of relationships.” (Koch, 2014, p. 27). An identity-based approach to positioning, therefore, uses the internal perceptions of the brand to strategically position the brand to provide value (de Chernatony, 2010). The importance for the brand position to provide a value

proposition is stated by Aaker (1996), who emphasises that it should be constructed around the brand's functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefits. Furthermore, Aaker (1996) states the need for an internally developed positioning strategy to actively communicate the value proposition. Four possible positioning categories that can be used to communicate the value proposition are: organisation-based, product-based, marketing-variable-based, and receiver-based (Riezbos & van der Grinten, 2012). Included in an organisation-based approach are corporate ability, mentality, and employee aspects (Koch, 2014), indicating an emphasis on the internal beliefs and how the brand's identity is internally perceived. Koch (2014) states how product features, national benefits, and prototypical claims are possibilities for the product-based approach. Suggesting a broader perspective and viewing the outside world when deciding on how to communicate the value proposition. While for a marketing-variable-based approach, Koch (2014) states how price, distribution, design, and name awareness are options to emphasise. The last approach, receiver-based, is mentioned to emphasise the target group, situation, emotional benefit, and value when communicating the value proposition.

2.4.2 Image-Driven Positioning

A brand's image is a central part of brand management to successfully connect to the customers and build a competitive advantage (Knox, 2004; Koch, 2014). The authors Keller and Lehmann (2009) state that the customers' experience and knowledge of the brand is how the image is constructed and the customers, therefore, behold the power. Developing a brand image can reduce risks according to Knox (2004), who states that a brand that has a trusted image has a higher tolerance in the eyes of the consumers if they fall short of their promises. Knox (2004) continues to explain a brand's image tolerance by clarifying how every customer's experience with a brand affects the overall perception. It is explained as "Each experience provides a context for customers to evaluate and test the organisation's image and reputation; it's ability to deliver against expectations." by Knox (2004, p. 106). The importance of understanding the image consumers have is shown in brand image literature by the focus on cognitive psychology (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2009). Positioning from a brand image perspective is stated to circulate around the knowledge of consumers and their understanding of the brand (Koch, 2014). To enable organisations and companies to control their brand a brand concept framework was

developed by Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) to aid managers to guide the brand image in the wanted direction. The founders of the framework emphasise the long-term focus on creating a competitive advantage when working to strengthen the brand image.

Brand associations unite positioning to the image approach of brand positioning, as the perspective provides a foundation of how a brand is perceived (Keller, 1993). Connecting the brand to certain brand associations is one way to align the perceptions of the brand position (Knox, 2004), as it provides one single reference to guide the perception of the brand for consumers who can have multiple reference points (Keller & Aaker, 1998). Furthermore, the usage of brand associations is mentioned by Aaker (2008) as a way to either create a credible or aspirational brand image. Connecting the brand with an external source which beholds certain attributes is one way to position the image of a brand (Keller, 2012). When positioning a brand, one has to balance the uniqueness of the brand which Keller (2012) mentions as points of difference and the points of parity which he clarifies as the resembling characteristics of competitors. Brand associations are a tool for connecting both unique attributes and elements to the image of the brand, as well as linking features that a brand in a certain market must have (Keller 2012; Koch, 2014).

2.5 Market-Oriented and Brand-Oriented Positioning

Several alternative points of view for positioning strategies are identified in the literature, Urde and Koch (2014) mention market-oriented positioning and brand-oriented positioning as two theoretical and practical approaches to work with positioning. The market-oriented positioning concept means an outside-in perspective, meaning that the market demand and customer will be the guiding factor when positioning a brand (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011; Urde & Koch, 2014; Koch, 2014). A brand-oriented positioning approach is instead an inside-out perspective, which means that the organisations prioritise their own identity first and all actions regarding their position are based on their identity (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011; Urde & Koch, 2014). The two approaches can be said to be part of the organisation's core identity and their mindset (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011), which have effects on the positioning

strategies taken to reach a certain position in the market.

The different mindsets of an organisation can be understood by clarifying to which extent a brand's positioning should be guided by its identity, as well as to which extent others' views and wishes should be valued (Urde & Koch, 2014). These two questions can provide an answer if the organisation aims to satisfy customers' will and if that is their main focus, which reflects a market orientation (Koch, 2014). Or if the actions taken to answer the market demand is taken within the limits of the brand identity, meaning that the organisation will only follow market demands if it is in line with their brand core values (Urde & Koch, 2014). The approaches to positioning were visually clarified by Urde and Koch (2014) in the following figure.

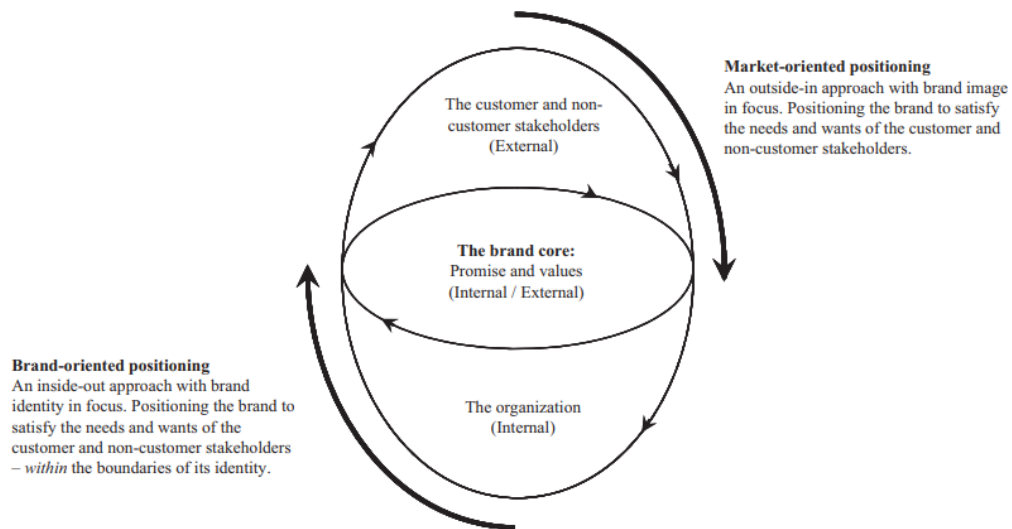


Figure 1 - Approaches to Positioning - Urde & Koch (2014)

To further understand market-oriented positioning and brand-oriented positioning, one can observe how previous literature defines the two positioning “meta-theoretical” concepts (Koch, 2014, p. 16), to view what different interpretations are within the positioning mindsets.

2.5.1 Market-Oriented Positioning

The author Keller state that “Brand positioning is all about creating the optimal location in the minds of existing and potential customers so that they think of the brand in the *right way*.” (1999, p. 44). Keller’s perception reflects a straightforward market-oriented approach as the customer rather than the brand identity is in focus. Urde and Koch (2014) view “Market-oriented positioning as an outside-in approach that defines and implements an intended position with brand image as its point of departure and continuing frame of reference.” (2014, p. 482). Articulating a clear focus on the external perception of the brand and how the positioning is used to compete for end-consumers mind-space. Another definition which is built from Ries and Trout’s focus on the consumers' mind, is Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, and Hansen (2009, p. 361) who state positioning as the “act of designing the company’s offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market.”. The focus on the individual shows as well in Urde, Baumgarth, and Merrilees (2011, p. 3) summary of a market-oriented positioning approach as they state “market-orientation can refer to the mindset of a company or to concrete instruments that pertain to the actual and latent needs and wants of individual customers.”.

2.5.2 Brand-Oriented Positioning

A brand-orientation approach emerged from companies that aimed to use the brand's resources as a strategic benefit (Melin, 1997; Urde, 1994; Urde, 1997). Having a brand-oriented approach means according to Urde (1999) a focus on protecting the identity when interacting with potential customers to achieve a long-term competitive advantage. The approach views and uses the brand as a strategic platform to enable both meeting the demand of the market while still keeping the identity (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011). Previous literature on brand-orientation gathers around the focus on identity, having a brand-oriented focus in the positioning process is showcased by Kapferer (2012), who states that the identity is key to understanding the inner values which are communicated by the brand position taken by the organisation. Though, in Kapferer’s (2012) brand identity prism, he includes both an outside and inside orientation in the prism’s six facets. The approach to positioning still indicates a focus on

the internal, which can be referred to as brand-oriented positioning (Koch, 2014). Furthermore, Aaker (1996) provides a viewpoint which is in line with the brand-oriented positioning perspective. He states, “The part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands.” (Aaker, 1996, p 176). Providing another perspective with the identity as the essence of positioning. Urde and Koch (2014, p. 482) provide a clear description of the approach as they state, “Brand-oriented positioning is an inside-out approach that defines and implements an intended position with brand identity as its point of departure and continuing frame of reference”. The following table from Urde and Koch (2014) presents the differences between brand- and market-oriented positioning.

Table 1 Market- vs brand-oriented positioning

| | Market-oriented positioning | Brand-oriented positioning |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Point of departure | External market demand and industry structure | Internal strength-driven brand potential |
| Approach | Outside-in | Inside-out |
| Key concept | Image | Identity |
| Prominence | Market (customer) over resources (brand) | Resources (brand) over market (customer) |
| Strategic focus | Positioning the brand to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer and non-customer stakeholders | Positioning the brand to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer and non-customer stakeholders – <i>within</i> the boundaries of its identity |

Table 2 - Urde and Koch (2014)

2.5.3 Mixing Market- & Brand-Orientations

The two different strategy approaches, market-orientation, and brand-orientation can and are mixed by companies that seek to stay relevant to the market, but also keep their identity intact (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011). The authors state how the different orientations result in four possible approaches. Either a complete market- or brand-orientation, or a mix of the two orientations where one of the orientations is prioritised but the other one is included in the process of creating the strategy. Urde, Baumgarth, and Meerilees (2011) have simply put it as a market- and brand-orientation or a brand- and market-orientation (Figure 2).

A market- and brand-orientation strategy is stated as an approach that initially prioritises the market insights that the company gathers, which are used to develop new products or services (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011). However, this approach recognises identity as a valuable part of the company which influences the culture, organisation, and the overall strategy the organisation uses (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011). Indicating a hybrid version of the two approaches, the authors Urde, Baumgarth, and Meerilees (2011) provide an example of the mixed orientation by highlighting the company Electrolux's strategy when launching new products. It clarifies how the first stage has a market-oriented approach as the consumer is prioritised but is followed by a brand-oriented strategy as Electrolux values the brand identity as a competitive advantage when launching the product on the market (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011).

The prioritising of the two orientations can be swapped, which is exemplified in the Volvo example given by Urde, Baumgarth, and Meerilees (2011). Having a brand- and market orientation is encapsulated by how Volvo's strategies emerge from their core values, indicating the emphasis on the brand's identity and their brand-orientation focus. Though, they state how they aim to include the consumer in the process of developing the strategies, which showcases how a market-orientation is let to influence the culture and brand strategy (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011). Providing a clear example of a hybrid orientation, that is initiated by a focus on the brand identity and followed by giving the image attention.

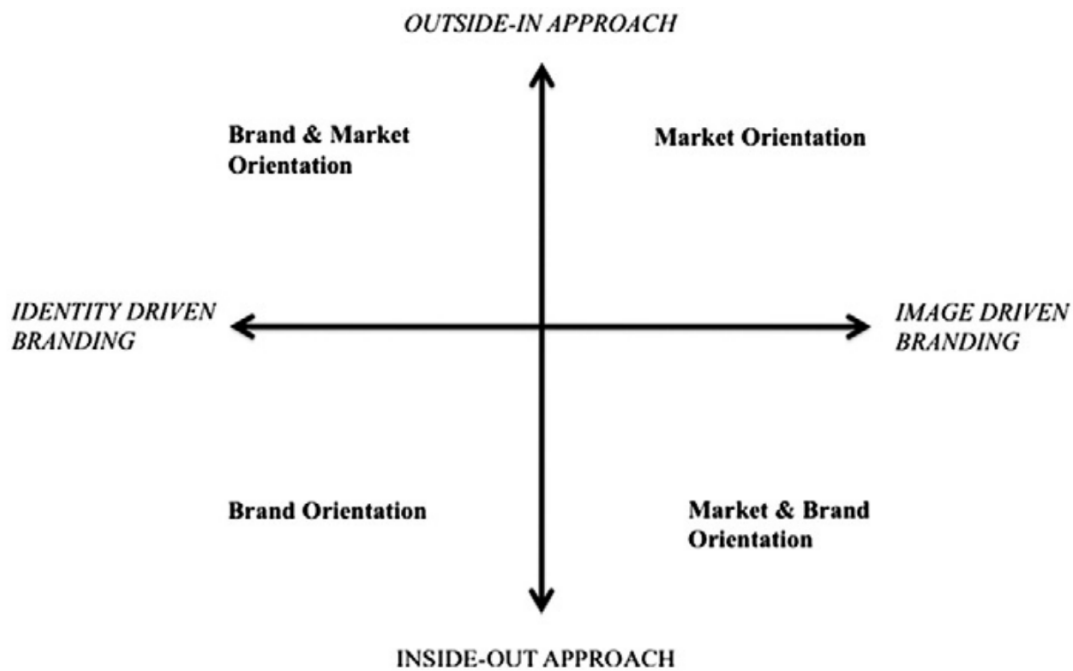


Figure 2 - Brand- and Market-orientation Matrix (Urde, Baumgarth & Meerilees, 2011)

2.6 Schools of Positioning

Developing the understanding of organisations' brand positioning strategies, the authors Urde and Koch (2014) present five schools of positioning which are constructed by their previous research and emerge from the market- and brand-orientation theories. The distinguished strategies are explained by metaphors to make them more comprehensible, Urde and Koch (2014) refer to metaphors being an important tool as it boosts creativity and vitality, with the aim of making the five schools accessible. The five positioning schools are positioning as a puzzle, positioning as wordplay, positioning as chess, positioning as dominoes, and positioning as wild-card poker (Urde & Koch, 2014).

The first school, *positioning as a puzzle*, is explained by Urde and Koch (2014) as an approach that aims to analyse the market, the competitors, and target customers to find a potential gap of unmet needs that the brand can fill. The metaphor of a puzzle, therefore, clarifies how the strategy aims to fill holes in the market, by monitoring all stakeholders to strategically identify potential market patterns that they can provide an answer to with a new product or service (Urde & Koch, 2014). Urde and Koch (2014) state how conjoint analysis and multidimensional scaling are potential techniques that can aid in finding the gaps in the market, they continue to clarify how statistical analysis methods are central to mapping out all stakeholders' perceptions of the market and their desires.

The second school is *positioning as wordplay*, Urde and Koch (2014) explain the strategy as a rhetorical technique to position the brand in the mind of the consumers. The school is based on Ries and Trout's previous research on how the battle for the mind of the consumer. This strategy focuses on communicating the attributes of the brand and its services or products with a simplified message to successfully compete with all the other competitors trying to reach the consumers with their messages (Urde & Koch, 2014). They clarify how the focus lies on achieving positive associations and attributes that are not price-related to develop the brand (Urde & Koch, 2014).

The third school Urde and Koch (2014) present is the *positioning as chess*, which they link closely with strategic positioning by highlighting Porter's (1996, p. 62) words on strategic positioning stating it as "performing different activities from rivals" or as "performing similar activities in different ways". The usage of the chess metaphor is clarified by Koch (2014, p. 36) who explains the similarities to the game of chess as the positioning school builds on "diligent analysis, thorough planning, and strategic execution", which are methods also used when playing the game chess. Urde and Koch (2014) further explain how the strategy of positioning as chess is demonstrated when a brand keeps evaluating all actions taken by the company and by rivals to understand what the brand's next step will be. Urde and Koch (2014, p.486) further state that the objective of this positioning school of thought is "Coordination" by identifying a "fit" between corporate- and brand-strategy. Moreover, the school emerges from both the market- and the brand-orientation approach as Urde and Koch (2014) state a need for both an outside-in and

inside-out understanding when evaluating their strategy. The chess positioning strategy is further explained as a hybrid orientation and explained to be a brand- and market-orientation approach (Urde & Koch, 2014).

The fourth school, *positioning as dominoes* is explained as an approach that is shown by matching the brand's current values and attributes with new ones (Urde & Koch, 2014). The strategy empathises the brand's identity and previous actions, showcasing a brand-orientation that aims to uphold previous promises and the internal values which the brand currently possesses (Urde & Koch, 2014). By valuing the brand's track record when planning new actions, the perception is stated to be upheld and aids in keeping the competitive strength the brand already possesses with its current position (Urde & Koch, 2014). Furthermore, this strategy is shown in a brand's focus on its core values when leveraging its brand equity and creating value (Urde & Koch, 2014), providing a clear example of how a brand keeps its current identity at the top of mind when developing new strategies for the brand.

The fifth and last school of positioning, the *positioning as wild-card poker* is explained as a strategy which focuses on "(...) creating uncontested market space and making the competition irrelevant (...)" (Koch, 2014, p. 37). The strategy shares the objective of Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) blue ocean strategy which aims to find untouched markets that have not been exploited. Urde and Koch (2014) explain how the strategy aims to avoid competing with other brands for the consumers' attention. The approach is further explained as a way for a brand to stand out (Urde & Koch, 2014), which is easily understood as necessary as the markets are saturated with different brands.

Looking at Table 3, the positioning schools are horizontally lined up in a sequence that corresponds with where they belong on the market-orientation and brand-orientation spectrum. Furthermore, the positioning schools' metaphors are concretised, along with their objectives and typical techniques as well as concepts employed.

| | | Brand-oriented positioning (Inside-out) | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| | | Market-oriented positioning (Outside-in) | | | |
| Positioning metaphor | Puzzle Finding lacking pieces in the market puzzle and matching them with existing ones. | Wordplay Exploiting the meaning of words to reach desired brand associations. | Wild-Card Poker Identifying and creating uncontested market space by innovation. | Chess Strategizing to create fit with market demand, resources, and capabilities. | Dominoes Matching identity with selected market positions. |
| Objective | Optimization: Identifying and exploiting unmet customer needs and wants. | Communication: Finding mental space to position the message in prospects' minds. | Innovation: Finding new, untapped, market space to bypass competition. | Coordination: Finding a fit between the business and the brand strategy. | Selection: Selecting and fortifying market positions based upon identity. |
| Typical techniques and concepts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Image - Pattern matching - Perceptual mapping - Gap spotting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cognitive psychology - Customer insights - Advertising effectiveness - Rhetoric | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economics - Socio-cultural studies - Innovation - Cultural myth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic planning - Industry analysis - Resource management - Capabilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identity - Values - Track record - Authenticity |

Table 3 - Koch (2014), Adapted from Urde & Koch (2014)

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The theories presented in this literature review aim to enhance the comprehension of the brand positioning topic through their insightful contributions. By initiating the chapter with an exploration of the concept of brand positioning and its historical development, a solid foundation was established for developing a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Further followed by Sean Duffy's (2017) critical perspective of making sense of branding concepts, and the hinders that the lack of agreement on the terms may create. To present the problematic scene of brand positioning, a chapter on the different definitions of the concept follows, providing different perspectives of positioning. In order to further enable an understanding of the perceptions a brand- and marketing-manager can have of positioning; an in-depth coverage of positioning follows. First, the linkage between brand positioning and brand management is made, followed by the view of brand positioning being linked to identity by Kapferer (2012) is presented, as well as brand image being linked to positioning. Thereafter, a review of identity- and image-driven

positioning is presented to allow for a comprehensive understanding of the viewpoints. It is followed by an exposition of market- and brand-oriented positioning (Urde, Baumgarth, & Meerilees, 2011), which includes a chapter of the two orientations' possibility to be mixed. These set the stage for the five schools of positioning created by Urde and Koch (2014). The theories enable the creation of the conceptual framework presented by Figure 3.



Figure 3 - Conceptual Framework, Ellqvist & Kjellander (2023)

This thesis intends to use the five schools of positioning as an analysing tool to understand and map out how nine brand- and marketing-managers conceptualise, as well as approach brand positioning. The schools created by Urde and Koch (2014) will act as perspectives which the managers will be categorised as. Using the framework will enable the thesis to distinguish the differences between the brand-managers and overcome the difficulties of making sense of branding terms which Sean Duffy (2017) presented. The study will therefore enable a bottom-up understanding of individual brand- and marketing-managers' conceptualisation as well as approach the concept of brand positioning. The thesis will as well provide insightful empirical data to further foster the academic discussion of the concept of brand positioning.

3.0 Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological choices of the research are outlined. First, the philosophy of the study which the researchers adopted is discussed. Initiating the chapter's discussion of what methods were used and why they were chosen. Second, is the research approach presented, inducing arguments for choosing a qualitative and abductive method for the thesis. Thirdly follows the data collection method and how the data was analysed. Lastly, the quality of the study is discussed through trustworthiness and authenticity.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, and Valizade (2021) emphasise the significance of considering the research philosophy as a researcher. They underscore the importance of this consideration as it directly impacts the execution of the study in terms of the chosen methods. The implications of one's research philosophy are shown in how the research design is shaped and conducted as Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) argue for the philosophical approach to be the foundation of the study. To describe how our research design unfolded we initiate by overviewing the ontological stance which Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) describe as "Philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality" (p. 71) and Mason (2009) states ontology to be the researchers' view of "the nature and essence of things in the social world" (p. 14). When overviewing brand positioning in relation to the different ontological philosophies, which range from realism to nominalism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). We saw the reality of our study to have numerous truths, as the managers' conceptualisation and approaches of the positioning concept varied. The understanding of the managers having different realities indicates this thesis having a relativism ontological philosophy as the understanding of reality depends on the individual (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), it is crucial to comprehend and choose an epistemology that aligns with the ontological philosophy, thus clarifying our research

philosophy. Epistemology, as the philosophy of guiding how we determine and assume the process of acquiring new knowledge, is of paramount importance in this regard. The two different epistemology standpoints are positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The view of positivism is described as “the social world exists externally, and that its properties should be measured through objective methods” (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021, p. 77). Social constructionism is described by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) as “the idea that ‘reality’ is determined by people rather than by objective and external factors, and hence it is most important to appreciate the way people make sense of their experience” (p. 77). The two different philosophies’ definitions clarify for us how social constructionism fits us better for answering the research question of how the managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning. The selection of the philosophy was driven by the study's aim and purpose, which focused on exploring the diverse ways in which managers make sense of their individual interpretations of brand positioning. The social constructionism philosophy was therefore allowed to influence the study, and how we obtained new knowledge.

The choices of our philosophical approaches were made carefully and cautiously as we understand the risks of neglecting the other viewpoints of both reality and how to understand knowledge. Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) highlight this by saying that the adopted philosophical positions “can both increase the quality of research and contribute to the creativity of the researcher.” (p. 72). By thoroughly examining the various philosophical assumptions, we have carefully considered the advantages and disadvantages in order to ensure that the thesis effectively addresses the research question in the most optimal manner.

3.2 Qualitative Research Method

This thesis presents a qualitative research study that aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of brand- and marketing-managers conceptualisation and approach to brand positioning. With the aim to contribute to a better empirical understanding of how positioning differs between managers in practice, as well as adding to the theoretical understanding of the

concept of brand positioning. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the managers conceptualisation of brand positioning, a need for in-depth empirical data became evident. The aim clarified the need to understand every unique manager from several angles of incidence. A qualitative method was decided as a suitable collection method to enable us to answer the research question *How do brand- and marketing-managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning*. As the qualitative approach enables a gathering of rich and detailed information (Bryman & Bell, 2017), of all nuances the managers could describe about the concept of brand positioning. Furthermore, as it quickly became evident that how one conceptualises brand positioning varies drastically the need for in-depth investigation was strengthened, and therefore the choice of a qualitative study (Esterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.3 Abductive Reasoning

The initial stages of the study were characterised by various adjustments and challenges, necessitating multiple changes to the research question. The scarcity of existing research on brand positioning in practical settings posed a hindrance, impeding our ability as researchers to comprehend how managers would respond to inquiries regarding the topic. Consequently, the selected theories also needed to be revised accordingly, inclining the thesis to have an abductive research method. Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) define an abductive reasoning to be a “reasoning where we connect an observation or instance to a theory by means of plausible interpretation” (p. 267). The definition clarified the aid an abductive reasoning would provide to the study, as its aim and purpose are to provide plausible interpretation. Gerring (2012) reinforces our choice by describing an abductive reasoning to fit for a study within social science, as research within the area is commonly challenged by the subjective perspectives of the interviewed individuals. The adoption of an abductive reasoning method enabled the flexibility to navigate between theories, empowering the theoretical framework with the necessary analytical tools to examine the collected data effectively (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The choice of reasoning method matches the research question as well, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) argue for its suitability for finding plausible explanations. In line with Bryman and Bell (2017) stating the suitability for an abductive reasoning when aiming to provide explanations instead of absolute truths. For this

thesis, it meant understanding the managers conceptualisation and approach to brand positioning by utilising Urde and Koch's (2014) five schools of positioning framework to make sense of the answers given.

Furthermore, the other choices of reasoning methods presented by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) are inductive or deductive reasoning approaches. In qualitative research, the more commonly used method is the inductive reasoning, which entails examining patterns within the data and aligning them with relevant theories (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In practice, the inductive research method is conducted by collecting all empirical data, which is then followed by creating and testing theoretical hypotheses based on the data (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The reasoning approach would have acted as a hindrance to this study as theories on brand positioning could not have guided the data collection. Creating the potential risk that the gathered data may not adequately have facilitated the answering of the research question or yield meaningful managerial and theoretical implications. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2017) state how even large amounts of empirical data might not be able to support theory-building. The third option among reasoning methods, as mentioned by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), is deductive reasoning, which is commonly employed for quantitative research. Bryman and Bell (2017) state how the deductive reasoning method is conducted by first, selecting a theory, followed by gathering data, and subsequently testing theoretical hypotheses using the collected data. This approach, as outlined by Bryman and Bell (2017), discourages the flexibility to change the chosen theory. Further, adhering too strictly using the theory initially selected would have hindered us from engaging in a comprehensive analysis that necessitates exploring multiple theories and their implications.

3.4 Research Design

The purpose and aim of the thesis, which are to enhance the comprehension of how brand- and marketing-managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning, highlight the necessity of gathering insights from multiple individuals. Through discussions between the two researchers,

we reflected on the essential elements required to effectively address the research question and fulfil the study's purpose and aim. Consequently, we designed the study as a multiple case study, aligning with Easterby-Smith et al.'s (2021) definition of this research design. The chosen design is in accordance with the thesis philosophy according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) and provides the essential foundation for the study to gather the needed material.

The selected research design has faced substantial criticism from positivist researchers according to Yin (2013). However, such criticism does not significantly impact this thesis, as it primarily asserts that the design does not allow for drawing generalisable conclusions that can be applied to the public, which is not the aim of this particular study. Therefore, it does not have a negative influence on this research. Furthermore, Yin (2013) provides a response to this criticism, which reinforces the appropriateness of the chosen design, approach, and methodology in this thesis. He argues that studies conducted with rigour and careful selection of the data sources enable case studies to attain a high degree of validity. Further, Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) state that a study grounded in a constructionist epistemological philosophy places less emphasis on validity and instead prioritises the contribution to a deeper understanding. This aligns well with the research question addressed in this thesis, where the objective is to enhance comprehension rather than solely focusing on strict validation measures.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Following an initial exploration of the previous literature on brand positioning and formulating the initial version of the research question, the data collection process was initiated. The decision to commence data collection early was based on the researchers' previous experience, and understanding the time-consuming nature of securing the participation of suitable managers for interviews. The following chapter provides a comprehensive presentation and discussion of the methodology employed for sampling the brand- and marketing-managers. Followed by an in-depth explanation of the process of gathering empirical data by conducting semi-structured interviews and how the interview guide was created.

3.5.1 Sampling Strategy

To achieve rich empirical material with the time and possibilities for this thesis, a restrictive sampling of interviewees was conducted. We narrowed it down to brand- and marketing-managers, who work actively with branding, with an emphasis on their need to have extensive knowledge of brand positioning. Moreover, the sampled managers needed to have at least a decade of experience within the marketing field, the sample resulted in the manager with the least amount of experience having worked with marketing strategies for thirteen years. The criteria secured the interviewees to answer our brand positioning questions and provide us with detailed answers about how they conceptualise brand positioning and how they approach the work with brand positioning. Table three showcases the interviewees and which company they work for, as well as the length of the interview.

The criterion and aim of gathering rich material resulted in an adoption of a purposive sampling method. Given us researchers' clear understanding of the required information, purposive sampling was deemed a suitable method for participant selection. Purposive sampling allows for the deliberate selection of individuals possessing specific knowledge or skills relevant to answering the research questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), matching our need for managers with extensive brand positioning knowledge. Furthermore, the choice of conducting a purposive sampling provided the empirical foundation for answering our research question. The choice of sampling method became evident as well when overviewing the alternatives, such as random sampling and convenience sampling. A selection method such as random sampling, which is a method where random individuals of a population or company are picked, would have risked resulting in interviews with people that have no comprehension of brand positioning (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021; Bryman & Bell, 2017). A convenience sampling was mentioned as we have previous experience with the method, but as the selection method consists of choosing sample units that are most accessible (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), it quickly became evident that the method did not match the criteria. Furthermore, convenience sampling did not align with the specific requirements of the thesis, which resulted in us swiftly discarding the sampling option. Additionally, the convenience sampling method posed the risk that the most easily accessible individuals to interview would mainly be classmates. The majority lack extensive

practical experience in working with brand positioning, which limits their ability to provide in-depth insights necessary for effectively addressing the research question. The following table presents the interviewees and the interviews conducted.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Role</i> | <i>Brand</i> | <i>Industry</i> | <i>Length of Interview</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| A | Head of Brand Portfolio Management | Tele2 & Comviq (Tele2) | Telecom | 45 Minutes |
| B | Chief Communications Officer | Mälarenergi | Energy | 49 Minutes |
| C | Senior Brand Manager | Felix (orkla) | Food-retail | 39 Minutes |
| D | Senior Brand Manager | Garant & Eldorado (Axfood) | Food-retail | 48 Minutes |
| E | Group Brand Director | Telia, Halebop, Fello, Cygate (Telia) | Telecom | 46 Minutes |
| F | Nordic Portfolio Strategy Manager | Nescafe (Nestlé) | Food-retail | 45 Minutes |
| G | Marketing Manager | Skogaholm (Fazer) | Food-retail | 43 Minutes |
| H | Senior Marketing Manager | Froosh (Fazer) | Food-retail | 31 Minutes |

| | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------|--------|------------|
| I | Senior Brand- and Marketing-Manager | E.ON. | Energy | 53 Minutes |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------|--------|------------|

Table 4 - Participating managers

3.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The collection of empirical material was conducted through semi-structured interviews. The method facilitates the interview process as it involves predetermined themes that the interviewer guides the interviewee through (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). During the interviews, one of the researchers oversaw the questionnaire and guided the interviewee through the themes and questions. At the same time, the second researcher could focus on listening and adding follow-up questions to achieve a rich and comprehensive picture of their conceptualisation and approach to brand positioning (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). The choice was further based on discussing the different interview methods; structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning, a structured interview method was decided to minimise the requirement for flexibility, which was deemed necessary in this context. Additionally, an unstructured interview format was considered unsuitable due to the lack of guidance it would provide, particularly for researchers who had limited experience in conducting interviews. The chosen method was suitable for the study as it allows follow-up questions which can increase the richness of the material gathered (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The premade interview structure enabled us to easily ensure that each of the interviewees touched all information points that we sought answers to.

3.5.3 Interview Guide

The interview guide was structured around three key themes, aimed at exploring the brand- and marketing-managers thoughts of brand positioning. The first theme specifically sought to gain

insights into each manager's individual understanding and interpretation of brand positioning as a concept. Subsequently, the guide delved deeper into market-oriented positioning, followed by an exploration of brand-oriented positioning, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the managers' conceptualisation and approach to brand positioning. The interview questions were designed to be open-ended, focusing on the managers' thoughts rather than solely on theoretical aspects of brand positioning. This approach aimed to uncover practical insights and real-world experiences. The final theme of the interview guide centred around the managers' practical working process with brand positioning, with the objective of understanding how they develop positioning strategies.

3.5.4 Mediated Interviews

To reduce the geographical limitation, we conducted mediated interviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), meaning that they were conducted online through Zoom and Teams, allowing the thesis to sample managers from a larger geographical area and enabling better empirical material. Furthermore, online interviews allowed the individuals to be in their own chosen place with the aim for them to feel relaxed when answering the questions. Furthermore, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) state how the usage of digital communication has become normalised due to Covid-19, we felt confident and at ease regarding conducting the interviews online. Consequently, the decision to opt for a mediated interview format was straightforward, as it also greatly facilitated time management. This format eliminated the necessity of physically travelling to each interview, providing added convenience and efficiency in the research process. Additionally, the interviews were conducted in Swedish, the choice was made to facilitate in-depth answers as Swedish were the mother tongue of all interviewees, as well as to ensure the respondents felt as relaxed as possible.

3.5.5 Recording and Transcribing

Online interviews facilitated the recording of the meetings which could be used to transcribe and further analyse the material. The authors Bryman and Bell (2017) argue for the benefits of transcribing interviews as it enhances the researcher's understanding of the material as well as enables a more nuanced analysis. The interview process commenced by requesting the managers to give their full consent to record the interview and informing them that any quotes used would require their agreement. This approach ensured transparency and respected the participants' autonomy in controlling the usage of their quotes. Furthermore, the choice aided the thesis in safeguarding against any loss of content during the translation process. The choice further ensured that no misconduct or violation of the respondent would occur, as well as safeguarding the integrity of the research community (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). The recordings allowed us to revisit the interviews and include details which would otherwise have been lost. Furthermore, the recordings were agreed between the researchers and the managers to be deleted after the study was finished, which was another action made to ensure the respondents felt comfortable with sharing their truth of brand positioning.

3.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of the empirical data commenced with a comprehensive exploration of the methodological choices and an examination of various potential analysis methods. Initially, we encountered the inherent complexities associated with qualitative studies, where the optimal choice of analysis method is depending upon numerous factors (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). As we delved deeper into the available options, it became apparent that a key consideration would be selecting an analysis method that effectively reduced the complexity of the material and facilitated the organisation of data in a manner advantageous to our study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Furthermore, as the thesis has the novel approach of a bottom-up perspective, the analysis emanates from the manager's viewpoint. A deciding factor would evidently be which method would facilitate the answering of the research question.

The process involved reviewing the range of methods that aligned with the thesis's research philosophy, approach, and design, as recommended by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021). This led us to explore all eight analysis methods presented by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), engaging in thorough discussions on the strengths and limitations of grounded analysis, content analysis, and template analysis. However, none of these methods proved to be a perfect fit, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of considering the researcher's background, previous experience, knowledge of analysis methods, and research objectives when selecting an analysis method.

Ultimately, our investigation guided us towards a clear, well-structured, and guiding analysis method. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) proposed the three-step process of *sorting*, *reducing*, and *arguing* as a suitable and practical analysis method to employ. This method provided a framework that resonated with our research needs and allowed for a systematic examination of the data. Therefore, was the three-step analysis method presented by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) chosen. The three-step approach enabled us to identify the common threads as well as the differences between the managers conceptualisation and approach to brand positioning. This not only enhanced the quality of the thesis but also served as a tool to efficiently analyse the empirical data. Subsequently, the following parts are divided by the three-step process to provide clarity of the analysis approach that was applied.

3.6.1 Sorting

Commencing the analysis process after finalising the data collection included sorting the material into several categories which were decided to match the criteria and aid both the purpose and aim of the study. It quickly became evident that the initial sorting did not enable an overview of the material and the categories created did not provide a red thread for the analysis. The authors Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) highlight the phenomena chaos-problem, which they define as the challenges researchers encounter when attempting to comprehend and structure extensive qualitative research material. They further explain the phenomena as a consequence of the substantial volume of data that is typically associated with qualitative research studies. The

phenomena became our reality during the analysis process, as we encountered the prominent presence of the chaos-problem as our empirical data consisted of 170 transcribed pages. To address this challenge, we adopted the approach recommended by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015), which involved familiarising ourselves with the material through collaborative discussions and multiple iterations of review. This process of working allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the data and facilitated the identification of nuanced and insightful details beyond the obvious findings.

By revisiting our conceptual framework, which served as a guide for creating categories, we structured our analysis into three distinct chapters: perception of positioning, description of brand's position, and the managers' approach to positioning. These chapters provided a comprehensive framework for organising and presenting the findings, ensuring a coherent and systematic analysis of the data. The categories were a result of us adopting the method of creating categories that answered either *why* or *how*, which Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) argues to be suitable tools for sorting the empirical material. Furthermore, the process of sorting the quotes in the data required us to re-sort the material to create clear core themes (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). The process used is in line with Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) arguments of the benefits of re-sorting, and how it should be seen as a tool to obtain an in-depth understanding of the empirical data.

Sorting data is linked by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) with the potential risk of subjective interference of the material, stating how the freedom inherited by a qualitative research method can lead to findings that may be far-fetched. To counteract this risk, Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) advise researchers to approach the analysis of the empirical data with humility. Moreover, in line with Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) recommendations, we proceeded slowly with the sorting process by questioning both ourselves and each other during the progression. Furthermore, sorting into categories enables more comprehensive explanations of the empirical findings, and can therefore, provide a robust foundation for the findings (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). Lastly, reality is explained by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) to not exist without arranging the available information. Consequently, it became imperative for us, as researchers, to diligently arrange and sort the gathered empirical data to gain insights into the

conceptualisation and approach of brand positioning employed by the managers. By following the principles of Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015), we aimed to minimise subjective interference and foster meaningful interpretations of the empirical data.

3.6.2 Reducing

The second step of the analysis process was the reduction of the material to a manageable amount of data (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2015). The process was done to clarify and highlight the categories we found most interesting and representative for the material. The second step of our analysis process involved reducing the extensive amount of data to a more manageable volume, as recommended by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015). This reduction process aimed to clarify and emphasise the categories that we found most intriguing and representative of the material, as well as most suitable for aiding the analysis to answer the thesis research question. Through the process of condensing the data, we were able to focus on key themes and insights that presented itself when analysing the data. Notably, we observed a significant difference in perspectives regarding brand positioning, as well as the various approaches taken to develop a brand position. This reduction of data facilitated a more concentrated analysis, allowing us to delve deeper into the selected categories and extract meaningful interpretations. That further aided us in providing clear explanations of the different perspectives of brand positioning we observed.

Additionally, by reducing the material, we were able to address the representational challenge described by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015), which they state to be a result of the sheer volume of data that can impede researchers from presenting all aspects of the material. Categorising the data enabled us to selectively choose representative quotes from the interviews that provided diverse perspectives on how managers conceptualised and approached brand positioning. As mentioned earlier, we organised the material into three chapters, and during the process of selecting categories, we viewed it as a dialogue with the data, aligning with the recommendations of Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015). This approach helped maintain a clear and cohesive narrative throughout the empirical material as we reduced it. Furthermore, we

initially identified several subcategories, which aided us in the decision-making process when discarding certain portions of the data. This ensured that the empirical data remained descriptive and representative of the interviewees' understanding while also facilitating for us to identify strong connections between the empirical data and the chosen theories.

3.6.3 Arguing

The final step of our analysis process involved connecting the empirical data with the selected theories and providing arguments to support our findings. This step followed the approach outlined by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015), as the adopted analysis method for our thesis. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) acknowledge that researchers at this stage often encounter the challenge of establishing authority. They refer to the difficulty of feeling justified in a research community populated by more experienced scholars. To address this challenge, Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) recommend initiating the argumentation process by presenting and defending the empirical findings while staying true to the findings inherent significance. This approach allowed us to articulate the connections between the empirical data and the chosen theories, providing a solid basis for our arguments. By utilising Sean Duffy's (2017) critical perspective on the widespread disagreement on branding terms, we could build the arguments by using the perspective, and further use the theories presented as a foundation. In other words, it provided us authority to argue and state the need for our thesis. By aligning with this guidance, we aimed to ensure that our findings were grounded in both the empirical evidence and the broader scholarly context. Despite the potential authority-related concerns, we remained focused on the importance and validity of the actual findings, emphasising their relevance within the research community. Furthermore, the process we applied for building supportive arguments was constantly revised, and the importance of having abductive reasoning became evident for us. As the process was characterised by us going back and forth between the theories and empirical material with the aim to formulate the data as theoretical arguments, to be in accordance with Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) recommendations.

3.7 Quality Assessment

This thesis has been conducted by gathering brand- and marketing-managers thoughts on brand positioning, it can therefore be said to include a certain amount of subjectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Throughout the study, the researchers have aimed to be reflexive towards the material and considerate of the circumstances, such as having subjective answers. Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) state how a researcher's awareness of the influencing factors strengthens the quality of the study. The adopted research philosophy of this thesis approaches reality by acknowledging the existence of multiple truths. Therefore, subjectivity is seen as necessary for capturing diverse perspectives and enriching the study. Embracing subjectivity allows for a comprehensive understanding of how brand- and marketing-managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning.

The authors Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the criteria of reliability and validity, which were originally developed for quantitative studies emphasise measurability, which is not suitable for determining the quality of a qualitative study. Similarly, Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) assert as well that these terms are inappropriate for social studies. To ensure the study's validity and reliability, the researchers decided to instead follow Lincoln and Guba's (1985) as well as Bell, Bryman, and Harley's (2019) recommendations of using trustworthiness and authenticity as guiding concepts to achieve quality.

3.7.1 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) clarify how the quality criterion trustworthiness, consists of four sub-criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To achieve the first criterion, credibility, which is defined as how believable the findings are, the researchers have continuously revalidated the quotes and their meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With the aim of assuring that the interviewed managers statements reflect their reality, all translated versions of the quotes were sent to the participants for confirmation. The second sub-criteria, transferability, refers to whether the findings apply to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the findings

reflect Sean Duffy's (2017) statements about the lack of agreement on branding terms, we argue for our findings to be applicable in other contexts. Furthermore, as the thesis is a qualitative study it does not aim to draw any generalising conclusions on how managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). The third criterion, dependability, refers to if the findings are probable to apply at other times (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Which we argue for, as the findings reflect a reality described by both Saqib (2020) and Duffy (2017). The last sub-criterion, confirmability, refers to which extent the researchers' own values have coloured the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To counteract our own subjectivity to affect the findings, the process included revisiting the transcriptions to view the quotes in the context it was said. Furthermore, the quotes and findings have been discussed back and forth between us two researchers to ensure they match the manager's intended meaning.

3.7.2 Authenticity

The second criterion authenticity is covered more extensively by Guba and Lincoln (1994), where they present authenticity to include several other criteria: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. These criteria guided the thesis throughout the process with the aim to improve the quality of the study. Fairness, meaning if the different viewpoints gathered are represented fairly (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), was considered by allowing all managers viewpoints to be presented, as well as aiming to give them approximately equal amount of space. Ontological authenticity, means if the study provides the readers with aid for understanding the social reality better (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As one of the aims of the study is directed to add to the discussion of brand positioning's meaning, we would argue that the study is authentic. Educative authenticity refers to increasing the consciousness of members in the same setting having different perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). We argue that this perspective of authenticity aligns with the purpose of the thesis, ensuring a match between the two. As a result, authenticity is naturally achieved in the study. The catalytic authenticity means to what extent the research encourages the affected members of the findings to change their circumstances (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). We argue that this criterion does not apply to our study as our goal was to contribute to the understanding of

brand positioning disagreement, rather than influencing brand- and marketing-managers to take action. The last criterion, tactical authenticity, is explained by Guba and Lincoln (1994) to include the focus on assessing whether the research has empowered the individuals involved to take action. We argue that the thesis contributes to the managers' knowledge by highlighting the possibility that their own understanding of brand positioning may be subjective or individual.

4.0 Empirical Findings

The following section provides an overview of this thesis's collected empirical data. The data is sorted into three different perspectives of the managers conceptualisation and approach to brand positioning. The parts are: 4.1 perception of positioning, 4.2 description of brands' position, 4.3 managers' approach to positioning.

4.1 Perception of Positioning

This subchapter presents the managers' view and understanding of brand positioning. Clarifying their perspective on the concept as well as the factors they emphasise for positioning.

The manifold impacts of positioning became evident when engaging in interviews with brand- and marketing-managers. These professionals provide a multitude of perspectives regarding the nature of positioning and its effective utilisation to maximise brand benefits. By delving into their insights, it was uncovered how positioning could be conceptualised in several different ways. Inter alia, as a tactic to express your core brand values, differentiate from competition or meet market demand (Table 5). There was a clear lack of agreement on positioning but some resemblance between the managers' perceptions could be identified. Managers A, B and F all described positioning as a broad concept that permeates the entire organisation. Manager A stated “I would say it is really the complete experience of a brand. What a customer experiences when meeting the brand, as well as the image they have of the brand as a whole.”, indicating that manager A views positioning as something that derives from the customers' experience and their image of the organisation rather than what an organisation states to be their position. Equally important is positioning perceived as by Manager B who describes it as “Positioning is the overall strategy, which is translated into communication. Brand positioning is really the corporate strategy.” (Manager B). Manager F, on the other hand, defines positioning as:

Looking at the competitors on the market, who are they, and then making sure to also differentiate yourself from them. Or at some point, it may be that you

stand for the same thing, but you do it in a better way, thus gaining market share.

Managers B and F both emphasise the significance of positioning for the organisation. Manager B views positioning as an essential element of the organisation's strategic plan, while Manager F links positioning to competition, and as a differentiating tool. Similarly, several of the managers interviewed emphasised positioning to be a tool to differentiate the brand from its competitors and to aid the brand to stand out, manager G described positioning as as:

How different brands simply position themselves in relation to competitors. I don't think you can position a brand without the context of the market landscape. It has to be done in relation to the market the brand operates in and the competitors that exist in the market.

The quote above demonstrates how positioning is seen as something that emanates from the market landscape rather than the organisation's core values. Manager G provides a perception of positioning as a concept that is created from market insights. The focus on the market landscape was equally emphasised by Manager E who stated, “The brand position, it's about how we want to be perceived in the market.”, also indicating a focus on positioning being a tool for creating the wanted brand image. A similar perception was given by manager C who said “Brand positioning is how the brand is positioned and recognised, and what place it has in the minds of consumers compared to other brands. As in the same sphere, you think about what you associate the brand with and what role it plays.”, showcasing a focus on how positioning can link the brand with certain attributes to compete on the market. Contrastingly, Manager D stated that “the brand core constitutes the foundation- and guidance of the brands’ positioning strategy”. This quote indicates Manager D conceptualising positioning as being something that derives from brand values.

Reaching the different target groups and understanding how to best do it, was mentioned by Manager H when talking about what positioning is. The manager stated that positioning is to “Find what is unique about the brand and choose to look at what the competition looks like.

What they press on and then try to find a ‘white spot’ where one's own brand fits in.”, indicating that positioning is about finding the unmet demand and filling that gap by positioning the brand.

A different pattern in the perception of positioning was noticed when interviewing Manager E and Manager I. They had an underlying focus on being able to live up to the chosen position, stating the following:

How we want to be perceived and of course then it's about mental reliability in the first step, but. You have to fulfil the promises (...), to achieve the position we want. So of course, it is super interesting to review which services, which experiences, what the customer's journey and the customer experience look like in all touchpoints together.
(Manager E)

It is probably based on the competition that exists and against the offer you have yourself, and then try convey messages about what you can expect and what promise you have made to your customers connected to it. And that it must somehow be true as well. It must be fulfilled later when you buy or have contact with E.ON. So the attributes you have linked to your brand matches. (Manager I)

The two managers demonstrate how they link the chosen position of their brand to need constant attention to make sure the promise of the brand is upheld. One can though detect differences in the underlying focus of the managers. Manager E’s quote illustrates an accentuation on the consumers opinions and understanding of their will. Conversely, Manager I's statement displays a focus on internal authenticity as a means to align with the brand position from the customers' perspective. Manager I’s definition may demonstrate a potential integration of external market considerations with internal brand values.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Positioning definition</i> | <i>Keywords / Concepts</i> |
|----------------|---|--|
| A | “I would say it is really the complete experience of a brand. What a customer experiences when meeting the brand, as well as the image they have of the brand as a whole.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customer Perceptions - Outside Image - Brand Experience |
| B | “Positioning is the overall strategy, which is translated into communication. Brand positioning is really the corporate strategy.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overreaching Corporate Strategy |
| C | “Brand positioning is how the brand is positioned and recognised, and what place it has in the minds of consumers compared to other brands. As in the same sphere, you think about what you associate the brand with and what role it plays.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customer Recognition - Brand Association - Competitive Landscape |
| D | “(…) the brand core constitutes the foundation- and guidance of the brands’ positioning strategy” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand Core |
| E | “The brand position, it's about how we want to be perceived in the market.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Market Perception |
| F | “(…) looking at the competitors on the market, who are they, and then making sure to also differentiate yourself from them. Or at some point, it may be that you stand for the same thing, but you do it in a better way, thus gaining market share.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competitors - Differentiation - Market Share |
| G | “How different brands simply position themselves in relation to competitors. I don't think you can position a brand without the context of the market landscape. It has to be done in relation to the market the brand operates in and the competitors that exist in the market.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competitors - Market Landscape |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| H | “Find what is unique about the brand and choose to look at what the competition looks like. What they press on and then try to find a ‘white spot’ where one's own brand fits in.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differentiation - Competitors - Gap Identifying |
| I | “It is probably based on the competition that exists and against the offer you [the brand] have yourself, and then try to position and convey messages about what you can expect and what promise you have made to your customers connected to it. And that it must somehow be true as well. It must be fulfilled later when you buy or have contact with Eon. So the attributes you have linked to your brand matches.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competitors - Brand Authenticity - Brand Promise |

Table 5 - Definitions of brand positioning given by brand-/marketing-manager A-I

4.2 Description of Brands’ Position

This subchapter takes the function of a contextual frame of reference to the managers’ brands, thus focusing less on the perceptions of managers. In this section, we will explore the managers’ descriptions of how their brands are positioned. With the aim to further facilitate the comprehension of the manager's understanding of brand positioning.

Though Tele2 has two brands in their portfolio (Tele2 and Comviq), **Manager A** explains that they are set to have different positions in the marketplace: Tele2 strives to be positioned as an expert and an industry leader, emphasising innovation and the latest solutions in the industry. Manager A wants Tele2 to be recognised as reliable, knowledgeable as well as being able to offer unlimited possibilities to customers. On the other hand, Comviq is positioned as an inclusive, nice and humorous brand where affordability, friendliness and simplicity are core values stressed in the positioning: "Comviq is positioned more as a friend... inclusive, warm, and give[s] the feeling that everyone can be a customer at Comviq." (Manager A).

Manager B explains that they strive to position Mälarenergi as a sustainable, safe and innovative brand. Regarding sustainability, the net-zero emission goal is deeply integrated by how the brand wants to be perceived. Manager B explains that by positioning Mälarenergi as a responsible

energy partner with a focus on renewable energy and community involvement – they aim to differentiate the brand in the competitive energy market and attract customers who value sustainability and reliable energy services.

Manager C describes the positioning of Felix by heavily emphasising its Swedish identity and leveraging familiarity. Manager C emphasises the importance of core values that are consistent across different product categories; Regardless of the specific product, consumers should feel that it aligns with the essence of Felix:

Those are some core values that we sort of try to work with cross-category, so regardless of whether you pick a ketchup or something else, you should kind of feel that this is Felix. (Manager C)

Felix positioning is conducted by emphasising deep roots in Swedish culture and ensuring that the products appeal to the average Swede's taste preferences: "Felix aims to maintain a position as a brand that takes food trends to the broad mass, rather than to focus on more niche segments." (Manager C).

Manager D at Axfood explains that Eldorado is positioned as the best low-price brand in Sweden. Manager C wants Eldorado to be perceived as a brand that offers trusted products at affordable prices: "We position Eldorado as goods to trust at a low price (...) that is also our brand promise" (Manager D). On the other hand, there is Garant. Manager D explains that they want Garant to be perceived as a brand that stays ahead of food trends and offers sustainable as well as high-quality products. Further, Manager D wants Garant to be, from a customer perspective, comparable to branded products (i.e. not private label) but at a lower price. Manager D emphasises the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between Garant and Eldorado in each product category to avoid consumer-confusion and branded cannibalisation.

Manager E explains that Telia is perceived as a stable, safe, innovative and high-quality brand. The brand positioning may differ slightly in marketing efforts based on the target audience and market context. Manager E explains that while the core brand positioning remains the same, the

way it is expressed in marketing can vary depending on the specific business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C) context. Manager E mentions that negotiations with large companies or acquisitions of IT-consulting services may require different marketing approaches, but the overall brand positioning remains consistent. Manager E states: "(...) the brand and what you want to stand for can still come from the same brand positioning... but can be expressed in different ways, depending on where we stand."

Manager E states that Telia has three distinct brands: Fello, Halebop and Telia Cygate. Fello is positioned as the affordable and flexible operator and emphasises key attributes such as simplicity, transparency and competitive pricing. Halebop is positioned as the fun and youthful operator for the young, hip audience. Halebop stresses values such as playfulness, creativity and trendy offerings. Telia-Cygate is positioned as the professional and reliable IT-solution provider in the B2B context. Telia-Cygate highlights core values such as expertise, reliability and solution-tailoring. Manager E explains that they aim to position them in a way that prevents cannibalization. Each brand serves different customer needs and has its own positioning strategy. However, Telia strives to provide value to customers by allowing them to move between these brands based on their requirements and affordability.

Manager F explains that Nescafé is positioned as the coffee for the wide target group, their position is not limited to a specific niche or demographic group, but focuses on providing accessible and enjoyable coffee to the broad scale of consumers. Manager F further states that being democratic is heavily emphasised in their communication and is what Nescafé wants to be perceived as, Nescafé wants to be the coffee that does not exclude. Manager F further stresses the convenience aspect of the positioning and states that "Nescafé stands for simplicity and being fast". The positioning is centred around providing a solution that caters to consumers who prioritise convenience without compromising on taste. Manager F explains that it is the ambition to create associations with Nescafé and the "everyday-life" cup-of-coffee, and to extend the usage beyond "going out with the boat or to the cabin" and integrate it into the everyday mornings. Manager F compares Nescafé with Nespresso and calls it an "opposite pole" due to Nespresso's exclusive and niche positioning.

In terms of brand positioning, **Manager G** emphasises Skogaholm's Swedish heritage, quality craftsmanship, and dedication to baking excellence. Skogaholm's products are perceived as trustworthy and dependable, reflecting the brand's commitment to maintaining high standards. Manager G explains that Skogaholm is associated with freshness, taste, and authenticity. Further, Manager G argues that Skogaholm is positioned heavily as "the family bread that everyone likes" and refers to the deeply rooted memories the brands' product have in Swedish culture. This family-oriented positioning is expressed through the word "togetherness" and reflects the cosy moments where the bread is shared, mainly during family breakfasts. Further, Skogaholm is positioned as the bread with a price-point between affordable and medium cost.

Manager H aims to position Froosh as the happy, fun, cool and vibrant fruit-smoothie brand. Manager H further states that Froosh does not strive to hold a position as a health-brand, as many other brands in the market. Instead, Froosh emphasises being hip, cool and unpredictable through various marketing actions, for example rap-artist collaborations. Froosh's brand positioning is described by Manager H as: "(...) a happy and easy-going personality that spreads good energy."

Manager I explains that the aim of E.ON's brand position is to strike a balance between various factors to cater to a large and diverse customer group. These factors are: *Competitive Pricing*: E.ON offers affordable and accessible pricing to appeal to a wide range of customers. *Sustainability*: Manager I emphasises E.ON's sustainability and responsible practices, aligning with the increasing demand for environmentally friendly products. *Overall Solutions*: E.ON goes beyond just energy and provides a comprehensive range of energy-related solutions, including heating and cooling solutions, sun panels, energy-tracking software and more to meet the diverse needs of customers. *Touch of Premium*: E.ON also offers certain high-quality or premium products to cater to customers who value luxury or indulgence. Overall Manager I strives to position E.ON as a middle ground, incorporating elements of price, sustainability, overall solutions, and a bit of premium, in order to effectively target its broad customer base in Sweden.

4.3 Managers' Approach to Positioning

Throughout this subchapter, the different managers' approach to brand positioning will be discussed. This approach refers to the manner in which the managers express their thoughts, actions and way of reasoning regarding positioning, in the context of strategic brand management. The managers approaches are summarised in Appendix A.

When it comes to positioning Tele2, **Manager A** emphasises several different elements. One of those is the need to fully understand the complexities of the marketplace. Manager A explains that in order to gain deeper comprehension, they employ a *market perspective* and look at their brands' from an outside angle in order to understand their relative strengths in relation to competition. Manager A explains that they scan the market to determine what position Tele2 can hold and simultaneously differentiate themselves from the competition. While Tele2 and Comviq are brands that hold very different positions in the mindspace of customers, Manager A states that "...but as we've formulated the positioning strategy [for Tele2 and Comviq], it is more out of a market perspective". Manager A adopts a market-based approach by studying the market landscape and competitors to effectively position the brands. Manager A further maintains active competitor monitoring to ensure the brands remain distinct and competitive in the market: "You look a lot at what the competitors are doing, we have a fairly active competitor monitoring all the time, to enable us to be a distinct brand.". When developing the brand positioning, Manager A further looks at *customer experience*, Manager A acknowledges the significance of the prevailing customer experience and the ideal brand experience. Manager A considers how customers perceive Tele2 and Comviq and explains that the aim is to shape the brand experience with consideration to customers' desired direction. Another element of weight when positioning a brand, Manager A explains, is *evaluating the current position*. Here, manager A assesses whether they want to maintain their current position or strive for a change in perception: "...There is of course a little tug-of-war on what we are now and if we want to stay there or continue to develop".

When it comes to developing Mälarenergi's brand positioning, **Manager B** emphasises the importance of Mälarenergi's core values, which are innovation, sustainability, safety and quality.

Mälarenergi's positioning efforts are centred around these values which take expression in numerous ways. Manager B further states that the brand core values are so essential that they would not risk changing or manipulating them for the sake of meeting external market demands. Manager B states: "...a very large part of our business deals with water and sewage, for example, which is not at all sensitive to the market situation, but there we need to be perceived as a safe, reliable partner who is likeable". Instead, Manager B stresses the importance of communicating Mälarenergi's identity, where innovation and sustainability is at the heart. Manager B stated that Mälarenergi recently developed a new brand-strategy connected to the company's strategic orientation of 2021. Here, a new vision and mission were formulated by which forms the foundation and direction of the brand positioning strategy. Manager B explains that the brand strategy is in fact the overarching strategic orientation of the company, but adapted and translated in understandable communication. Despite the heavy emphasis on Mälarenergi's brand core values when positioning the brand – Manager B explains that target customer insights are also evaluated and weighted in the brand positioning. Manager B works with "satisfied-customer-index" where perceptions, options and thoughts of Mälarenergi's brand are considered and integrated into brand communication.

Manager C explains that central in the building of brand positioning, is understanding how customers perceive Felix as a brand. Manager C further argues that comprehensive measuring is conducted in order to locate the brand-distinct elements by which customers associate Felix with, along with the feelings and thoughts when encountering the brand. The intention is to identify certain gaps between Felix's intended positioning in relation to the actual perception of customers and making adjustments if needed. Manager C explains that ideas for the brand often come from observing and analysing the market. The brand positioning is influenced by the market landscape and Felix's understanding of customer needs, preferences, and trends: "I would still say that it is more often that the ideas come from what the market looks like, so that is where the inspiration comes from and what we actually do". Though Manager C is looking extensively at the market when developing Felix positioning – Manager C also looks within the brand for guidance. Manager C explains that they work with a type of framework called *Felix Brand-Stamp* which includes the brand core and brand essence, filling the role of explaining why Felix exists and what its mission is. Apart from the brand-stamp, Manager C states that they

develop a strategic document called *brand plan* with a three-year focus. This brand plan involves strengths, weaknesses, competition, marketing efforts, intended perception and image. So it is the combination of the customer perception, overall market insights along with the brand-stamp and brand plan that lays the foundation of Manager C’s approach to positioning Felix.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Primary Focus</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Secondary Focus</i> |
|----------------|--|--|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Market Perspective - Customer Experience - Evaluating Current Position | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A |
| B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritising Brand Core over Market Influence - Identity Expression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aligning Positioning with Corporate Strategy - Evaluating Customer Insights |
| C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating Customer Perception - Developing Strategy through Market Insights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporating and aligning brand- core and essence |

Table 6 - Managers A, B & C Brand Positioning Approach

Manager D at Axfood explains that when positioning Garant and Eldorado, the brand values are at the centre. In Eldorado’s case, they are “trusted products at an affordable price”, and for Garant “high quality and sustainable food that stays ahead of food-trends”. Manager D states the importance of building strategy from within brand values and makes an example of Garant’s positioning. “...Garant is positioned as good food and we want people to associate Garant with good food, then it is difficult to launch dog food, toilet paper or diapers under the same brand”. In this sense, the brand core appears to be the foundation and guide of the brands’ positioning strategy. Manager D further states “...at the same time, the very role is to follow the market and be able to cover different positions on all shelves, so that's why we have a portfolio of brands”. Manager D elaborates by saying that since Axfood has a big portfolio of 18 brands, there is relatively little need to adapt and adjust Eldorado’s and Garant’s positioning efforts. Instead, these brands can focus on positioning their brand identity in the minds of customers.

Manager E explains that the development of Telia's brand positioning strategy may best be described as a balance act between long-term brand focus and short-term business needs: Manager E states that they value brand-focused long-term communication efforts by positioning Telia through its anchored identity and core values: safe, stable, high quality and innovation. This is matched with the overarching strategic orientation of the company, expressed as: "Reinventing Better Connected Living". Simultaneously as working with the long-term positioning strategy, Manager E recognizes the importance of responding to competitors and meeting short-term sales targets with relevant offers. Further, Manager E emphasises the importance of closely monitoring customer movements and preferences, particularly those who may leave Telia. The goal is to ensure that customers who switch, choose Telia's other portfolio brands (Halebop or Fello) rather than competitors. Moreover, something else highlighted by Manager E is that in order to reach long-term brand positioning throughout the brand portfolio, is to work with relevance:

To be a brand that stands out the way we want, you need to work on relevance. That is, if I move within Telia Cygate contexts, I need to adapt to a certain extent and you should not change who we are, what we come from and what we stand for, what we offer as a brand – but definitely not to be tone deaf. (...) So the same identity, the same brand positioning applies even if we are in B2C or B2C, we look a lot at being context-relevant, (...) our DNA needs to be the same. (Manager E)

Manager E's quote demonstrates the importance placed on core identity (DNA), while at the same time considering external market factors, such as customers and competitors.

The development of Nescafé's brand positioning strategy is characterised by identifying- and taking opportunities in the marketplace. **Manager F** states that:

It's all about whether there are holes in the market, and how we can fill them (...). Opportunities that are on the market right now, are about how we can do it better than it already is. But also to a high degree, we look at the expected

demand in the coming few years, because we use the portfolio and the positioning to follow where the market is going.

Manager F further highlights the importance of evaluating the market situation in regards to strategy development: “(...) it is important to ensure that the market is mature and that there is a demand that is large enough for it to be relevant for our customers”. Moreover, while Manager F states that Nescafe may tweak its brand to align with certain trends, Manager F also emphasises the importance of maintaining a logical association with what the brand stands for. Nescafe has clear values and a specific positioning, and while they can stretch their brand to some extent, it still aligns with its clear values and overall brand identity:

We have to analyse actions to see if it can match what we stand for. For example for Nescafe, we are not relevant to all trends, we do not fit into all trends. We may have to tweak ourselves to make it fit, but you shouldn't keep tweaking too much because it has to still fit what the brand stands for. So you can stretch, but in my world not too much. You must still be within a certain area to have a logical association with what the brand stands for, as the brand has clear values. (Manager F)

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Primary Focus</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Secondary Focus</i> |
|----------------|--|---|
| D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand-Values - Core Identity - Brand Portfolio over Adaption to Market | - N/A |
| E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identity and Relevance - Market Tracking - Corporate Strategy Alignment - Rethorics | - N/A |
| F | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating Market Situation - Locating and Filling Holes in the Market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand Values - Identity - Business Strategy Alignment |

Table 7 - Managers D, E & F Brand Positioning Approach

In building the positioning strategy for Skogaholm, **Manager G** explains it is about expressing and protecting the family-oriented values as well as the cultural heritage which is deeply rooted in the brands' identity. Simultaneously to deliver products that meet the preferences and demands of Swedish consumers, which includes keeping up with food-trends. Regarding change, Manager G states:

Change is needed (...). But if you change too quickly you risk that consumers won't recognize you and you lose the strength that the brand has. Quick change risks the strength of the brand and keeping brand promises, you might not deliver on that anymore and then you might weaken your brand instead of strengthening it with change.

Manager G is cautious against changing too rapidly as it may risk the brand's recognition and compromise its strength. Manager G understands the importance of consistency and delivering brand promises to maintain its reputation and customer loyalty. The brand seeks to balance the need for change with the preservation of its core identity and the trust it has built with consumers. Manager G further explains that the brand identity or essence may to some extent sometimes play a bigger part than the influences of the market. Manager G exemplifies this by arguing that if the market had a demand for "fitness-bread", Manager G states: "we first need to look at our identity. Who are we? Can Skogaholm do this but still keep our identity?".

Manager H explains that the formation of Froosh's positioning strategy involves a heavy emphasis on looking at what competitors are doing, which also is the starting point:

We sort of find what is unique about Froosh and we look at what the competitors look like. What they press on and then try to find, like, a "White spot" where one's own brand fits in.

Manager H looks at competitors and searches for this "white spot" in terms of an unutilised position and fills that role. Manager H's positioning efforts being more adopted by the external market is further concretized by their marketing constraints: Since Froosh were acquired by a

corporate brand, Manager H explains that certain elements of Froosh's identity had to be softened:

Some who remember when Froosh was more provocatively involved. Sentences on the bottles "Better than botox" and "More immunity than Berlusconi" are like the entire piece on which the brand is built. But then we were bought out by part of a larger company. There's like certain limits to what we can do as a brand right now, so we can't get too political and too provocative, so instead we've tried to choose a path that can be humorous, but mustn't take it too far.

Manager H emphasises that while identity-building holds significance, the external market analysis plays a more significant and critical role in Froosh's brand positioning communication. Manager H states that Froosh puts a big emphasis on competitive data tracking, which is conducted roughly once a month. Here, Manager H looks at competitors and the broad category itself – “how they are doing, what is happening?” This is order to better form an appropriate positioning strategy:

We have different data sources from sales, from the big customers, we buy data. from certain countries, we get point-of-sale data from certain customers as well. So, we follow both how we are doing and how our competitors are doing, either monthly or quarterly. And then we also have a brand tracker.

Manager H further states that this extensive tracking and monitoring on other market players is due to the fact that several of Froosh's competitors are owned by larger companies who possess greater financial strengths.

The positioning approach by **Manager I** can be described through three main elements: *Brand-focus*, *Business area alignment* and *Performance monitoring*. Brand-focus refers to the way Manager I continuously takes E.ON's brand as a point-of-departure in communication efforts: “When developing strategy, we first look at our own brand, and thereafter we look at the market.”. The quote exemplifies Manager I's perception of the brand positioning process.

Business area alignment refers to the way Manager I emphasises the significance of listening to and understanding the specific needs of different business areas within E.ON. This approach involves tailoring positioning strategies to support and uplift each business area while considering their individual requirements. Manager I states:

There are a few different business areas, we listen to them and see what their specific needs are to lift their business, you could say simply. And it differs a lot, so that there is a part that we sum up in the business area Communication framework and the other part is the strategic communication objective that is carried out for the whole of E.ON.

Lastly, performance monitoring. Manager I actively monitor E.ON’s brand index to understand its positioning relative to competitors. This helps them assess E.ON's brand performance and identify the factors that impact its positioning, allowing them to make informed positioning decisions: “We have a brand index that we follow all the time, for example where we see how we stack up against the competition.” (Manager I).

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Primary Focus</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Secondary Focus</i> |
|----------------|---|---|
| G | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stewarding Brand Identity - Core Beliefs and Values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adapting to Market Demand - Keeping up with Food-Trends |
| H | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying Market Gaps (White Spots) - External Market Influence - Competitive Data Tracking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A |
| I | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand Identity and Promise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business-Area Alignment - Market Situation - Competitive Monitoring |

Table 8 - Manager G, H & I Brand Positioning Approach

5.0 Analysis

Throughout this chapter, the empirical evidence: 4.1 Perception of Positioning, 4.2 Description of Brands Position and 4.3 Managers Approach to Positioning will be analysed and ongoingly discussed through the lens of Urde, Baumgarth & Merrilees (2011) and Urde & Koch's (2014).

5.1 Brand-Oriented Schools of Positioning

Manager D inhabits the perception that positioning is an instrument to be utilised to reach and attract customers through the brand's positive attributes, which should derive from within the brands. Manager D conceptualises positioning as a way of communicating brands to customers, through where the brand-identity is at the point-of-departure: "(...) the brand core constitutes the foundation- and guidance of the brands' positioning strategy" (Manager D). In coherence with Urde, Baumgarth, & Merrilees (2011), Urde & Koch (2014), and Koch (2014), Manager D inhabits a brand-oriented approach to positioning. Here, the brand identity is fortified and emphasised as a strategic resource, rather than something that is transformable upon market demand. Urde & Koch (2014) states that the brand-oriented positioning takes an inside-out approach, corresponding with Kapferer (2012)'s identity-driven positioning. Koch (2014) asserts that this identity-focused approach entails that the brand may satisfy the demands and trends of the market, if those are within the frame or boundaries of the brand identity. Manager D declares that Garant is a brand with strong identity values and is positioned as "good food". Thus, due to the brand-oriented approach which Manager D possesses, Garant would never sell diapers nor dog food, since it would not fit their identity Manager D explains. Manager D's seemingly brand-oriented approach to positioning is further validated by the statement: "(...) there is relatively little need to adapt and adjust Eldorado's and Garant's positioning efforts. Instead, these brands can focus on positioning their core identity in the minds of customers.". Moreover, Manager D emphasises the cruciality of cultivating a strong communication-based distinction between Garant and Eldorado, this in order to strategically prevent brand cannibalisation. Manager D asserts that achieving this distinction is accomplished by strategically developing and nurturing distinct brand identities, rather than trying to create a fit or match everywhere for every

brand. This mindset and pursuit further strengthens the argument for a brand-oriented approach where identity is at heart.

Undertaking a close scrutiny into the brand- / market-orientation spectrum we are presented with Urde & Koch’s (2014) five schools of positioning. By glancing back at Manager D’s statements, it is thus evident that Manager D conforms with the *Dominoes school of positioning*. This is due to the fact that, in the same manner, Urde & Koch (2014); Koch (2014) describes this school’s objective (Selecting and fortifying market positions based upon identity) – Manager D carries an equivalent conceptualisation and approach to brand positioning, by emphasising identity, track record, authenticity and staying true to brand values. A perhaps noteworthy reflection is that Urde & Koch (2014) argue that an organisation’s (not an individual manager) school-based approach seldom is ‘pure’ (i.e. one and not the other). Urde & Koch (2014) explains that instead, they tend to be hybrid structures along the orientation-spectrum. Examining Manager D’s seemingly pure brand-orientation perception and Dominoes-school approach, undeniably is interesting.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Brand(s)</i> | <i>Primary Orientation</i> | <i>Secondary Orientation</i> | <i>School of Positioning</i> |
|----------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| D | Garant & Eldorado (Axfood) | Brand | N/A | Dominoes |

Table 9 - Manager D’s Strategic Orientation and Schools of Positioning

5.2 Market-Oriented Schools of Positioning

Doing a 180-degree turn on the orientation spectrum, we found ourselves at the market-oriented schools of positioning. In defining the positioning concept, Manager A states “I would say it is really the complete experience of a brand. What a customer experiences when meeting the brand,

as well as the image they have on the brand as a whole”. Further, Manager H defines positioning as “Find what is unique about the brand and choose to look at what the competition looks like. What they press on and then try to find a ‘white spot’ where one's own brand fits in”. Manager A and H’s quotes both correspond with Urde & Koch’s (2014) market-oriented positioning: Manager A’s statement signifies a strategic point-of-departure from outside market elements such as image and customers. A similar outside-in approach may be identified in Manager H’s quote, which highlights inspecting competitors’ actions as well as spotting market gaps in order to uncover unmet needs. Rigorously scrutinising Manager A and H’s other statements, it opens up for a discussion regarding which school of positioning most resonates with their conceptualisation and approach of positioning. Manager A provides clarification that their strategy development begins with a market perspective, where they analyse their brands from an external standpoint. This approach enables them to understand the relative strengths of Tele2 and Comviq compared to their competitors. Manager A further elaborates that they scan the external market surroundings to determine what position Tele2 is capable of obtaining, meanwhile simultaneously differentiating from their competitors.

Retroactively analysing Urde & Koch (2014), there are conspicuous indications that Manager A inhabits a Puzzle school of positioning. Again, Urde & Koch’s (2014, p. 486) puzzle metaphor pertains to the way brands scan for gaps or “lacking pieces” in the marketplace, by which they then strive to match with their brand. Manager A takes into consideration the manner customers perceive their brands and thereafter strives to shape and optimise customers' brand experiences that are harmonious with their perception. This “Optimisation” supports the market-oriented approach as well as constitutes the objective in the Puzzle positioning school (Urde & Koch, 2014, p.486). Further, a captivating quote by Manager A is: “(...) there is of course a little tug-of-war on what we are now and if we want to stay there or continue to develop”. Taking into account Manager A’s positioning approach, one may assert that there are grounds for this “tug-of-war” stemming from Manager A’s puzzle approach and market orientation. This, due to the constant shift and optimisation of the brands’ position may tend to result in positioning-uncertainty. This uncertainty is articulated through Manager A’s contemplating whether to stay where they are, or evolve further in consonant with market demand.

Deviating from Manager A and instead approaching Manager H, it is evident that Manager H inhabits a market-oriented approach. This is supported not only in Manager H’s positioning definition, but also in how Manager H argues that external markets create influence over positioning strategy. To illustrate, Manager H discloses that elements of brand identity were forced to be mitigated due to marketing constraints, in conjunction with being acquired by the current corporate brand – put differently, the provocative elements of the former identity were severely diminished because of market demands (politics, public, customers and consumers). Meticulously observing Manager H, their positioning definition composes an even clearer example of a Puzzle school of positioning: The way Manager H expresses their pursuit of discovering and utilising “white spots” in the external market sphere resonates well with the puzzle metaphor. It further aligns with Urde & Koch’s (2014, p.486) emphasis on “Identifying and exploiting unmet customer needs and wants”. In addition, Manager H expresses additional strategic actions by which to harmonise further with a Puzzle school of thought: Manager H unfolds that while they see value in brand building, looking at the marketplace is more vital. Manager H further discloses that they focus greatly on competitive data tracking, where they investigate market statistics on competitors, the industry as a whole, as well as customer perceptions. This approach of developing a positioning strategy through market statistics is in accordance with Urde & Koch’s (2014, p.483) claim that Puzzle-schooled brands may use “perceptual maps” as a tool to reveal customer perceptions and target uncontested market space. In summary, Managers A and H both employ a market-oriented conceptualization and approach to positioning, whereby Positioning as Puzzle composes their school of thought.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Brand(s)</i> | <i>Primary Orientation</i> | <i>Secondary Orientation</i> | <i>School(s) of Positioning</i> |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A | Tele2, Comviq (Tele2) | Market | N/A | Puzzle |
| H | Froosh (Fazer) | Market | N/A | Puzzle |

Table 10 - Manager A and H’s Strategic Orientation and Schools of Positioning

5.3 Mixed-Orientation Schools

As discussed by Urde, Baumgarth & Merrilees (2011) and Urde & Koch (2014), market-orientation and brand-orientation are in practice usually not either one or the other, but more realistically a combination of the two. Urde, Baumgarth & Merrilees (2011) expands the twofold concept into two further orientations: Brand- and Market-Orientation as well as Market- and Brand-Orientation and further suggest a more synergetic view and approach to them. Delving into the insights from the nine brand- and marketing-managers, it is clear that six of these managers obtain a combination of brand-orientation and market-orientation approaches. These mixed approaches are both market-focused (market- and brand-oriented positioning) as well as brand-focused (brand- and market-oriented positioning). By means of meticulous examination, one can unveil clear characteristics and elements adhering to various combinations of positioning schools developed by Urde & Koch (2014).

5.3.1 Dominoes and Chess School of Positioning

Manager B's approach to building positioning strategies is subject to a palpable emphasis on the brands' core values: Manager B expresses that external brand-communication efforts are centred around sustainability, safety and quality. Furthermore, Manager B discloses that they would not risk adjusting or in any way manipulating their brand identity in order to satisfy market demand. Revisiting Urde & Koch (2014), there are undeniably vigorous grounds for arguing that Manager B inhabits an inside-out brand-oriented approach. This may be illustrated by how Manager B reasons for the role of brand identity in the development of positioning strategy (i.e. market factors will not compromise core values). Through closer inspection, Manager B's approach furthermore gives validated indications of a Dominoes School of Positioning. This is due to the fact that Manager B addresses Mälarenergi's strategy as mirroring their chosen mental market position (sustainable, safe and high-quality) with their brand identity. Manager B's approach is congruent with how Urde & Koch (2014, p.486) describe the objective of the Dominoes school of positioning: "select market positions based on brand identity and to fortify them over time".

However, by polishing our analytical glasses and undertaking a comprehensive exploration into the insights of Manager B – a second positioning school unravels. Retrospectively glancing at Manager B’s positioning definition: “Positioning is the overall strategy, which is translated into communication. Brand positioning is really the corporate strategy”. Considering this, Manager B’s seemingly ‘pure’ brand-oriented approach is compromised through a slight market-oriented direction. Manager B elaborates that the brand strategy is a symbiotic combination of the overarching business strategy, but translated and communicated into perceptible and simplified words. Moreover, Manager B explains that despite the brand-heavy focus when developing a positioning strategy, customer insights are further evaluated and integrated to attain valuable market insights. In coherence with Urde & Koch’s (2014) positioning schools, there are tangible indications that Manager B also inhabits a Chess school of positioning: Urde & Koch (2014, p.486) assert that the chess school of Positioning exhibits the objective to “Find a fit between the business strategy and the brand strategy”. Furthermore, the authors declare that strategic planning, industry analysis and resource management are some of the techniques that are commonly applied by the Chess school of positioning. In conclusion, with the collected insights of Manager B’s conceptualisation and approach to positioning, there exists bolstering evidence for a brand- and market-oriented approach. Within this approach, the Dominoes and the Chess school of positioning are fortified in Manager B’s way of resonating.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Brand(s)</i> | <i>Primary Orientation</i> | <i>Secondary Orientation</i> | <i>School(s) of Positioning</i> |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| B | Mälarenergi | Brand | Market | Dominoes and Chess |

Table 11 - Manager B’s Strategic Orientation and Schools of Positioning

5.3.2 Dominoes and Puzzle School of Positioning

Further exploring the managerial conceptualisations and approaches to brand positioning, additional combinations of positioning-schools are uncovered. Manager G conceptualises positioning as:

How different brands simply position themselves in relation to competitors. I don't think you can position a brand without the context of the market landscape. It has to be done in relation to the market the brand operates in and the competitors that exist in the market.

Moreover, Manager G states: “The brand position, it's about how we want to be perceived in the market.”. Through these two quotes alone, Manager G conveys the semblance of perceiving positioning as something that is fortified in and shaped exclusively through market influence. Through the theoretical lens of Urde & Koch (2014), Manager G, at first glance exhibits a solid and even purified market-oriented approach. Although, through continuous scrutinization, other perspectives are brought up to attention. Manager G namely expresses a palpable significance in emphasising Skogaholm’s brand-centric values (Swedish heritage, family and togetherness). Manager G elaborates by explaining that brand identity is emphasised to be protected and that it may to some extent play a more vital role than the influences of the market. Through the illustration of a hypothetical market demand for a “fitness bread”, Manager G claims that if they were to ‘jump on’ this trend, brand-identity would be prioritised. This prioritisation is validated by Manager G’s claim of first asking: “Who are we? Can Skogaholm do this but still keep our identity?”. These arguments of brand identity emphasis by Manager G comply with Urde, Baumgarth & Meerilees’s (2011) description of an inside-out, brand- and market-oriented approach. By further analysing Manager G’s insights through Urde & Koch’s (2014) framework, it becomes evident that Manager G possesses a two-headed school of thought – Dominoes and Puzzle. The Dominoes school of positioning gives expression in Manager G’s continuous strive to emphasise Skogaholm’s values, identity and track record (role and heritage in Swedish culture). Further, Manager G’s established positioning “The family bread that everyone likes” is a selected market position based upon identity, rather than market demand. Regarding the Puzzle school of positioning, it can be identified through Manager G’s secondary but constant focus on market landscape, competitors, market demand/trends and image regarding development of strategy. Because, even though identity seems to be the primary focus, Manager G still expresses that meeting the preferences and demands of Swedish consumers as well as other trends – is inevitable when developing strategy. Additional arguments to strengthen the perceptual

symbiosis of Dominoes- and Puzzle schools of thought is the way Manager G speaks about change:

Change is needed (...). But if you change too quickly you risk that consumers won't recognize you and you lose the strength that the brand has. Quick change risks the strength of the brand and keeping brand promises, you might not deliver on that anymore and then you might weaken your brand instead of strengthening it with change.

Per the quotation, it becomes evident that Manager G attempts to foster a balance between keeping Skogaholm's brand identity while simultaneously being open to adoption. This is achieved by Manager G's strive to fortify an identity-based market position, concurrently as listening to the demands of the external market.

Further reviewing the empirical evidence, we are presented with the insights from Manager I, who interestingly shares striking similarities with Manager G. By conducting a comprehensive examination of Manager I's quotes it is evident that they also inhabit a brand- and market-oriented approach. Through which a Dominoes- and Puzzle school of thought unravels. Starting off with considering Manager I's positioning conceptualisation:

It is probably based on the competition that exists and against the offer you [the brand] have yourself, and then try to position and convey messages about what you can expect and what promise you have made to your customers connected to it. And that it must somehow be true as well. It must be fulfilled later when you buy or have contact with E.ON. So the attributes you have linked to your brand matches.

Based on this viewpoint of understanding the positioning concept, it can be argued that Manager I employs a mixed orientation: While Manager I on the one hand puts an emphasis on competition and customers expectations (image-oriented) – on the other hand, the manager stresses factors of authenticity and matching brand-linked attributes (identity-oriented). Through

this quotation alone, it poses difficulties in distinguishing where Manager I’s primary focus lies (i.e. brand- and market-oriented or market- and brand-oriented). By further analysis of Manager I’s insights, a more comprehensive brand focus can be identified: “When developing strategy, we first look at our own brand, and thereafter we look at the market”. Manager I’s statement accentuates looking mainly at the brand identity when developing strategy. This approach is in line with the Dominoes school of positioning; employing an inside-out positioning approach. Further compelling rationale to support Manager I’s partly Puzzle- based approach is the use of *Performance Monitoring* and *Business-area Alignment* – both of which includes tracking and evaluating competitors and customers in order to better tailor E.ON’s brand strategy.

While concomitantly looking at Manager G and I’s insights, there exist differences in the way they discuss and reason around the concept. However, despite their aforementioned differences, the pattern of brand-prioritisation with instances of market influence, remains static in terms of developing positioning strategies. Interestingly, both managers mix their positioning approaches between the two extremes of Urde & Koch’s (2014) school spectrum. In other words, Manager G and Manager I do both employ the Dominoes and the Puzzle school of positioning.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Brand(s)</i> | <i>Primary Orientation</i> | <i>Secondary Orientation</i> | <i>School(s) of Positioning</i> |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| G | Skogaholm (Fazer) | Brand | Market | Dominoes and Puzzle |
| I | E.ON | Brand | Market | Dominoes and Puzzle |

Table 12 - Manager G and I’s Strategic Orientation and Schools of Positioning

5.3.3 Puzzle and Dominoes School of Positioning

Through continuous analysis of the empirical data, additional positioning conceptualisations and approaches can be ascertained. Manager C defines the positioning concept as follows:

Brand positioning is how the brand is positioned and recognised, and what place it has in the minds of consumers compared to other brands. As in the same sphere, you think about what you associate the brand with and what role it plays.

Through applying the theoretical lens of Urde & Koch (2014), Manager C's conceptualisation draws a correlation to the market-oriented view of positioning. This can be argued for due to Manager C's emphasis on striving to comprehend Felix's image ("association" and "recognition" in comparison to the market) and implementing customer insights into strategy. Manager C further argues that exhaustive measurements are conducted in order to find brand-distinct elements and feelings associated with the brand. The objective is to locate gaps between the intended brand position and the perception of customers and making strategic adaptations or adjustments if correlation is required (Manager C). This heavy focus on brand-image, perceptual mapping, gap-identifying as well as adjusting strategy against market strengthens the argument of Urde & Koch's (2014) Puzzle-based school of positioning. Manager C elaborates: "I would still say that it is more often that the ideas come from what the market looks like, so that is where the inspiration comes from and what we actually do".

However interestingly, Manager C arguably inhabits an equivalent mixture of orientation and school-of-thought mixture as aforementioned Manager G and Manager I, yet with a dissimilar focus. While comprehensive reasoning for a market-oriented approach is strongly supported in Manager C's quotes – a secondary inside-out approach appears. Manager C discloses that they use a brand identity-based framework called *Felix Brand Stamp*, describing brand core and essence as a strategic guidance. Furthermore, Manager C explains that through the identity-based elements of the brand-stamp, a *brand-plan* is developed. Glancing at Urde & Koch's (2014) framework, Manager C's approach resonates with the Dominoes school of positioning, through its focus on values, identity and integrating these into forming strategy. It is via the combination of comprehensive market insights along with the brand-plan by which Manager C approaches the development of a positioning strategy. By overviewing Manager C's approach, there are palpable indications for them possessing a Puzzle school of positioning by which carries significant

supplementary elements of the Dominoes school of Positioning. Interestingly, Manager G and I's approaches (Dominoes + Puzzle) appear to have the reverse focus of Manager C's (Puzzle + Dominoes). This is due to Manager G and I's approaches being brand- and market-oriented, while Manager C's approach being market- and brand-oriented (Urde, Baumgarth & Meerilees, 2011)

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Brand(s)</i> | <i>Primary Orientation</i> | <i>Secondary Orientation</i> | <i>School(s) of Positioning</i> |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| C | Felix (Orkla) | Market | Brand | Puzzle and Dominoes |

Table 13 - Manager C's Strategic Orientation and Schools of Positioning

5.3.4 Puzzle, Dominoes and Chess School of Positioning

Continuing the analysis on the empirical findings, another mixed orientation is unveiled. Manager F conceptualises positioning as:

(...) looking at the competitors on the market, who are they, and then making sure to also differentiate yourself from them. Or at some point, it may be that you stand for the same thing, but you do it in a better way, thus gaining market share.

Manager F's conceptualisation of positioning obtains, at first sight, a seemingly market-oriented approach, where the strategic point of departure is market influence in terms of competition. This is further strengthened by Manager F's reasoning that strategy stems from uncovering and filling holes in the market. Manager F refers to these as "opportunities" and further claims that it is also central to monitor the expected market demand and "(...) use the positioning to follow where the market is going.". Manager F's market-oriented focus is further supported by this quote:

So naturally you want to optimise your brands, because they stand for something that differentiates the brand and thus you can capture and attract a larger group of consumers with your position.

This particular optimisation Manager F expresses, constitutes a centrality in Urde & Koch's (2014) Puzzle school of Positioning. Nevertheless, through a greater in-depth investigation into Manager F's statements, alternative focuses reach the surface.

Manager F expresses a crucialness to communicate what Nescafé stands for, and to lift as well as integrate core values and identity (simplicity, fast, everydayness) into strategy. While Manager F explains the importance of market influence through the need to stretch the brand – it is still the brand identity that has the last say on the fit (of the hypothetical brand stretch). Exemplified above is arguably a slight market-/brand-orientation tug-of-war between Manager F's approach to positioning. While on the one hand, there are strong suggestions for Manager F to possess a Puzzle school of Positioning – on the other hand, a specific brand-oriented school is not as discernible.

While there exists certain evidence suggesting that Manager F, in addition to their primarily outside-in approach and Puzzle school, exhibits a Dominoes school of Positioning, there are also indications of their adherence to a Chess school of Positioning. The Dominoes school may be argued for by Manager F's emphasis on brand-identity and values as centralised in building strategy and their refusal to tweak the brand outside the identity frame. Meanwhile, scrutinising Manager F's quote: "We have to analyse actions to see if it can match what we stand for.", there are arguments for a reasoning in line with the Chess School of Positioning. Manager F expresses in the quote that strategic actions by the business must be aligned with the brand strategy. Urde & Koch (2014, p.486) argues that the objective of the Chess school is "coordination" of the market demand, resources and capabilities – not seldom through the use of industry analysis and resource management. In the context of market understanding when positioning the brand, Manager F state: "it is important to ensure that the market is mature and that there is a demand that is large enough for it to be relevant for our customers.". This further indicates the account of industry analysis as a factor when developing brand strategy. From Manager F's perspective, brand positioning can be comprehended as a concept enabling the harmonisation of market

demand with internal capabilities – thus implicitly emphasising this very coordination discussed by Urde & Koch (2014).

In order to summarise, there are strong arguments that Manager F employs a market- and brand-oriented approach to positioning. Looking even closer, three schools of Urde & Koch’s (2014) positioning may be identified in the development of strategy: Puzzle (due to market ‘hole-filling’ starting point), Dominoes (due to brand value-, and identity-crucialness) and Chess (due to ‘fit-searching’ between corporate- and brand-strategy)

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Brand (s)</i> | <i>Primary Orientation</i> | <i>Secondary Orientation</i> | <i>School(s) of Positioning</i> |
|----------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| F | Nescafé (Nestlé) | Market | Brand | Puzzle, Dominoes and Chess |

Table 14 - Manager F’s Strategic Orientation and Schools of Positioning

5.3.5 Puzzle, Dominoes, Wordplay and Chess School of Positioning

Lastly, there is Manager E who shows numerous traces of elements linked to four different schools of Positioning in Urde & Koch’s (2014) framework. As a starting point, one can analyse Manager E’s conceptualisation of positioning: “The brand position, it's about how we want to be perceived in the market.”, emphasising image and customer perception. Manager E further states: "(...) You have to fulfil the promises (...), to achieve the position we want.“. Through these two statements, Manager E puts an emphasis on image-based positioning, exhibiting to some extent a market-oriented approach (Urde & Koch, 2014). To develop the argument of an outside-in approach, Manager E further highlights the vitality of monitoring customers’ mental movements – meaning their perceptions of Telia and preferences in the business category. With these combined elements (image-orientation, customer-perception mapping), there exists grounded arguments for Manager E inhabiting a Puzzle school of Positioning proposed by Urde

& Koch (2014). On the other hand, Manager E expresses the importance of anchoring both the long- and short-term positioning decisions in Telia's core values (safety, stability, high quality, and innovation). This more inside-out approach is further supported by Manager E's quote:

To be a brand that stands out the way we want, you need to work on relevance. That is, if I move within Telia Cygate contexts, I need to adapt to a certain extent and you should not change who we are, what we come from and what we stand for, what we offer as a brand – but definitely not to be tone deaf. (...) So the same identity, the same brand positioning applies even if we are in B2C or B2C, we look a lot at being context-relevant, (...) our DNA needs to be the same.

This statement correlated with Urde & Koch's (2014) brand-oriented approach and can even be linked to the Dominoes school of positioning. This linkage to Dominoes can be argued for by Manager E's emphasis on remaining and protecting the brand "DNA" when working with positioning cross-contexts: Manager E does not manipulate the brand identity when doing business in different sectors with various demands, expectations and relationships with the brand. This approach supports the Dominoes school of positioning which centralises identity, values, authenticity and "fortifying market positioning based upon identity" rather than market demand (Urde & Koch, 2014, p. 486).

Through further examination of Manager E's statements, there are indications of the Wordplay school of positioning being employed. This claim can be strengthened by Manager E's statement that brand positioning, in the first step, is about "Mental Reliability". Mental reliability can be linked to a common technique/concept within the Wordplay school, namely "Cognitive Psychology" (Urde & Koch, p.486). Further, Manager E states that Telia's brand values (safety, stability, high-quality, innovation) are communicated through a sort of a brand-mantra "Reinventing Better Connected Living". This mantra summarises the brand mission as well as the desired brand position. This use of rhetoric and psychology to reach positioning goals, further correlates with the Wordplay school of positioning. Here the objective is to "finding mental space to position the message in prospects' minds" (Urde & Koch, 2014, p. 486). Urde & Koch

(2014, p.73) further argue that Wordplay is used to “deposition competing brands”, and while Telia’s mantra explicitly does not rhetorically patronise competitors like infamous examples of Pepsi and Coca-Cola – the mantras’ words “reinventing” and “better” may implicitly instigate competing brands being stagnant and lower-quality.

By means of rigorous examination of Manager E’s positioning approach, there also exists linkages to the Chess school of positioning developed by Urde & Koch (2014). This assertion is substantiated by Manager E expressing that the brands’ long-term positioning strategy is developed to be matched with the overarching strategic direction of the company. In the Chess school approach, the objective is to locate a match between corporate- and brand-strategy through employing strategic planning (Urde & Koch, 2014). Moreover, Manager E’s continuous use of competitive market analysis further strengthens their Chess approach. This is because Urde & Koch (2014) state that industry analysis is not a seldom used technique in this school of thought. In order to summarise, Manager E appears to be oriented neither to the market nor the brand, but instead constitutes a combination through equally playing both sides of the brand / market orientation spectrum. Identified in Manager E’s conceptualisation and approach to positioning is a symbiotic and non-dominant blend of four positioning schools of thought: Puzzle, Dominoes, Wordplay and Chess.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Brand(s)</i> | <i>Primary Orientation</i> | <i>Secondary Orientation</i> | <i>School(s) of Positioning</i> |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| E | Telia, Halebop, Fello, Cygate (Telia) | N/A | N/A | Puzzle, Dominoes, Wordplay and Chess |

Table 15 - Manager E’s Strategic Orientation and Schools of Positioning

6.0 Discussion

This chapter delves into a discussion and reflection of the key discoveries and insights that have emerged from this study. This chapter serves as a platform for in-depth analysis and synthesis, enabling an understanding of the significance of our research findings

Through the comprehensive analysis of the nine managers' insights, **three** main findings generate the necessity for further discussion.

6.1 Managers' Conceptualisation

Firstly, regarding the managerial **conceptualisation** of the term brand positioning, the analysis suggests that there exists some coherence between managers' efforts to define the concept. Out of the nine definitions given by each manager, six of them correspond with Urde & Koch's (2014) market-oriented positioning. Moreover, two definitions suggest a brand-oriented positioning and one definition indicates a mix. Table 16 visualises managers' definitions vertically sorted in line with Urde & Koch's (2014) market- / brand-orientation spectrum.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Positioning definition</i> | <i>Orientation</i> |
|----------------|---|--------------------|
| A | "I would say it is really the complete experience of a brand. What a customer experiences when meeting the brand, as well as the image they have on the brand as a whole | Market |
| H | "Find what is unique about the brand and choose to look at what the competition looks like. What they press on and then try to find a 'white spot' where one's own brand fits in" | Market |
| C | "Brand positioning is how the brand is positioned and recognised, and what place it has in the minds of consumers compared to other brands. As in the same sphere, you think about what you associate the brand with and what role it plays." | Market |
| E | "The brand position, it's about how we want to be perceived in the market." | Market |

| | | |
|---|--|-------------------|
| F | “(…) looking at the competitors on the market, who are they, and then making sure to also differentiate yourself from them. Or at some point, it may be that you stand for the same thing, but you do it in a better way, thus gaining market share.” | Market |
| G | “How different brands simply position themselves in relation to competitors. I don't think you can position a brand without the context of the market landscape. It has to be done in relation to the market the brand operates in and the competitors that exist in the market.” | Market |
| I | “It is probably based on the competition that exists and against the offer you [the brand] have yourself, and then try to position and convey messages about what you can expect and what promise you have made to your customers connected to it. And that it must somehow be true as well. It must be fulfilled later when you buy or have contact with Eon. So the attributes you have linked to your brand matches.” | Market / Brand |
| D | “... the brand core constitutes the foundation- and guidance of the brands' positioning strategy” | Brand |
| B | “Positioning is the overall strategy, which is translated into communication. Brand positioning is really the corporate strategy” | Brand |

Table 16 - Manager A-I's Definitions and Strategic Orientation

In accordance with the branding literature, in terms of definition, the six market-oriented managers (A, H, C, E, F & G) resonate with Kotler et al.'s (2009) definition: “Positioning is an act of designing the company’s offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market”. This distinction was made due to the six managers' clearly expressed emphasis on outside market elements and brand-image in their own brand positioning definitions.

On the other side of the spectrum, two brand-oriented Managers D and B’s definitions can be linked to Aaker’s (1996) definition: “The part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over

competing brands”. The linkage to Aaker’s (1996) definition stems from the two managers’ strategic point-of-departure in brand-identity, core values and authenticity.

Moreover, Manager I gave a positioning definition by combining a mixture of Kotler et al (2009) and Aaker (1996) by emphasising the importance of both elements (image and identity/market and brand). So, by solely observing the positioning definitions made by the managers, the most prevailing is an outside-in, market-oriented approach that links to the Puzzle school of positioning developed by Urde & Koch (2014).

6.2 Managers’ Positioning Approaches

Secondly, deviating from the positioning definitions by various managers and instead redirecting focus to managers’ in-depth **positioning-approaches**, the findings suggest that a mixed approach is the most ubiquitously adapted (Table 19). While six managers (B, G, I, C, F & E) obtain a mixed approach, two (A & H) possess a market-oriented approach and only one (D) inhabits a brand-oriented approach to positioning.

The overall dominating approach is a brand- and market-oriented approach, which was identified in Managers B, G and I’s statements about strategic reasoning. Through these managers, the most frequently recognized school of thought was the combination of Dominoes and Puzzle as well as Dominoes and Chess. The second most commonly ascertained approach was the Market- and Brand-Oriented, which was identified in the approaches of Managers C and F. These strategic approaches also identified a blend of Puzzle, Dominoes and Chess. Considering the insights from Managers B, G, C, I and F, these three schools (Dominoes, Puzzle and Chess) were, with varying focus, the most commonly occurring schools of thought throughout the entire study. These findings are in line with Urde & Koch’s (2014) argument that an organisation more realistically constitutes combinations of market- and brand-orientation, rather than utilising one or the other.

The results of the three dominant schools are undeniably interesting: Although the Chess school was identified in some managers' approaches, the Dominoes- and Puzzle mixture were more prevailing. The significance of this is that the latter-mentioned schools represent the two extremes of the orientation spectrum. One might assume that a Dominoes- or Puzzle-dominant managerial approach would incorporate and blend elements from schools of thought that are conceptually 'closer' on the orientation spectrum. However evidently, several of the managers in this study constitute positioning approaches that mix schools of thought, which represent opposite poles in Urde & Koch's (2014) framework.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Brand(s)</i> | <i>Approach</i> | <i>Urde, Baumgarth & Meerilees (2011)</i> | <i>Urde & Koch (2014)</i> |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| D | Garant & Eldorado (Axfood) | Not-mixed | Brand-oriented | Dominoes |
| B | Mälarenergi | Mixed | Brand- and market-oriented | Dominoes and Chess |
| G | Skogaholm (Fazer) | Mixed | Brand- and market-oriented | Dominoes and Puzzle |
| I | E.ON | Mixed | Brand - and market-oriented | Dominoes and Puzzle |
| C | Felix (Orkla) | Mixed | Market- and brand-oriented | Puzzle and Dominoes |
| F | Nescafé (Nestlé) | Mixed | Market- and brand-oriented | Puzzle, Dominoes and Chess |
| E | Telia, Halebop, Fello, Cygate (Telia) | Mixed | N/A | Puzzle, Dominoes, Wordplay and Chess |
| H | Froosh (Fazer) | Not-mixed | Market-oriented | Puzzle |
| A | Tele2, Comviq (Tele2) | Not-mixed | Market-oriented | Puzzle |

Table 17 - Managers' Positioning Approach and the Literature

6.2.1 A Potential Discrepancy between Conceptualisation and Approach

While the managers may have defined the positioning concept through conveying strong linkages to a particular orientation – two thirds of the managers obtain a mixed approach to brand positioning when further analysing their actual claimed approach: Observing manager C, E, F and G definitions, they all express clear connections to a market-oriented positioning. However, by means of thorough scrutinization, their more in-depth explored approach to the concept shows clear signs of various orientations and numerous of Urde & Koch’s (2014) positioning schools. In order to illustrate, Manager G’s definition employs an evident market-oriented nature (Table 17). Yet, the analysis strongly indicates that Manager G’s actual positioning approach (Table 18) is brand- and market-oriented and inhabits a mixed school of Dominoes and Puzzle where the Dominoes-elements are more prominent. These findings imply that there are grounds to argue for a managerial discrepancy between positioning conceptualisation and the actual approach.

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Positioning definition</i> | <i>Orientation</i> | <i>Positioning Definition Keyword</i> |
|----------------|---|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| G | “How different brands simply position themselves in relation to competitors. I don't think you can position a brand without the context of the market landscape. It has to be done in relation to the market the brand operates in and the competitors that exist in the market.” | Market | Competitors Market Landscape |

Table 18 - Manager G’s Positioning Definition and Orientation

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Primary Focus</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Secondary Focus</i> | <i>Orientation</i> | <i>School of Positioning</i> |
|----------------|--|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| G | Stewarding Brand Identity Core Beliefs and Values | Adapting to Market Demand Keeping up with Food-Trends | Brand- and Market | Dominoes and Puzzle |

Table 19 - Manager G's Positioning Approach, Orientation, and School of Thought

6.3 A Unique Approach

Third, a significant insight, both in theoretical and practical terms, is that eight out of the nine managers could be categorised according to a specific orientation – Manager E's orientation remains two-headed. Manager E's approach to positioning may be characterised as equally playing both sides by inhabiting a quadruple school of thought (Puzzle, Wordplay, Chess and Dominoes) which interplays synergistically. These results are interesting when glancing at the literature. Although Urde & Koch (2014) admits that organisations in practice more realistically obtain a combination of market/brand approaches – the authors do however argue that the organisations' development of strategy will imply a certain approach along the brand-/market-orientation spectrum. This is intriguing in the case of Manager E who inhabits an approach that is unidentifiable to a specific or brand- or market-orientation. Further, Manger E's unique approach enables a deeper exploration into theory. Through Manager E's unfitting approach, we, the authors would respectfully like to suggest an extension to Urde & Koch's (2014) positioning school framework.

Though Urde & Koch (2014) uses metaphors within the context of board games, we propose an extension into a new context, namely the animal kingdom. Glancing back at where we started, Ries and Trout (2001) argue for the over-communicated society whereby the authors refer to the contemporary marketing environment as a dense jungle of impressions, attacking customers from every direction. In the real-life jungle, there are many intelligent animals in all of the rainbow

colours. And with the characteristics of Manager E’s approach (continuously adaptive, long-term oriented, independent, environment-scanning, and accurate) – we would like to present *Positioning as a Chameleon* (Figure 4).

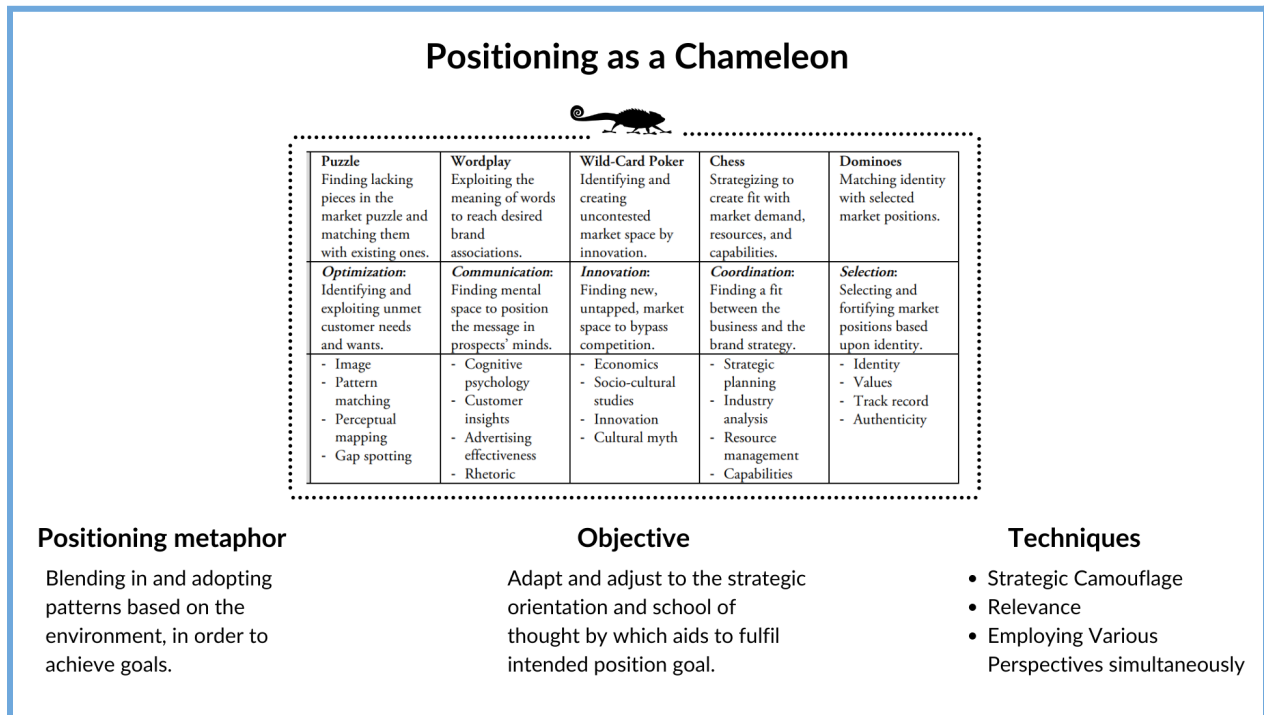


Figure 4 - Positioning as a Chameleon - Based on Urde & Koch (2014)

Positioning as a Chameleon is an overarching approach, independent of a specific orientation and inhabits collected elements of various positioning schools. Similar to Manager E’s positioning approach, a chameleon is a solitary and unique actor in its natural habitat. Both demonstrate remarkable adaptability to their surroundings through the strategic use of camouflage (various schools), enabling them to effectively achieve their goals within their respective environments. Furthermore, the chameleon's movements are slow yet deliberate which further resonates with Manager E’s positioning approach in the senate that they emphasise long-term brand positioning strategy. Moreover, chameleons possess the ability to rotate their eyes independently, thereby obtaining the advantage of scanning the environment before making a move. Likewise, Manager E acquires multiple perspectives by possessing vision through various strategic avenues. Lastly, the chameleon is known for its accurate tongue to catch its prey. Similarly, Manager E’s positioning approach attains a rhetorical sharpness of ‘attacking’ the competition. The objective

of the Chameleon School of positioning is to adapt and adjust to the strategic orientation which aids them to fulfil their intended position.

Moreover, an alternative finding of this study is the absence of one particular school of thought. While the analysis illuminated in-depth insight into how four of Urde & Koch's (2014) positioning schools apply – Positioning as Wild-Card-Poker remained irrelevant for all nine brand- and marketing-managers. Urde and Koch (2014, p.486) argue that the objective of this positioning school is to, through innovation, “find new, untapped market space and bypass competition”. And even though managers E (Telia), A (Tele2) and B (Mälarenergi) express that ‘innovation’ is important, embedded in core values or that they strive to be positioned as such – an approach to positioning through groundbreaking innovation in their market space does not take place. Instead, innovation remains something expressed in market communications, whether stemming from identity or image.

7.0 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis by revisiting and answering the research question and purpose. This chapter further presents the thesis contributions, practical- and managerial implications, limitations as well as the avenues for further research.

7.1 Purpose, Aim and Research Question

In order to derive meaningful conclusions from this study, it is crucial to retrospectively examine chapter one. The purpose of this study was to elucidate the conceptualisation and approach employed by brand- and marketing-managers in the domain of brand positioning. The aim of this study was to enhance the existing understanding of brand positioning in practical settings by delving into further depth. Furthermore, the study strived to broaden the current literature on brand positioning by adopting a distinctive managerial perceptual perspective, thereby expanding the scope of inquiry. In order to achieve our purpose and aim, we asked the following research question:

How do brand- and marketing-managers conceptualise as well as approach brand positioning?

7.2 Managers Conceptualisation of Brand Positioning

In addressing the initial inquiry of this research, it becomes evident that brand- and marketing-managers hold divergent conceptualisations of brand positioning. Each and every one of the nine managers who participated in this study expressed a distinct definition. Through unique definitions, clear patterns were identified through the theoretical framework of Urde and Koch (2014) as well as Urde, Baumgarth & Meerilees (2011). Six of the managers in the study defined brand positioning as something that stems from outside market elements – which are linked to Kotler et al's (2009) positioning definition. These managers' conceptualisations are market-oriented and may be linked to a school of thought referred to as 'Positioning as Puzzle' (Urde & Koch, 2014). On the other hand, two of the managers define positioning as something

that is shaped by internal brand elements. These managers' conceptualisations are thus brand-oriented and can be connected to Aaker's (1996) definition as well as The Dominoes school of positioning. Furthermore, one manager defined positioning as something that is shaped by both the market and the brand. This managers' definition resonates with a hybrid version (Urde, Baumgarth & Meerilees, 2011). While one conclusion of the managers' conceptualisations is that most managers are market-oriented in their definitions. The more general conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that it varies. In other words, how managers define brand positioning depends heavily on what strategic orientation and positioning school of thought the manager inhabits.

7.3 Managers' Approach to Brand Positioning

In this study, the 'approach' to brand positioning refers to the way in which managers' spoke about and reasoned with it, in the context of strategic brand management. The findings of this study revealed, similarly to positioning conceptualisation, that managers' approaches may be identified by the different brand orientations as well as positioning schools of thought. However, two more in-depth conclusions can be drawn: 1) The majority of managers in this study inhabit a hybrid approach to brand positioning, whereby a brand- and market-oriented approach is the most eminent. 2) The majority of managers in this study exhibit a combined school of thought in line with Urde & Koch's (2014) Puzzle, Chess and Dominoes school of positioning.

7.3.1 The Chameleon Approach

While eight of the nine managers had approaches that were clearly identifiable to one dominant orientation – Manager E's approach lacked such dominant direction. The uniqueness regarding Manager E lies in their ability to blend different orientations and schools of thought in their approach to brand positioning, indicating how the manager understands positioning to be adopted depending on context. The conclusion that can be drawn is that certain managers evidently deviate from a particular direction of the brand/market orientation spectrum.

7.4 Managerial Implications

This study has taken a somewhat pioneering role by exploring the depth of managerial perceptions and approaches to brand positioning. Retrospectively glancing at chapter one, it is emphasised that positioning is central and plays an imperative role in brand management as well as in the over-communicated society. This study illuminates comprehensive managerial relevance in the sense that managers' conceptualisation and approach to brand positioning can exert influence on the brand's strategy, or conversely, be influenced by the brand's strategy. A manager-wise heightened awareness of their individual strategic orientation and underlying school of thought (which may reside at a subconscious level) can significantly contribute to strengthened brand coherence. It may also foster more effective conceptual and practical collaboration amongst the brand or marketing team members. We suggest that managers incorporate and advocate discussions on market- / brand-orientation, as well as different positioning schools of thought into their deliberations on brand strategy. By doing this, a more holistic and uniform strategic brand-orientation may emerge within teams.

7.5 Theoretical Contributions

In chapter one, we pointed out two gaps in the brand positioning research. The former is the absence of coherent definitions amongst researchers, and the latter being the lack of sufficient 'bottom-up' research on brand positioning amongst practitioners. The subsections below will, in greater depth, discuss the contribution we've made to theory.

7.5.1 Brand Positioning Definitions

Revisiting chapter one, Fayvishenko (2018) and Urde & Koch (2014) highlights the lack of an unitary definition of brand positioning. This scarcity was underscored by Saqib's (2020) findings, which revealed a lack of consensus among researchers in the 152 publications on positioning, further emphasising the absence of mutual agreement on the subject. Through studying the conceptualisations of positioning among brand- and marketing-managers, our aim was to

contribute to the academic discourse by evaluating and mapping out the definitions employed by practitioners. This allowed us to investigate whether the lack of consensus among scholars regarding the conceptualization of positioning was reflected in practice. This study suggests that, while the nine managers' definitions are not unitary, they can however be correlated through the identification of similar strategic elements (i.e. market/brand orientation and schools of positioning). In that regard, this study has contributed with an in-depth understanding of some dynamics that contribute to shape managers positioning definitions.

7.5.2 A Managerial Approach to Positioning

As expounded upon in the introductory chapter, the studying of positioning in the branding literature has predominantly been subject to a top-down approach. That means, studying the phenomenon 'from above' and addressing positioning as an organisation's overarching strategic effort. In this study, we've contributed with an original 'bottom-up' standpoint, which takes a point-of-departure in the individual brand- and marketing-managers own conceptualisation and approach to positioning. Through this, we have not only contributed to both Järventie-Thesleff, Moisanter & Lanes's (2011) and Urde & Koch' (2014) expressed further research suggestions – but also introduced the research field to a new unexplored area of positioning. One where the focus is directed beyond the efforts of the organisation as a whole, and instead toward the actual people that develop and implement brand positioning strategies. In this perspective, much emphasis has been laid on the managerial 'approach'. Again, this approach referred to how managers, in combination with their conceptualisation, deliberate upon positioning in the context of strategic brand management.

7.5.3 Framework Extension

Furthermore, this study has contributed to extending Urde & Koch's (2014) five schools of positioning framework. Through Manager E's unique and framework-wise unfitting approach, we introduced Positioning as a Chameleon. Positioning as a Chameleon represents a new

positioning school of thought which lacks a specific brand/market orientation and inhabits a combination of the two. This school of thought blends various of Urde & Koch's (2014) positioning schools (Puzzle, Wordplay, Chess, Dominoes) and adapts through 'strategic camouflage' where they see contextual fit – hence the chameleon metaphor. By expanding the scope of Urde & Koch's (2014) framework, a more profound comprehension of the intricate dynamics inherent in the brand positioning concept was attained.

7.6 Limitations and Future Research

This master thesis is subject to several inherent limitations. Firstly, the narrow scope of the study, involving nine brand- and marketing-managers, may limit the generalisability and robustness of the conclusions drawn. One should though recognise that this thesis does not aim to provide any generalising conclusion but rather provide plausible explanations. Furthermore, this limitation arises from the constrained time frame within which empirical data was collected. Consequently, the conclusions reached in this study pertain exclusively to the perspectives of Swedish managers working in Sweden. Therefore, caution should be exercised when attempting to extend these findings to managers of other nationalities working in other countries and their conceptualisation as well as approach to brand positioning. However, it is essential to note that as this thesis is a qualitative study, the primary focus was on achieving depth rather than breadth.

The philosophical approach adopted in this thesis introduces another limitation, which is subjectivity. The presence of the limitation can be attributed to the relativistic ontological perspective which has influenced this thesis, which acknowledges multiple interpretations of reality. The study is inherently constrained in providing a definitive answer regarding how managers conceptualise and approach brand positioning. Moreover, as subjectivity arises as an inherent limitation due to the chosen research method, it can potentially have an influence on the findings and conclusions by reflecting our own thoughts and understanding of brand positioning. We have acknowledged and addressed this limitation by being reflexive, transparent and rigour when interpreting the empirical data.

To gain a deeper understanding of the managers' perspectives on brand positioning, it becomes necessary to consider theories from the field of psychology. This requirement presents a limitation in this study, as the focus has primarily been on brand management theory, thereby excluding a comprehensive exploration of psychological aspects. However, this limitation also offers a valuable suggestion for future research. By integrating psychological theories into the study, a different perspective on brand- and marketing-managers can be obtained, thereby enriching the discourse on the concept of brand positioning. Exploring the interplay between psychological factors and brand positioning, could provide valuable insights for enhancing the understanding of brand positioning and perhaps finally making sense of the branding concept.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Manager A-I's Summarised Positioning Approach

| <i>Manager</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Primary Focus</i> | <i>Positioning Approach Secondary Focus</i> |
|----------------|---|---|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Market Perspective - Customer Experience - Evaluating Current Position | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A |
| B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritising Brand Core over Market Influence - Identity Expression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aligning Positioning with Corporate Strategy - Evaluating Customer Insights |
| C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating Customer Perception - Developing Strategy through Market Insights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporating and aligning brand-core and essence |
| D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand-Values - Core Identity - Brand Portfolio over Adaption to Market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A |
| E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identity and Relevance - Market Tracking - Corporate Strategy Alignment - Rethorics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A |
| F | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating Market Situation - Locating and Filling Holes in the Market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand Values - Identity - Business Strategy Alignment |
| G | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stewarding Brand Identity - Core Beliefs and Values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adapting to Market Demand - Keeping up with Food-Trends |
| H | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying Market Gaps (White Spots) - External Market Influence - Competitive Data Tracking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A |
| I | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand Identity and Promise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business-Area Alignment - Market Situation - Competitive Monitoring |