

REPOSITIONING WESTERN BRANDS IN THE ASIAN CULTURE: INSIGHTS FROM THE INDIAN CONTEXT

S. RAMESH KUMAR AND VIPIN GUPTA

When Western brands are introduced into Asian markets, the firms face a challenge to either adapt their brand personality to the Asian culture, or attempt to modify the imagery and self-concept of the users. This article proposes a pragmatic strategy whereby the firms can sustain their core brand proposition and personality, and also enrich—rather than challenge—the imagery and self-concept of the users as rooted in the host culture. The proposed strategy is illustrated using an analysis of two American brands that were repositioned in the Indian market.

KUMAR IS CHAIRPERSON AND PROFESSOR OF MARKETING, INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, BANGALORE, INDIA

GUPTA IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, SEIDMAN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY, MICHIGAN, USA

In today's marketing context of cluttered communication, positioning provides a competitive mental 'edge' (Trout & Rivkin 1999). This mental edge lies in the differentiation that corporations attempt to forge for the offerings marketed by them. Positioning is the process whereby a marketer creates an association for a product or entity in the mind of a prospective consumer (Ries & Trout 1987). It involves designing the company's offering and image so that they occupy a meaningful and distinct competitive position in the target consumers' minds (Kotler 1997). While positioning is an accepted concept in marketing communications, the concept of repositioning does not seem to have been adequately explored by marketers. Positioning does undergo changes (Trout & Rivkin 1999). In a dynamic

and spatially differentiated marketing environment, repositioning a brand is as important as formulating the original positioning strategy for the brand.

Some insights into the repositioning imperatives are provided by the strategic brand concept (SBC), which probes into the three stages (introduction, elaboration and fortification) through which a brand could pass during its lifecycle (Park, Jaworski & MacInnis 1996). However, while the SBC delves into brand strategies that are appropriate to the different stages of brand lifecycle, it does not probe into brand repositioning dimensions from the viewpoint of brand personality. Repositioning of a brand is not an isolated marketing exercise: it has to be considered with product-line management, sub-brands and new kinds