

# Embedding Brand Positioning within Strategic Management

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## ABSTRACT

To explore brand prospects and development, it is essential to implement precise brand positioning closely aligned with the company's strategy. The authors propose embedding brand positioning within the broader context of strategic management. This integration ensures that brand recognition and a well-designed brand image significantly influence customer decision-making, leading to a preference for the brand. By embedding brand positioning within strategic management, it becomes a catalyst for enhanced performance and long-term growth. This paper examines the impact of strategic brand positioning on key outcomes: organizational performance and organizational sustainability. Data collected from top executives of diverse organizations have been utilized to test the relationships within this framework. The authors employ structural equation modeling to estimate the proposed relationships in the conceptual model. The results confirm that top executives perceive positioning as having a significant impact on organizational outcomes, and when brand positioning is embedded in strategic management, the impact is more pronounced and effective. Furthermore, management involvement in strategic brand positioning issues significantly mediates the relationship between strategic brand positioning and outcomes.

**Keywords:** Brand Positioning, Strategic Management, Organizational Performance, Organizational Sustainability.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the conditions of fierce competition and rapid digitization, organizations are increasingly aware of and appreciate the importance of the brand in organizational performance (hereinafter - performance) and organizational sustainability, long-term growth (hereinafter – sustainability), emphasizing the strengthening of competitive advantages in strategic management as an essential component. Superior performance is associated with more distinct and generally high-quality positioning and product positioning and company brand reputation are significantly associated with firm performance [1]. Marketing has changed significantly - features of offerings become less distinctive. Intangible factors gain importance whereby the management of reputation manipulation of consumer perceptions and the positioning of the firm and its offerings in the marketplace become important [1-3]. As marketing has become an increasingly important element of the strategic management process, so has the concept of positioning become fundamental to the success of organizational marketing strategies [4].

Organizations are becoming more and more brand-oriented to gain a strong position in the market, and precisely address the customer. Today, not only marketing communication and

marketing activities are brand-oriented, but there is also an ongoing discussion about the importance of the consistency of the company's internal processes, and organizational culture with the brand's guidelines to ensure a unified and authentic brand concept [5-7]. Miles and Mangold (2005) have established an association between positioning and firm success in the marketplace through the employment of "employee branding" positioning strategy [8]. On the other hand, a brand-oriented approach also includes a focus on the aspect of the target audience - how the involved parties perceive and value the brand. The components included in brand positioning, such as competitiveness, differentiation, brand identity, and brand trust, create a brand image that shapes the attitudes of the target audience, influencing the brand's place in the market through their choices [5], [9-11]. As early as 3 decades ago authors stated that brand positioning is significantly correlated with financial performance [12-14]. The studies also later demonstrate the importance of positioning strategies' capability in contributing to firm performance [1], [15]. Consequently - the greater the emphasis placed on the embedding of positioning into strategic management and the implementation of positioning strategies, the higher the financial performance and competitive advantages. Despite claims about the impact of positioning strategies on firm performance, as mentioned above, there is a need to explore the impact of the concept of positioning on advertising and firm performance [1], [14]. Within the framework of the study, hypotheses are proposed regarding the interaction between brand positioning and organizational outcomes - performance and sustainability. It is determined that embedding brand positioning within strategic management potentially exerts a stronger and more positive impact on these outcomes.

**The tasks of the research:** 1) to create a theoretical overview of the actuality of brand positioning, the interaction between brand positioning and organizational indicators (performance and sustainability); 2) to develop a hypothesis; 3) to obtain the results of the survey in the audience of top executives; 3) analyze the results in order to answer the research questions and analyze the conformity of the results with the proposed hypothesis; 4) development of the conceptual model.

## 2. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The subject of this paper is brand positioning, and the object of the study is strategic management.

**Scientific aims** of the research: 1) the research of brand positioning impact on performance, and sustainability; 2) to investigate whether embedding brand positioning within strategic management is more efficient regarding outcomes.

**Findings:** positioning has a significant impact on organizational outcomes. Brand positioning affects organizations' performance and sustainability, and when brand positioning is embedded in strategic management, the impact is more pronounced and

effective. Management involvement in strategic brand positioning issues significantly mediates the relationship between strategic brand positioning and outcomes.

**Conclusions:** the authors confirm that strategic brand positioning, when embedded within strategic management, has a substantial impact on both - organizations' performance and sustainability.

In this article, brand positioning is theorized to strengthen performance and sustainability, directly and indirectly, integrating brand positioning in strategic management. Data collected from the top executives of diverse organizations have been used to test the relationships in the framework. The authors use equation modelling to estimate the proposed relationships in the conceptual model.

To achieve the aim of the paper theoretical research and quantitative research were done. Several research methods were used: 1. theoretical literature review and overview; 2. survey; 3. the conceptual model is created using structural equation modelling (SEM).

Theoretical literature analysis was conducted to study the relationship between brand positioning and the outcomes (i.e., performance and sustainability) and how does embedding brand positioning within strategic management affects the results. To study the interaction between brand positioning, strategic management and organizational indicators a survey is conducted.

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### Brand positioning as a strategic tool

The importance of marketing in business is becoming more and more important and relevant in the last decade. As the statistics show [16] (see Figure 1), the global market data reflect a rapid increase in the marketing industry revenue, showing a 50%

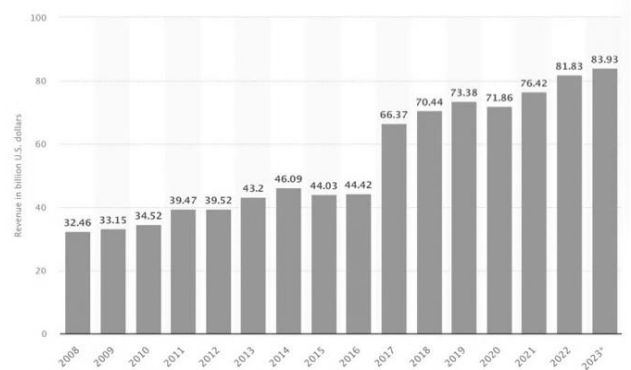


Figure 1: Global revenue of the market research industry from 2008 to 2022 with a forecast for 2023 (Statista, 2023)

As studied in an article by Strausa et al. [21] - several authors indicate that one of the most important questions in marketing strategy is particularly the company's positioning in the market [22-26]. Trout determines the essence of positioning "Positioning is what you do with the human's mind because it is possible only there" [26]. Emotional appeal to stakeholders through values determines strong brand loyalty [26-27]. Strausa et al. [21] point to changes in the development of the marketing field in 2016: "Kotler expanded the branding conceptual model, including two new elements: brand trust and brand beneficence: "Marketers need to target not only the minds of the customers but also their hearts and well-being." [28]. Values become especially important in such a context – a brand must be assigned target audience values for consumer engagement with a brand [11], [29]. Positioning is conceptualized as a complex multidimensional construct that attempts to positively adjust the tangible

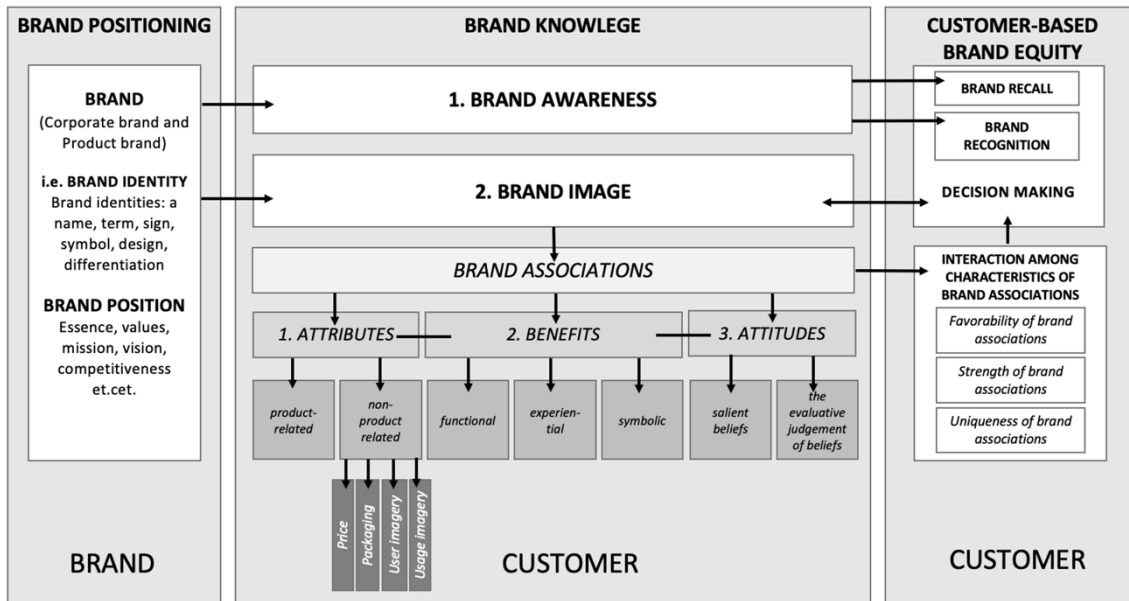


Figure 2: Model of Decision Making from the Prism of Positioning (summarized and augmented by authors from Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity (Keller, 1993))

increase in 2017 and maintaining revenue growth (source: Statista, 2023).

Positioning in general has been a central concept in marketing thought [17 -20] since Ries and Trout's seminal work in 1972 [3] where positioning forms part of the triumvirate of segmentation, targeting, and positioning [5].

characteristics of the offering and the intangible perceptions of the brand in the marketplace. Scholars have historically classified company resources as either tangible or intangible [30-32], and it is difficult for a single intangible or tangible resource to be the sole source of value creation [33]. Companies must usually bundle their portfolio of available resources into capabilities that can be leveraged for successful performance [33-34].

Strategy researchers have suggested that intangible resources are considered the most likely sources of a firm's success because they are not easily acquired and replicated [35-37]. However, businesses are a combination of intangible and tangible resources, and it is difficult for a business to compete based on just one intangible resource [33], [36].

and heart of the customer – brand positioning, and the authors conduct a deeper study of this stage.

After an in-depth study of brand positioning the authors conclude that it is a complex, comprehensive, and strategic approach for the organization to successfully adapt and maintain the material characteristics of the offer and, importantly, the intangible image

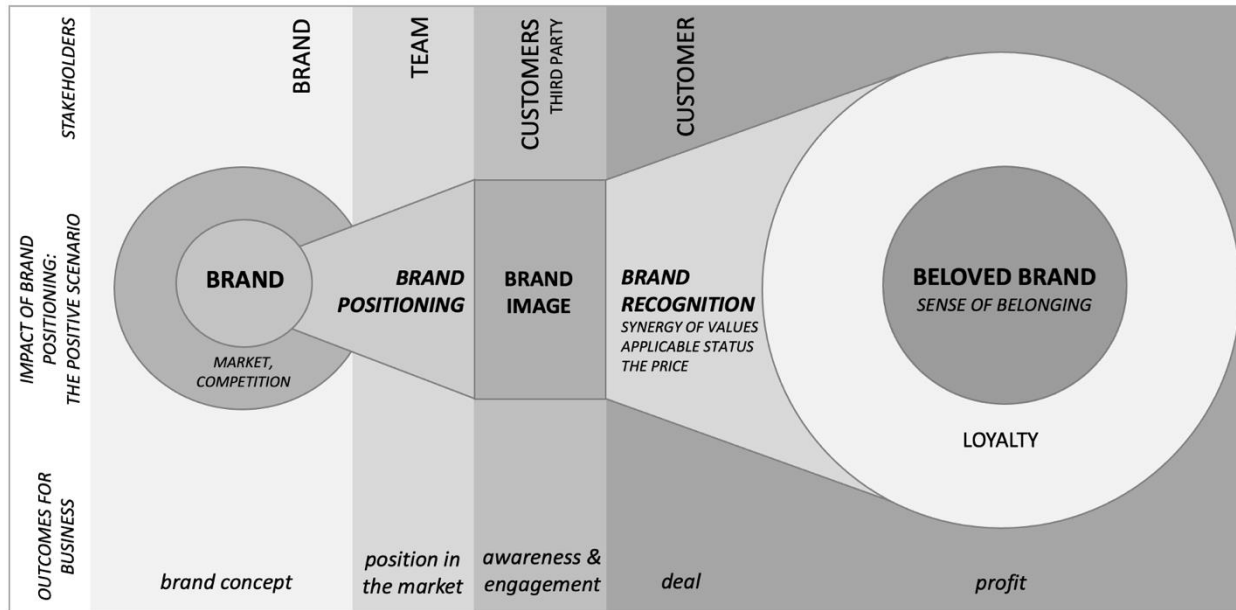


Figure 3: Brand Interaction with Stakeholders; The Context of Brand Positioning (authors' developed model)

A well-positioned brand meets the specific needs of the target audience and creates high consumer loyalty, positively formed desires and beliefs about the value of the brand, as well as a greater willingness to choose the brand [38-40].

A customer's choice decision is determined by a combination of factors when a brand interacts with a consumer. Authors summarize Keller's statement about Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity [41] and analyze decision-making from the prism of positioning, see Figure 2. Brand positioning is an important process of building customer brand awareness and brand image. As seen in Figure 2 - brand image is an essential element in customer association formation and, accordingly in the decision-making process and brand equity. Though brand image has been recognized as an important concept in marketing [42] there is less agreement on its appropriate definition [43]. Consistent with definitions by Herzog (1963) and Newman (1957) [44-45], among others, and an associative network memory model of brand knowledge, brand image is defined here as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. Brand associations are the other informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers. The favourability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations are the dimensions distinguishing brand knowledge significant in determining the differential response that makes up brand equity, especially in high involvement decision settings. Before considering those dimensions, it is useful to examine the different types of brand associations that may be present in consumer memory [41]. The positive result of brand positioning is seen in Figure 3, where the stakeholders, impact of the brand positioning as a positive scenario, and outcomes for business are reflected. As seen in Figure 3, there is an important stage between brand expression and the formation of a brand image in the mind

of the offer and brand [46]. As a result of studies, the authors concluded that it is necessary to supplement the previously created model with an additional dimension: it is found that external factors are also important in determining the market position within the brand positioning. The authors upgrade the previously defined brand positioning dimensions and elements that can be used for a complex approach to brand positioning (see Figure 4). An additional dimension ("Dimension 1") is added to The Holistic Brand Positioning Model with a broader positioning framework – "External Influences". Considering the previously mentioned, brand positioning in general has been a central concept in marketing thought and it is one of the most important questions in marketing finding that intangible resources were considered the most likely sources of a firm's success, the authors are interested in whether organizations' top executives perceive brand positioning as a comprehensive concept or focus on individual elements of positioning. The research will later examine the respondents' perception of brand positioning within the framework of strategy management. Analyzing literature sources on how the process of brand positioning interacts with brand positioning, the authors point to the Resource-Based Approach to Strategy Analysis, which is an "inside-out" process of strategy formulation - starting by looking at what resources the firm possesses, then assessing their potential for value generation, and ending up by defining a strategy that will allow to capture the maximum of value in a sustainable way [47]. Grant (1991) developed The Resource-Based Theory and summarized the "inside-out" strategic process - reflected in Figure 5 [47]. The authors of the paper see strong similarities in the process of brand positioning, analyzing resources and capabilities in the context of brand position, where the Holistic Brand Positioning Model (see Figure 4) can be used for positioning analysis in strategy development.

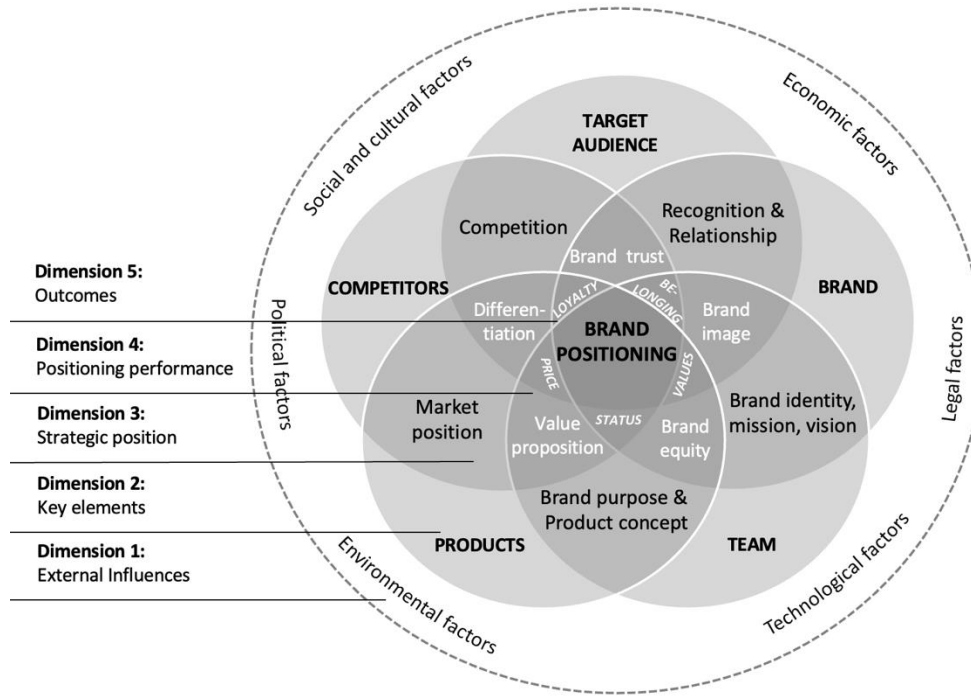


Figure 4: The Holistic Brand Positioning Model (authors' developed and augmented model)

price sensitivity [52] and customer-derived brand equity, price margins, and demand flexibility [41], [53]. Several authors point out that strategic brand positioning affects sustainability.

For example, this approach was applied to "Tērvete food" Ltd. case, creating a new brand to enter a new segment.

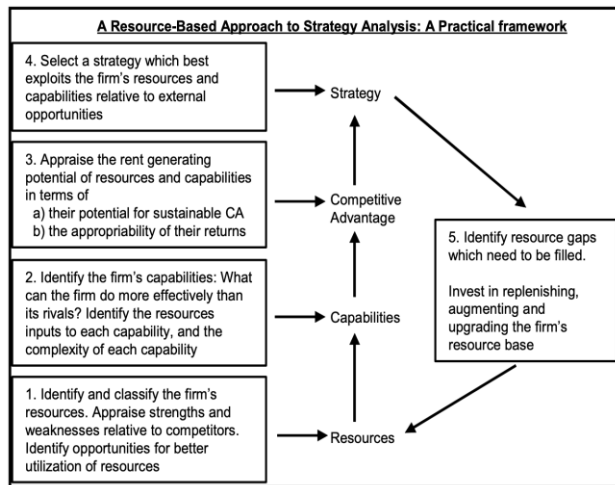


Figure 5: A Resource-Based Approach to Strategy Analysis: A Practical Framework (Grant, 1991)

**The impact of brand positioning on performance and sustainability**

The importance of positioning is supported by assertions of a positive relationship between company performance. Several authors stated that brand positioning is significantly correlated with financial performance [12-14], [48-50]. The studies demonstrate the importance of positioning strategies' capability in contributing to company performance [1], [15]. If the positioning is done effectively, it has the potential to create strong brands; however, if done inappropriately, it can also lead to negative effects on the brand [51]. Brand positioning has an impact on consumer-based outcome variables such as perceived

According to Zineldin (2006) [54] companies that focus on positioning strategy stand a high chance of achieving long-term growth as opposed to those that choose operational efficiency. With a strong strategic position, the organization is poised for ongoing success, sustainability, and distinct competitive advantage [55]. As can be seen in the authors' statements, brand positioning is complemented by a strategic approach, therefore the authors study the concept of strategic management how brand positioning can be made strategic, and how it is embedded in strategic management. The role of consumers in value creation (that is closely related to outcomes) is crucial. The Value-Price-Cost (VPC) framework developed by Tirole (1988) illustrates the importance of the value creation process and the framework is a widely used conceptual tool in business strategy and economics [56]. Tirole discusses value creation and differentiation - how firms create value by differentiating their products and competing on factors other than price (ibid), which is a framework for brand positioning.

Porter states that the competitive advantage is the company's ability to take a higher position in the industry, ahead of its competitors and achieve the main operational goal - profitability. A company's superior competitive position allows it to achieve higher profitability than the industry's average [57]. The firm that achieves the largest difference between value and cost has an advantage over its rivals. Still, major theoretical perspectives dealing with competitive advantage, namely positioning, transaction cost economics, and resource-based view focus on the producer profit component of the framework (i.e. efficiency), disregarding the consumer benefit component [58]. The data from the study conducted by Millers and Gaile-Sarkane (2021) on small and medium-sized enterprises reflect "a strong correlation between the level of management practice development, approach, and company performance" [59]. A study by Lapiņa et al. (2021) confirms that employee well-being also affects performance: "The well-being of employees has a

great impact on their job performance. The more satisfied employees are with their roles and job responsibilities, the greater their contribution to the development of the organization.” [60]. Another study by Robertsons and Lapiņa refers to strategically important elements affecting sustainability and development: “To be sustainable, companies must constantly improve their performance, efficiency, and productivity and offer their customers new products, services, and experiences. In other words, they need to innovate.” [61].

### Strategic management

Strategy concerns the inseparability of the organization and the environment [62-63]. Changes in the surrounding environment bring new combinations of circumstances to organizations, thus organizations adapt to the changing environment using different strategies. Strategy is constantly changing, it cannot be defined as permanent and unchanging [64-68]. The three basic strategies proposing different strategic approaches in the organization - linear strategy (the adoption of courses of action, and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals), adaptive strategy (viable match between the opportunities and risks present in the external environment and the organization’s capabilities and resources for exploiting those opportunities) and interpretive strategy (orienting metaphors constructed to conceptualize and guide individual attitudes or organizational participants) [69]. Over time, various authors propose to expand the concept of strategies by combining and supplementing types of strategies: the expressive type of strategic management as a combination of the adaptive and interpretive [70] and the transformation of management practices from planning to strategic management [71]. Johnson and Scholes (2002) define strategy as “Strategy is the direction and scope of an organization over the long-term: which achieves advantage for the organization through its configuration of resources within a challenging environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfill stakeholder expectations” [72]. Each of the generic strategies involves different routes to competitive advantage, combining a choice of the type of competitive advantage sought with the scope of the strategic target in which competitive advantage is to be achieved [73]. Competitive advantage can be achieved when a firm pursues a value-creating strategy that is not simultaneously pursued by any existing or potential competitor, and when other firms are unable to duplicate the advantages of this strategy [74]. A Firm with a low-cost position will have a greater competitive advantage over a high-cost rival in low-growth industries than if they are to compete in high-growth industries [75].

The authors suggest embedding brand positioning within strategic management, as illustrated by its elements in Figure 4, to gain competitive advantages, establish a unique identity, create value, maintain appropriate price positioning, and achieve customer ownership. This alignment should be in accordance with the strategic objectives set by the brand. To determine how strategic brand positioning affects organizational outcomes, the authors present a conceptual model that reflects its influences on these outcomes.

## 4. PRACTICAL RESEARCH

In the practical part of the work, the survey is arranged by asking the following key questions: 1) How much does brand positioning affect performance and sustainability? 2) How much does embedded positioning within strategic management affect performance and sustainability? 3) How much does strategic management mediate the relationship between brand positioning

and outcomes (i.e., performance and sustainability)? In addition, other questions were clarified: top executives’ perception of brand positioning; top executives’ opinion, and whether brand positioning or its elements should be and are incorporated in the strategic management to get better results.

**A hypotheses** are proposed regarding the brand positioning influences on performance and sustainability determining that embedding brand positioning within strategic management potentially exerts a stronger impact on outcomes.

**Control variables:** in addition to the determinants that lead to performance and sustainability, other characteristics or factors that influence overall performance may exist. For example, the impact of brand positioning on results may also vary by field of activity or the involvement of management in driving brand positioning. Therefore, the authors propose that these factors be incorporated as control variables.

### Proposed hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Organizational performance (OP) influences organizational sustainability (OS) and vice versa.*

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a).** *Brand positioning (BP) influences organizational performance (OP).*

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b).** *Brand positioning (BP) influences organizational sustainability (OS).*

**Hypothesis 3a (H3a).** *Organizational strategic management (SM) more effectively mediates the relationship between brand positioning (BP) and organizational performance (OP).*

**Hypothesis 3b (H3b).** *Organizational strategic management (SM) more effectively mediates the relationship between brand positioning (BP) and organizational sustainability (OS).*

**Control variable 1 (C1).** *Control variables affect results in the context of the system, such as the specific industry or the involvement of the management.*

Brand positioning is assumed to affect performance and sustainability, and when brand positioning is embedded within strategic management, the impact is more pronounced and effective.

### Results of survey

To study the interaction between brand positioning, strategic management, and organizational indicators a survey is conducted researching top executives’ opinions on the impact and interaction of the components. The study included a total of 14 top executives of diverse organizations as respondents. The demographic breakdown of the respondents is as follows: gender: 9 females and 5 males, average age: 44.1 years. The impact of the components was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale. The influence of brand positioning on outcomes was assessed at various levels, with ratings of moderately strong, almost strong, and strong. In contrast, the influence of embedded brand positioning within strategic management was evaluated more highly, with ratings of almost strong and strong. The survey results indicate varying levels of awareness and integration of brand positioning among organizations. 86% of respondents develop and maintain brand positioning or elements of it in their organization. Specifically, 43% of the organizations recognize brand positioning as a complex construct, while another 43% focus on individual elements of brand positioning. The most frequently mentioned elements include market and competitor research, determination of value, and uniqueness/differentiation. In contrast, 14% of the organizations consider brand positioning to be of low importance. A significant majority of respondents (71%) agree that brand positioning or its elements should be incorporated into the strategic management of their organizations. Furthermore, the perceived impact of brand positioning on strategic management is substantial, with 43% of

respondents rating the influence as strong, 36% as almost strong, and 21% as moderately strong. The authors make a comparison to reflect changes in relationship effects (see Figure 6). The results confirm that top executives believe brand positioning, when embedded within strategic management, has a substantial

that representatives from certain industries, such as the accounting industry, may perceive the impact of brand positioning as less significant. For instance, accounting industry representatives (14% of respondents) indicated that brand positioning is not particularly important in their companies.

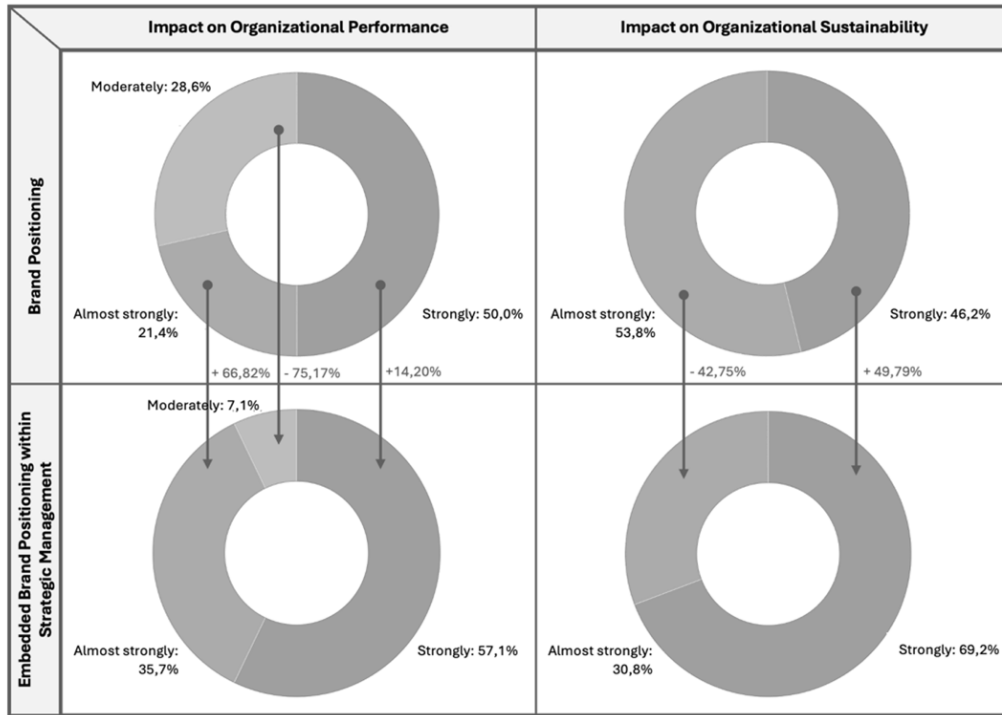
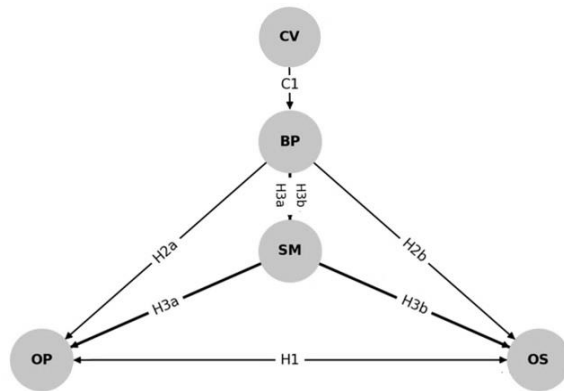


Figure 6: A comparison of the impact of brand positioning on outcomes with brand positioning embedded in strategic management. (author's created comparison)

impact on organizations' performance and sustainability. When comparing the impact of brand positioning on company results with positioning integrated into strategic management, a significant increase in rating is observed.

Figure 7: Conceptual Model of Brand Positioning: Influences on Organizational Performance and Organizational Sustainability



(author's created model)

Specifically, it is associated with a +66.82% rating increase for an "almost strong" impact (35,7%) and a +14.20% rating increase for a "strong" impact (57,1%). Additionally, a higher rating tendency is observed for the component of sustainability, with +49.79% of respondents rating its impact as "strong" (69,2%). The study confirms the hypothesis, based on the evaluations from top management. Analyzing the control variables, it is evident

However, management involvement significantly mediates the relationship between strategic brand positioning and organizational outcomes - 64% of management representatives affirm strong impact and 29% rate it as almost strong. The authors develop the conceptual model using structural equation modeling (SEM) - see Figure 7 for the representation of brand positioning influences. The model also includes the reflection of hypotheses. The study confirms that top executives believe that brand positioning affects organizations' performance and sustainability, and when brand positioning is embedded in strategic management, the impact is more pronounced and effective.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions are found within the framework of the study:

- 1) Brand positioning has become an increasingly important element of the strategic management process.
- 2) The study confirms the hypotheses in the assessment of the top management, but further research as a case study is needed to verify the correspondence of the hypotheses and the developed conceptual model to the actual results.
- 3) Brand positioning affects performance and sustainability, and when brand positioning is embedded in strategic management, the impact is more pronounced and effective.
- 4) Management involvement in strategic brand positioning issues significantly mediates the relationship between strategic brand positioning and outcomes.
- 5) The specific industry, the involvement and attitudes of the management, and other factors affect perceptions of the importance and results of brand positioning. Control

variables should be studied more deeply - which additional factors influence the outcomes?

- 6) Analyzing the performance of brand positioning, as reflected in Figures 2 and 3, and confirming the hypotheses, the authors conclude that brand recognition and a well-designed brand image as a result of brand positioning significantly influence customer decision-making, leading to a preference for the brand.
- 7) When studying the perception of brand positioning, 43% of executives perceive brand positioning as separate elements, not a comprehensive construct. Consequently, this can lead to a fragmented approach that focuses only on individual aspects of positioning. Therefore, the impact of positioning on outcomes may be reduced, but more research is needed to prove the relationship.

**Acknowledgment:** This research was funded under contract No. 5.1.1.2.i.0/1/22/A/CFLA/003 between “Latvian Food Sector Competence Centre” Ltd. and the Central Finance and Contracting Agency, the study was conducted by “Tērvete food” Ltd. (Research No. 8) with support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) within the framework of the project “Latvian Food Sector Competence Centre”.

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