

Model: Positioning Cube

Type of model: Brand model (structure and process model)
 Author(s): SARV International, Bex* communicatie
 Domain: Brand positioning

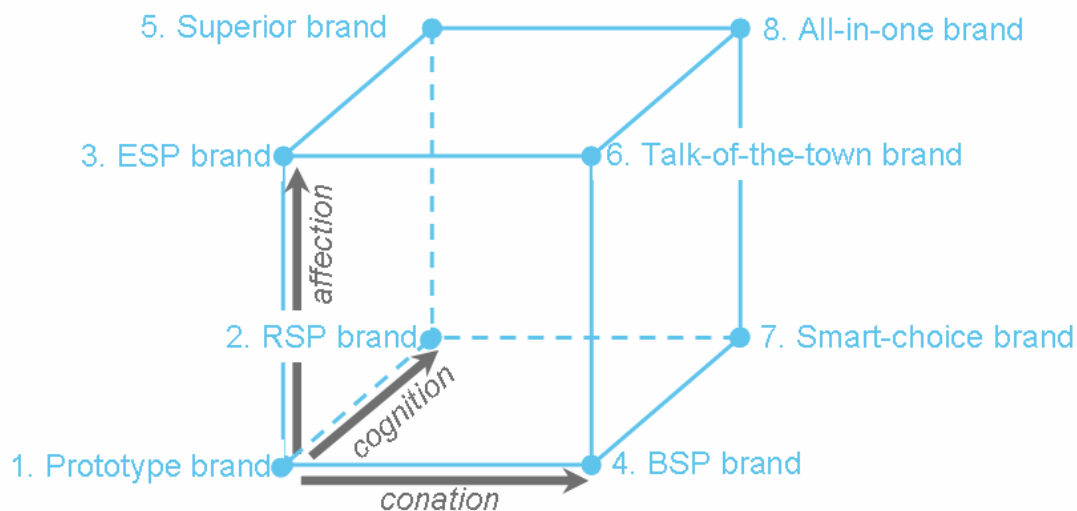


Figure 1: The three dimensions of the positioning cube, with eight corresponding brand types.

The positioning cube identifies eight types of brands on the basis of three dimensions of consumer behaviour:

1. Cognition (thinking): this dimension refers to knowledge-related elements, ratio and arguments. Brands (partly) positioned on this dimension attempt to convince consumers with rational arguments. In linguistic terms, this means expressions tend to use nouns.
2. Affection (feeling): this dimension refers to feelings, emotion and trust. Brands (partly) positioned on this dimension attempt to convince consumers with emotionally charged arguments (through the likeability factor, for example). In linguistic terms, this means expressions tend to use a lot of adjectives.
3. Conation (doing): this dimension refers to action, behaviour and behavioural intentions. Brands (partly) positioned on this dimension attempt to convince consumers with behavioural arguments. There are two ways of doing that: by promising the consumer certain behaviour (such as better service), or by facilitating behaviour (by offering huge discounts, for example). In linguistic terms, this means expressions tend to use verbs.

When offsetting the abovementioned dimensions against each other, you get a cube shape (see Figure 1). Each corner of the cube represents a different combination of cognition/affection/conation. Seeing as brand associations are based on attitudes – with cognition, affection and conation being the building blocks of an attitude – all brands can be plotted in this cube. That will make it clear where brands differ from each other, but also where they are similar. This way, brands from entirely different categories can be compared to each other. The following provides an explanation of each of the eight identified types of brands.

Based on the dimensions cognition, affection and conation, the positioning cube discerns eight brand types:

1. The 'Prototype brand': this is a brand of which the name is often synonymous for the product category. These brands do therefore not differentiate themselves on any of the three dimensions specifically. Examples are Maggi, Luxaflex and Kleenex.
2. The 'RSP brand': this is a brand that mainly distinguishes itself through an association with one or several Rational Selling Propositions (RSP). Examples are most of Procter & Gamble's brands (Always, Head&Shoulders, Pampers, Tempo etc.), but also Unilever's Dove ('¼ hydrating lotion').
3. The 'ESP brand': this brand positions itself mainly through an association with an Emotional Selling Proposition (ESP), which is usually translated into 'trusted quality'. Examples are Douwe Egberts, Albert Heijn and Coca-Cola.
4. The 'BSP brand': this brand positions itself mainly through the association with a Behavioural Selling Proposition (BSP). This expresses itself in the promising and displaying of different behaviour. Examples are EasyJet and Dell. Consumers will often struggle to list hard rational benefits (other than the price) for these brands, and tend to lack strong affectionate feelings for such brands. 'Challenger brands' mostly fall into this category.
5. The 'Superior brand': this brand stands out amidst other brands on the basis of both rational and emotional points. These are brands with a rational message that has great emotional impact. Examples of brands from this category are: Volvo (a brand that emphasizes safety, and with that protection of the family; 'Volvo for life') and Flora (cholesterol-lowering, and helps maintain a healthy heart; 'healthy living'). Exclusive brands, such as Bang & Olufsen and Rolex are also examples from this category.
6. The 'Talk-of-the-town brand': these are high-profile brands that consumers will primarily have a good feeling with (often on the basis of likeability), and which tempt consumers into doing new, exciting or adventurous things.

Consumers will not primarily base their choice for these brands on the rational idea of being better off with them, but rather because they consider it cool to be associated with these brands. Talk-of-the-town brands also attract a lot of attention, as they keep coming up with new things. Examples are Apple (a likeable, creative brand, which continuously manages to surprise us) and YouTube or Flickr (fun, likeable and simple brands, but certainly not top-quality videos or images).

7. The 'Smart-choice brand': these are brands that rate highly on cognition (i.e.: rational benefits) and behaviour, but not on affection. These tend to be brands with a clear benefit to offer, and with a no-frills attitude towards spurring people on to buy them. Examples are: BCC ('Everyday low pricing, high service'), C1000 ('No frills'), MediaMarkt ('I'm not stupid') and Škoda (smart purchasing behaviour: 'Follow the Škoda driver'). Sustainable and 'green' brands also often come under this denominator, seeing as they translate a different, in-depth outlook into concrete behaviour. Examples are ASN bank, or the Fairtrade brand.
8. The 'All-in-one brand': these are brands that are strong in all three dimensions: cognition, affection and conation. In concrete terms, this means that this type of brand conjures up rational, emotional and behavioural benefits. Again, Apple is a fine example of such a brand: in rational terms, this brand evokes associations of a high-quality product; in emotional terms, it is a brand that people like to be seen to use; in a behavioural sense, it is a brand offering excellent convenience and ease of use (such as: no complex interfaces with peripherals). Another example is Google: rationally the best and fastest search engine, with a wide range of extensions (Google Earth etc.), giving it high psycho-social meaning, and also a brand that does what it promises (simple, fast and accurate).

In the original version of this model, SARV International's SARV Cube, the names of the eight brand types were different than the above; namely (1) 'primal product', (2) 'USPs', (3) 'old, trusted A brand', (4) 'new, innovative', (5) 'superior features', (6) 'high-profile', (7) 'me-too' and (8) 'the ideal'. The numbering was also slightly different. The names were changed in this document in order for them to better denote the differences in the dimensions cognitive, affective and conative.