

## The Importance of Context in Developing a Brand Positioning



## The Importance of Context

*"I should venture to assert that the most pervasive fallacy of philosophic thinking goes back to neglect of context."*

*~ John Dewey (1859 – 1952)*

**"Nothing is right or wrong, but thinking makes it so."**

~ Some famous philosopher

This relativistic idea is especially true with a brand positioning. Any positioning could be powerful and compelling, or not, depending on how people think about it. And, how they think about a brand depends on what they want and need from category of products and organizations that the brand in question represents. Most important, what they want and need is driven most by the context in which the brand needs to function for them.

We call this the decision context – the usage situation most relevant at the time for at least some important segment of potential users. The decision context is the moment when a target decision-maker assesses his/her needs and wants based upon the physical requirements and emotional characteristics of (or desired

from) the situation. These can be primarily physical and rational, or they can be primarily emotional, but they are **ALWAYS** some combination of the two.

For example, if the target is a business person choosing a hotel for two nights during an out of town business trip then location (being close to his/her appointment), services (restaurant, workout facility), amenities and price are probably really important. But, so are more emotional characteristics such a hotel's reputation for consistency, cache of the brand name, imagery associated with the expected décor. The yardstick for a hotel brand to be effective in this context, then, must be a combination of both these rational and these emotional elements. Importantly, the physical attribute and emotional benefits must be connected to each other rather than simply paired with each other. That is, specific services and amenities offered should be linked to

delivering consistency and/or support the cachet of the brand name.

Now, take the same scenario but add to it that the business trip is to a foreign country, say to Mexico City. A number of things would likely happen to our yardstick. Physical attributes such as location are still important, but perhaps a good location now means close to the railway station or near the main shopping district. Services are still important but now they may include a complete business center and translation services. A competitive price may become less of a positive attribute, and may even become a negative attribute because it suggests the wrong side of a strange city instead of a good value or consistency. Moreover, new emotional characteristics like an American brand name or a friendly reputation may become important for the first time.



## Small changes in context have big impact

Further, the most highly prized summary benefit may be very different in these two iterations of the same scenario. In the first, a sense of efficiency and effectiveness may be the summary benefit. In the second, a sense of security and control may be paramount.

This example highlights the essential importance of context in developing a brand positioning: Context is hugely important. Even small changes in the context can lead the same individuals to:

- a. Alter the elements of their decision criteria
- b. Change the meaning of seemingly consistent elements (which means they are different even though we give them the same word label)
- c. Reassess once positive elements and evaluate them as negative
- d. Change the relative weight of concrete versus emotional elements, and
- e. Ultimately, make a very different choice

To understand this dynamic and harness the understanding, research must be flexible enough and multi-dimensional enough to detect how and why small

changes in the context radically change the set of decision variables, the relative value of each of the variables and end meaning given to those variables. In other words, the research must yield a very custom yardstick.

**Artemis Strategy Group** has a suite of research methodologies that incorporate the notion of context in the development of a winning brand positioning. These methodologies are really frameworks for thinking about which context is most important to whom, and how a brand can fit within that context in unique and compelling ways. We believe this is the hallmark of good brand research: viewing the word through the eyes of consumers and understanding their needs and wants to create a demand landscape into which brands may then be positioned.