


## THE SEARCH FOR BRAND POSITIONING FROM THE STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE CALÇADÃO STORES IN IMPERATRIZ-MA

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### ABSTRACT

This article is the result of the scientific initiation research produced during twelve months whose objective was to analyze the search for brand positioning from the strategic perspective of retail stores that operate on the sidewalk of Imperatriz-MA. To achieve the established objective, a bibliographic survey was carried out from several sources that bring an approach to marketing and then a questionnaire was prepared and applied, which allowed the collection of primary data, these data concluded that the "Calçadão do Imperatriz" is characterized by more diverse categories of companies that include Micro Entrepreneur Individual, Micro Enterprises, Small Businesses up to NO (those giant companies that do not fit into the first three categories, for example, public and private banks). All of them invest in the promotion and consolidation of their respective brands via social networks, training employees to improve service and the company's image (brand) even in traditional marketing.

**Keywords:** Strategies. Marketing. Imperatriz Boardwalk.

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## INTRODUCTION

Every marketing strategy is based on segmentation, target market selection, and positioning (STP). A company identifies diverse needs and groups in the market, targets those who can best serve, and then positions its products/services so that the target market recognizes the company's differentiated offerings and images. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), positioning is the action of projecting the company's offer and image so that it occupies a differentiated place in the minds of the target audience. The goal is to position the brand in the minds of consumers to maximize the company's potential advantage. The same authors also point out that effective brand positioning helps guide the marketing strategy, clearly exposing the essence of the brand, identifying the objectives that it helps the consumer to achieve and showing how it is done in an unparalleled way.

For Hooley, Saunders and Piercy (2005), companies can adopt a strategy for positioning suppliers, producers, services and brands. The latter is the object of our research. According to the authors above, competitive positioning refers to identifying the positioning of competitors in the market as a whole, and in the targeted segments and niches to develop the company's positioning strategy. According to Kotler and Keller (2018) an effective positioning has a "foot in the present" and a "foot in the future", it can be somewhat ambitious so that the brand has room to grow and improve. Positioning based on the current market situation is not sufficiently forward-looking, but at the same time, positioning cannot be so far removed from reality that it becomes essentially impossible to achieve. According to the marketing exponents mentioned above, the real secret of positioning is to achieve the balance between what the brand is and what it could be. The result of positioning is the successful creation of a customer-focused value proposition, that is, a compelling reason why the target market should buy a particular product.

Brand positioning is at the heart of the marketing strategy. According to Keller and Machado (2006), a good brand positioning helps to guide the marketing strategy, clarifying the meaning of the brand, how it is exclusive or similar to competing brands and why consumers should prefer it. It is essential to know how to identify the audience because different consumers may have different brand awareness structures and, therefore, different perceptions and preferences. The problem of the research is based on the concern to understand the associability or dissociability of the brand with the marketing strategies adopted by the stores that operate in the "Calçadão de Imperatriz do Maranhão", with this, the work has as its primary objective, to analyze the search for brand positioning

from a strategic marketing perspective. Specifically, outline the profile of the companies surveyed; to identify how companies develop and establish an effective positioning in the market and, finally, to understand the relationship between brand positioning and the achievement of the results recommended by the companies surveyed.

Regarding the methodology used to achieve the results, the research was developed in four stages, and initially a survey of the literature was carried out that brings a theoretical and practical approach to marketing.

After the survey and exploration of the material, questionnaires were elaborated that consequently had their application in the companies operating in the "Calçadão do município de Imperatriz" via interviews. In the third phase of the research, the primary data collected *in loco* and compared with the secondary data were carried out and analyzed. Finally, organize the results in the form of tables and graphs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Brands constitute the identities of companies. Firms and other types of organizations are concluding that one of their most valuable assets is the brand names associated with their products or services. With the complexity of the contemporary world, people and companies are faced with more and more choices, but have less and less time to make these choices. It is worth noting that according to the most diverse literature, marketing involves the identification and satisfaction of human and social needs. For these authors who constitute the references in the field of marketing, Keller; Kotler; Hooley and others, argue that the steps to better brand positioning can be market segmentation that divides a market into well-defined slices, that is, the market segment is composed of a group of customers who share a similar set of needs and desires. Thus, the present work sought bibliographies that define the market segmentation and the brand positioning of the companies.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE "IMPERATRIZ BOARDWALK"

A brief historical trajectory of the "Calçadão de Imperatriz". Located in the center of the municipality of Imperatriz, state of Maranhão, the space is marked by a remarkable transformation that has taken shape over several decades. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the city of Imperatriz went through a period of economic growth driven by railway expansion and agricultural development. This has resulted in a growing demand for

commercial and social areas. Rua Grande, as the current "Calçadão" was called, due to its central location, began to attract shops, restaurants and other commercial establishments.

In 1984, the place was officially transformed into a boardwalk, receiving improvements in infrastructure, such as adequate pavement, lighting and urban furniture. The "Calçadão de Imperatriz" has become an important meeting point for the local population, as well as being a vital commercial center for the city. Cultural events, such as musical performances and fairs, also began to be held at the site, enriching the city's cultural life.

The history of this space reflects the evolution of the municipality over time, showing its ability to adapt to the changing needs of its population and its commerce. From its construction to the present day, the "Calçadão de Imperatriz-MA" stands out as a popular trade that attracts not only the Imperatrizenses, but also the plaintiffs from the entire southwest region of Maranhão. This space, which is the object of our research, holds the most valued square meter of commerce in the municipality due to the flow of people circulate daily in the aforementioned environment called Avenida Getúlio Vargas, it is worth noting that the space consists of two blocks as illustrated in the image below and concentrates fifty-eight stores.



**Source:** Municipal Secretariat of Planning, Finance and Budget Management SEFAZGO, 2023.

THE role of the brand is of fundamental importance for customer loyalty.

According to Keller and Machado (2006), bringing the definition of the "American Marketing Association (AMA), the trademark is a name, term, symbol, design or a combination of these elements that must identify the goods or services of a supplier or group of suppliers and differentiate them from the competition. With this definition, we can state in other words that technically, that every time a marketer creates a new name, logo, or symbol for a new product, he creates a brand.

Every company needs a strategy that enables it to meet the challenges of the market. The term business strategy can also be called strategic positioning, which refers to the action of projecting the company's image so that it occupies a differentiated place in the minds of the target audience, (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The positioning of the brand in the minds of consumers is intended to maximize the potential advantage of the company. I emphasize that effective brand positioning helps guide the marketing strategy by clarifying the essence of the brand, identifying the objectives it helps the consumer to achieve and showing how this is done in an unparalleled way.

Through the survey carried out, it was identified that in the market surveyed, several more companies are offering different products. It is important to point out the difference between a brand and a product. To do so, it is to bring back the vision of one of the world's best-known authors in the field of marketing, Philip Kotler: "a product is anything that can be offered and a market for appreciation, acquisition, use or consumption and that can satisfy a need or a desire.

In a distinction between the product and a brand, Ferrell (2015) defines the product as a good, service or idea received in return and can be tangible or intangible and includes functional, social and psychological utilities or benefits. While the trademark is defined as the name, term, design, symbols or any other characteristic that identifies a seller's product as different from that of other sellers. From this definition we can assume that all stores or companies that operate on the "Calçada de Imperatriz" are registered with a name that represents the company's brand, on the other hand, these firms offer products and services of various brands.

At the heart of marketing strategy we can find brand positioning. Kotler defines brand positioning as the "act of planning the company's offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the minds of target customers (Keller and Machado, 2006). In light of Kotler's definition, for Keller and Machado, positioning implies discovering "location"

adequacy in the mind of a group of consumers or market segment, so that they think of a product or service in a desired way.

For Dornelas (2017), many companies have sought to renew themselves in order to keep up with the rapid technological development and globalization of markets, as well as a greater demand from consumers for better quality and technologically more advanced products and services. Brand consolidation necessarily involves marketing tools. According to Bastos (2023), marketing encompasses several strategies to meet consumer demands, promote positive values, and establish a consistent image. It is a continuous process of adaptation and responses to market needs.

Brands generate identification with consumers. For Kotler and Keller (2012), the real secret of positioning is to achieve the balance between what the brand is and what it could be. Initially, it is necessary to think about what the market wants, what the consumer wants. It is of fundamental importance that the company researches and analyzes what draws the consumer's attention, because among options, the company can implement effective marketing, ethical and responsible marketing and successful marketing, among others. According to Barreto (2013), effective marketing is based on understanding people's behavior patterns, their actions, reactions, expectations, and perceptions. I emphasize that it is about recognizing the needs and desires of the target audience and providing solutions that authentically meet these demands. With regard to ethical and responsible marketing, the author states that it is not about deceiving, seducing or persuading at any cost, nor about deceiving or deceiving consumers, but on the contrary, it aims to establish a genuine connection with people, understand their aspirations and deliver real value through products, services and experiences. Finally, by definition, successful marketing reflects a customer-centric approach, focused on understanding what people really want, want, and dream, and offering products and services that meet those expectations in an authentic and valuable way.

Again underlining, the main elements of a brand are brand names, internet domains, logos, symbols, characters, slogans, jingles and packaging. According to Keller and Machado (2006), regardless of the decisions made about the product and how it is advertised, the brand elements can be chosen in a way that builds the greatest possible brand equity. Pointed out by the same authors cited above, according to the customer-based brand equity model (CBBE), brand elements can be chosen to increase brand recall;

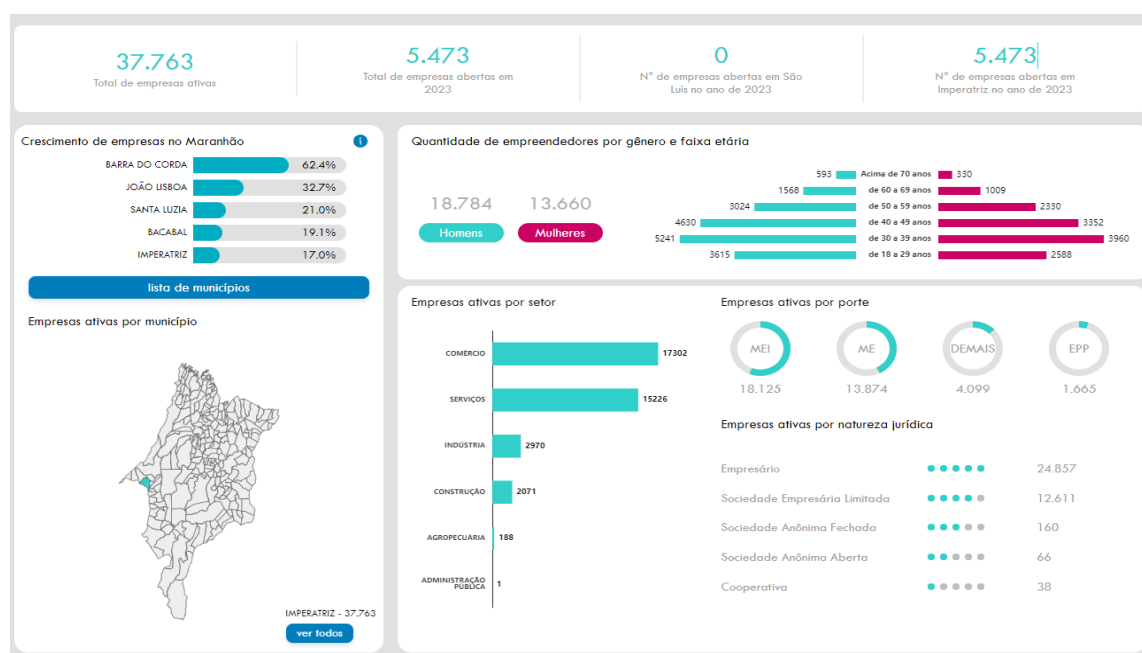


facilitate the formation of strong, favorable and exclusive brand associations; generate positive judgments and feelings about the brand.

## **ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The State of Maranhão has more than 415,807 (four hundred fifteen thousand and eight hundred seven companies), and in 2023 alone, more than 50 thousand were created. In the universe of thirty-seven thousand companies registered in the municipality of Imperatriz-MA, Individual Microentrepreneur-MEI concentrated 18,125 (eighteen thousand and one hundred twenty-five companies), while Micro Enterprises-ME grouped 13,874 (thirteen thousand and eight hundred seventy four companies), the Other companies that do not fit into the categories listed totaled 4,099 (four thousand and ninety nine companies), as an example of this category we can mention the company SUZANO, the large public and private banks such as Banco do Brasil, Caixa Economica, Bradesco and others, and finally, the Small Businesses - EPP gathered 1,665 (one thousand and six hundred sixty five firms). From January to November of this year, Imperatriz registered 5,473 (five thousand four hundred seventy three companies) new business. Among the municipalities that created the most new companies this year, the municipality of Imperatriz is in fifth place, behind Barra do Corda; João Lisboa; Santa Luzia and Bacabal. Other data that is worth highlighting refers to the number of entrepreneurs by gender and age group. The number of men with entrepreneurship is 18,784 (eighteen thousand seven hundred eighty four companies), while the performance of women in business generates 13,660 (thirteen thousand six hundred sixty companies). The large number of entrepreneurs are concentrated in the age group of 30 to 39 years old. It is worth noting that the data presented are updated until October of the current year.

Although women have played an important role in the process of implementing and managing the enterprises, generating employment and income for the population of the municipality, the number of male entrepreneurs still exceeds women. Among the actions of companies in the sector, the economy of the municipality is predominantly influenced by the tertiary sector: commerce with 17,302 and service with 15,226. Industry and civil construction concentrated 2,970 and 2,071, respectively. The operation in the agricultural sector is 188 companies.



Source: JUCEMA, 2023.

In a universe of 58 (fifty-eight) companies, questionnaires were randomly applied via interviews with employees and managers qualified to answer in 11 (eleven) companies that operate in the "Calçadão de Imperatriz", of these companies surveyed, five that correspond to 45.45%, operate in the Small Business category, 36.36% fit the Micro Company profile, 9.09% are included in the MEI and 9.09% NO, that is, they do not fit into any of the three categories. The companies surveyed have the most diverse areas of activity, which include retail trade, retail, cosmetics, footwear, pharmaceuticals, fabrics and clothing/bed, table and bath, intimate fashion, technology, etc. The respective companies have operations in the market ranging from one year and eight months to sixty-five years of experience, these companies are of fundamental importance for the dynamism of the local economy, since they generate employment and income, for the population of Imperatriz, not to mention indirect jobs.

When asked about the reason why the company sought to install itself in the "Calçadão de Imperatriz", almost 91% say that it is a strategic point and all the managers interviewed say that they can identify their respective target audiences. According to the answers obtained, they include women and beauty professionals, class A, B and C population, women, seamstresses and the like, etc. When the question is about where the target audiences are located, most companies, that is, 91%, point to the southwest region of Maranhão and the municipalities of Pará and Tocantins, close to Imperatriz do Maranhão.



When the question refers to the understanding of what the company does so that its brand is remembered by consumers, all managers say that their companies develop actions for this purpose and 91% say that a set of actions are developed internally in order to memorize their brands before their consumers, 10% of the managers said that planning and execution are developed by the headquarters, among the actions to make customers remember the brand, we can register investment in social networks, hiring the Marketing company based in São Paulo to manage the store page, investments in short courses for employees in order to improve service and consequently consolidate the brands, develop motivational actions to strengthen the brand, invest in advertising via radio and social networks.

According to Keller and Machado (2006), the way a product is sold or distributed can have a profound impact on a brand's brand equity and sales. For these authors, marketing channels are defined as "sets of interdependent organizations involved in the process of making a product or service available for use or consumption". Regarding the way in which the company identifies and selects its suppliers, the answers of 82% are related to the quality and price at the time of identification and selection, while for 18%, the process is done by the headquarters.

NOME DAS EMPRESAS	QUANTO TEMPO DE SERVIÇO	ÁREA DE ATUAÇÃO	QUANTIDADE DE FUNCIONÁRIOS	POR QUE ESCOLHEU O CALÇADÃO	PÚBLICO-ALVO DEFINIDO?	QUEM SÃO?	ONDE ESTÃO?	SUA MARCA É LEMBRADA PELOS CLIENTES?	SE SIM, QUAS AÇÕES PARA REFORÇAR A LEMBRANÇA DA MARCA?	DE QUE FORMA A EMPRESA IDENTIFICA E SELECIONA SEUS FORNECEDORES	QUAL FATOR DE SUCESSO PARA SEU NEGÓCIO
A	65 ANOS	COMÉRCIO VAREJISTA	255 PESSOAS	ANTES DA CONSTRUÇÃO DO MESMO	SIM	CLASSE A,B e C	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	SEMPRE FAZEMOS AÇÕES DE VENDAS OU MOTIVACIONAS PARA O FORTALECIMENTO DA NOSSA MARCA	COMPROMISSO, QUALIDADE, PREÇO	QUALIDADE NO ATENDIMENTO
B	16 ANOS	VAREJISTA COSMÉTICOS	10 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	MULHERES E PROFISSIONAIS DAS BELEZA	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	CURSOS, REDES SOCIAIS	PREÇO, QUALIDADE	PRODUTO E PREÇO
C	28 ANOS	CALÇADOS	3 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	MULHERES	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	REDES SOCIAIS	PREÇO, QUALIDADE	QUALIDADE DO PRODUTO, PREÇO E UM BOM ATENDIMENTO
D	aprox. 45 ANOS	FÁRMACOS	14 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	CLASSE A,B e C	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	AÇÕES COM ESCOLAS TÉCNICA, MÍDIA SOCIAL	PREÇO, QUALIDADE	QUALIDADE NO ATENDIMENTO
E	30 ANOS	TECIDOS E CONFECÇÕES (CAMISA, MESA E BANHO)	20 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	COSTUREIRAS E AFINS	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	MÍDIA SOCIAL, RADIO, REDES SOCIAIS	PREÇO, QUALIDADE, ENTREGA RÁPIDA, QUALIDADE NO ATENDIMENTO	FORÇA E CORAGEM PARA VENCER
F	5 ANOS	CONFECÇÕES	2 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	MULHERES	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	REDES SOCIAIS	PREÇO, QUALIDADE	QUALIDADE NO ATENDIMENTO
G	15 ANOS	CONFECÇÕES	17 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	CLASSE A,B e C (MULHERES)	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	PRODUTOS VEM SELECIONADOS DA MATRIZ (SÃO PAULO) PARA IMPERATRIZ	PREÇO, QUALIDADE	QUALIDADE DOS PRODUTOS
H	10 ANOS	MODA ÍNTIMA	7 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	CLASSE A,B e C (MULHERES)	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	REDES SOCIAIS, BRINDES PARA CLIENTES	PREÇO, QUALIDADE	QUALIDADE NO ATENDIMENTO E PREÇO
I	30 ANOS	CALÇADOS	8 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	NÃO SOUBE RESPONDER	NÃO SOUBE RESPONDER	SIM	REDES SOCIAIS	PREÇO, QUALIDADE	PREÇO JUSTO, QUALIDADE NO ATENDIMENTO
J	1,8 ANO	TECNOLOGIA	1 PESSOA	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	CLASSE A,B e C	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	REDES SOCIAIS	PREÇO, QUALIDADE	QUALIDADE NO ATENDIMENTO E PREÇO
K	30 ANOS	CONFECÇÕES	23 PESSOAS	PONTO ESTRATÉGICO	SIM	CLASSE B e C	REGIONAL (MA-PA-TO)	SIM	NÃO SOUBE RESPONDER	PRODUTOS VEM SELECIONADOS DA MATRIZ (SÃO PAULO) PARA IMPERATRIZ	QUALIDADE DOS PRODUTOS E PREÇOS

Regardless of the size of the company, whether it is formal or informal, all of them adopt some strategy. According to Birkinshaw and Mark (2017), a company's strategy explains where it is going and how it intends to get there, which implies figuring out where to act (which products to sell and which customers) and how to act (how to position your

brand in comparison to competitors). Authors cited above corroborating the idea of Henry Mintzberg, a famous management thinker, identified several models and perspectives. The search for brand positioning from the strategic perspective of the stores of "Calçadão de Imperatriz", aims to understand how the adoption of strategies of the researched companies to consolidate their brands, that is, to memorize their brands before their consumers.

Managing a brand is one of the fundamental challenges of organizational management, due to the growing access to information and the spread of technological resources, and this will depend on differentiating subsidies, such as strategic perception and brand franchising. According to Ribeiro (2023), the strategy depends on the organization's positioning, as well as on the path chosen and not explored to act creatively and efficiently for the market. Probably, the managers of the companies surveyed did not read marketing manuals to support their actions, but dealing with such a complex Brazilian taxation system, whether at the federal, state or even municipal level, facing a difficult process of identifying and selecting suppliers, adding to the high level of competitiveness that was driven by the globalization process and without leaving aside, the increase in the degree of demand of consumers, who most of the time value the quality of the product or service and affordable price, which consequently causes a double effort from the supplier. With all this intricateness, companies are forced to diagnose the market, adapt to the business environment, and formulate themselves either formally or informally. It is noteworthy that the majority, that is, 91%, work to consolidate their respective brands, or in other words, the majority work in the search for brand positioning, whether through social networks, investment in training professionals to improve service or in traditional marketing (radio advertising).

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The present work was the result of a scientific initiation research carried out in a time span of twelve months with the purpose of analyzing the search for brand positioning from the strategic perspective of retail stores that operate on the sidewalk of Imperatriz-MA. To achieve the recommended objectives, initially we surveyed and explored the material, questionnaires were prepared that consequently had their application through interviews with the managers of some companies that operate in the "Calçadão Imperatriz". With the

primary data, it is concluded that the companies surveyed have different profiles (MEI; ME; NO and EPP).

The aforementioned managers of the companies surveyed are aware of how important digital marketing is for the dissemination of their brands and almost all of them have at least one page on social networks to communicate with their respective target audience or potential customers, in addition to investing in training their employees and above all, In terms of service and all these actions are carried out by the direction of brand consolidation, make the consumer have a good memory of the company and create the expectation of this customer buying again. The managers of these companies have found in digital marketing an alternative to promote their business and at the same time provide their brands to consumers in the region. However, it is perceived that companies become aware of the importance of the brand, being active is the DNA of a company and is what connects the customer to the product, interviewed managers have difficulty understanding how much of the gain the brand itself brings to their companies.

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