
REINVENTING THE RIDE: VESPA'S BRAND REPOSITIONING IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Indian two-wheeler market has traditionally been shaped by functional purchase considerations such as affordability, fuel efficiency, durability, service network, resale value, and everyday commuting convenience. In such a market, most scooter brands compete by offering practical benefits to a broad consumer base. Vespa's approach in India differs from this dominant pattern. Rather than positioning itself as a mass-market commuter scooter, Vespa has attempted to build a premium lifestyle identity based on Italian heritage, retro-modern design, exclusivity, individuality, and emotional appeal.

This paper examines Vespa's brand repositioning strategy in India through a secondary research approach. It draws on existing literature on brand repositioning, customer-based brand equity, heritage branding, premium positioning, experiential marketing, digital engagement, and consumer identity. The paper also uses case-based and industry-oriented secondary material to understand how Vespa shifted its consumer meaning from a nostalgic scooter brand to an aspirational urban lifestyle product. The focus of this paper is not on primary consumer survey findings or mechanical product performance, but on the strategic branding logic behind Vespa's repositioning.

The study argues that Vespa's repositioning is built on a deliberate strategic choice: avoiding direct competition with high-volume utility scooter brands and instead creating a differentiated premium niche. Vespa's repositioning is supported by five major levers: heritage, design, premium pricing, selective brand experience, and digital/lifestyle communication. Together, these levers help the brand create symbolic value beyond transportation. For its target consumers, Vespa represents style, individuality, status, and self-expression rather than only mobility.

At the same time, the paper critically evaluates the limitations of this strategy. Vespa's premium pricing and selective distribution strengthen exclusivity, but they may also restrict broader adoption in a price-sensitive market. This creates a central strategic tension: the same choices that make Vespa distinctive also limit its mass-market potential. Therefore, Vespa's repositioning should not be assessed only through market share. It should also be evaluated through brand equity, premium perception, emotional differentiation, niche loyalty, and long-term relevance.

The paper concludes that Vespa's repositioning appears strategically coherent because its heritage, product aesthetics, pricing logic, communication style, and customer experience support the same premium lifestyle identity. However, long-term sustainability will depend on how effectively Vespa balances exclusivity with accessibility, heritage with innovation, and global Italian identity with Indian consumer relevance.

KEYWORDS: Brand Repositioning, Vespa India, Heritage Branding, Premium Positioning, Consumer Perception, Lifestyle Branding, Emotional Branding, Experiential Marketing, Digital Marketing, Brand Equity, Premium Scooter Market, Indian Two-Wheeler Industry

INTRODUCTION

Brand repositioning has become an important strategic tool for companies operating in markets where consumer expectations, competitive intensity, and cultural meanings change over time. A brand may have strong recognition and historical value, but if its image no longer matches the expectations of current consumers, it may gradually lose relevance. Repositioning allows such a brand to reshape consumer perception, communicate a renewed value proposition, and appeal to new or evolving target segments without necessarily abandoning its original identity.

The Indian two-wheeler market provides a strong context for studying brand repositioning because it is highly competitive, price-sensitive, and dominated by practical purchase considerations. Consumers in this category often evaluate scooters on the basis of affordability, fuel efficiency, durability, service availability, resale value, and daily commuting convenience. As a result, most scooter brands compete by emphasizing utility, reliability, and value for money. In such a market, creating a premium lifestyle identity is difficult because consumers may question whether the higher price is justified.

Vespa is a particularly relevant case in this context because it is not merely a scooter brand; it is a heritage brand with strong symbolic associations. Globally, Vespa is associated with

Italian design, freedom, youthfulness, individuality, urban style, and cultural charm. Its distinctive design language and long-standing legacy give it a different brand personality compared to conventional scooter brands. However, these global associations had to be translated carefully in India, where the scooter category has historically been more functional than symbolic.

When Vespa re-entered the Indian market, it did not position itself as a mass-market commuter scooter. Instead, it adopted a premium, design-led, and lifestyle-oriented positioning. This was a deliberate strategic choice. Vespa avoided direct competition with high-volume scooter brands that compete on price, mileage, and service reach. Instead, it attempted to create a niche for consumers who value design, individuality, exclusivity, and emotional ownership. In this sense, Vespa was not selling only mobility; it was selling a lifestyle expression.

This repositioning required alignment across multiple brand elements. Vespa's retro-modern design preserved its heritage appeal, while its premium pricing signalled exclusivity. Its showroom experience, digital communication, lifestyle imagery, and experiential marketing helped reinforce the perception that Vespa is not an ordinary scooter but an aspirational product. These elements together shaped a repositioning strategy built around style, status, identity, and emotional value.

At the same time, Vespa's repositioning also creates important strategic challenges. India remains a market where price sensitivity and service accessibility strongly influence purchase decisions. A premium price may strengthen exclusivity, but it can also restrict adoption. Selective distribution may support a premium image, but it can also reduce convenience and consumer confidence. Therefore, Vespa's repositioning cannot be evaluated only as a branding success story; it must also be examined through the trade-offs between exclusivity and accessibility.

This paper studies Vespa's brand repositioning in India through a secondary research approach. It synthesizes existing literature on brand repositioning, heritage branding, premium positioning, customer-based brand equity, experiential marketing, digital engagement, and consumer identity. The paper focuses on how Vespa's brand meaning has shifted from a nostalgic or traditional scooter identity to a premium lifestyle identity. It also examines how this repositioning affects consumer perception, competitive differentiation, and long-term strategic sustainability in the Indian two-wheeler market.

Review of Literature

- **Brand repositioning and perception management**

Brand repositioning refers to changing how consumers perceive a brand while retaining its core identity. Kotler and Keller (2016) explain that positioning is about occupying a distinct place in the consumer's mind. Vespa's repositioning fits this concept because the brand did not abandon its heritage, design language, or name. Instead, it changed the meaning attached to the brand in India: from a nostalgic scooter to a premium lifestyle product.

- **Brand identity as a source of differentiation**

Aaker (2014) explains that strong brands differentiate themselves through clear identity systems, including values, personality, symbols, and emotional associations. Vespa's identity is built around Italian style, retro-modern design, individuality, and exclusivity. These elements help Vespa stand apart from competitors that focus mainly on mileage, affordability, and practical utility.

- **Heritage branding and authenticity**

Heritage branding literature suggests that brands with a strong historical foundation can create trust, nostalgia, and emotional meaning. Urde, Greyser, and Balmer (2007) argue that heritage can act as a strategic resource when it provides authenticity and differentiation. Beverland (2005) also highlights authenticity as an important driver of consumer trust. Vespa benefits from this logic because its Italian origin and design legacy make its premium positioning more believable.

- **Customer-based brand equity**

Keller's customer-based brand equity framework explains that brand strength depends on the associations consumers hold in memory (Keller, 2013). Vespa's repositioning attempts to build strong, favourable, and unique associations around style, premium ownership, Italian design, and self-expression. Even if the brand does not dominate the scooter market by volume, it can still create strong brand equity if consumers perceive it as distinctive and aspirational.

- **Iconic and cultural branding**

Holt (2004) explains that iconic brands move beyond functional value and become cultural symbols. Vespa has historically carried meanings linked to freedom, independence, romance, and European lifestyle. In India, Vespa's repositioning draws from these symbolic meanings to appeal to consumers who want their vehicle to reflect taste, personality, and status.

- **Premium positioning and symbolic value**

Premium brands often create value through exclusivity, aspiration, controlled access, emotional appeal, and symbolic meaning. Okonkwo (2007) explains that premium and luxury-oriented brands are not valued only for functional benefits but also for the lifestyle meanings they communicate. Vespa applies some of these principles through premium pricing, selective brand experience, design-led communication, and aspirational storytelling.

- **Experiential marketing and the experience economy**

Schmitt (1999) argues that consumers are influenced by sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1999) similarly explain that value can be created through memorable experiences. Vespa's showroom experience, riding communities, lifestyle events, and digital campaigns support this logic by making ownership feel emotional and social rather than purely functional.

- **Digital engagement and modern brand communication**

Kotler's digital-era marketing perspective highlights that modern consumers are influenced by social media, online communities, storytelling, and interactive engagement (Kotler, 2017). Vespa's use of lifestyle-led visuals, digital storytelling, and social media communication is important because its target consumers are young, urban, and image-conscious.

- **Consumer identity and lifestyle consumption**

Consumer behaviour literature suggests that consumers often choose brands not only for what they do but also for what they represent. Vespa appeals to consumers who value individuality, style, uniqueness, and status. This makes Vespa relevant to identity-based consumption, where ownership becomes a form of self-expression.

Synthesis of literature

The literature suggests that Vespa's repositioning is not based on a single factor. It is the result of an integrated branding strategy where heritage provides authenticity, design creates distinction, premium pricing signals exclusivity, experiential marketing builds emotional connection, and digital engagement connects the brand with younger consumers. The central strategic issue is whether Vespa can maintain this premium identity while remaining sufficiently accessible in a price-sensitive market.

Research Gap

- **Gap 1: Limited integration of heritage branding and emerging-market price sensitivity**

Existing literature explains heritage branding and premium positioning, but Vespa's case requires both concepts to be understood within India's value-driven two-wheeler market. The gap lies in studying how a heritage brand can sustain premium positioning in a market where affordability, mileage, and service reach remain important.

- **Gap 2: Insufficient focus on the trade-off between exclusivity and accessibility**

Premium brands often create desire through higher prices and controlled access. However, in India's two-wheeler market, limited access can reduce purchase confidence. Vespa's strategy creates this tension clearly: exclusivity strengthens the brand, but limited reach may restrict adoption.

- **Gap 3: Need to examine repositioning beyond advertising**

Repositioning is often discussed as a communication exercise. Vespa's case shows that repositioning is broader. It involves product design, pricing, showroom experience, digital presence, consumer community, and ownership meaning. This paper addresses the need to treat repositioning as a full brand-system change.

- **Gap 4: Limited attention to lifestyle consumption in functional categories**

Scooters are traditionally functional products. Vespa's repositioning shifts the category conversation from utility to lifestyle. This creates a research opportunity to understand how lifestyle branding works in a product category normally associated with practicality.

- **Gap 5: Need for balanced evaluation of repositioning success**

A premium niche brand should not be judged only by sales volume or market share. At the same time, brand equity alone cannot guarantee long-term growth. This paper addresses the need to evaluate Vespa's repositioning through both strengths and constraints: brand distinctiveness, premium perception, consumer aspiration, pricing barriers, and accessibility challenges.

Research Objectives

- **To study Vespa's brand repositioning strategy in India**

This objective focuses on how Vespa shifted its brand meaning from a traditional or nostalgic scooter to a premium lifestyle product. It examines the strategic logic behind this shift.

- **To analyse the major repositioning levers used by Vespa**

The paper studies the role of heritage, retro-modern design, premium pricing, selective distribution, digital communication, experiential marketing, and showroom experience in shaping Vespa's brand image.

- **To examine Vespa's positioning against mainstream scooter competitors**

Vespa competes in the same broad scooter category as brands such as Honda, TVS, Suzuki, and Yamaha, but its positioning differs sharply. This objective evaluates how Vespa separates itself from utility-led competitors.

- **To understand consumer perception of Vespa as a lifestyle brand**

This objective studies how Vespa's target consumers may perceive the brand in terms of style, individuality, status, exclusivity, nostalgia, and aspirational ownership.

- **To identify the strategic challenges in Vespa's repositioning**

This includes high pricing, limited dealership reach, service accessibility, price-sensitive consumer behaviour, and competition from emerging premium and electric scooters.

- **To evaluate the sustainability of Vespa's premium niche positioning**

This objective examines whether Vespa can sustain its differentiated position over time by balancing exclusivity with accessibility and heritage with modern relevance.

Consumer Behaviour and Perception

- **From functional buying to symbolic buying**

In the mass scooter market, consumers usually ask whether the scooter is affordable, fuel-efficient, durable, and easy to service. Vespa targets a different buying logic. Its potential consumer may ask whether the scooter looks distinctive, matches personal style, feels premium, and communicates individuality. This shift from functional buying to symbolic buying is central to Vespa's repositioning.

- **Young urban consumers as a key audience**

Vespa's repositioning is most relevant to young urban buyers, including students, young professionals, and lifestyle-conscious consumers. These groups are more likely to value aesthetics, identity, social visibility, and brand experience. They may be more open to paying a premium if the brand reflects their desired self-image.

- **Design as the first layer of perception**

Vespa's retro-modern design creates immediate differentiation. In a category where many scooters are evaluated on practical similarity, design becomes a major perception driver. The

shape, colour, finish, and Italian styling create a premium visual identity before the consumer even evaluates technical specifications.

- **Heritage as emotional reassurance**

Heritage gives Vespa authenticity. Consumers may perceive Vespa as more than a newly positioned premium scooter because it carries a long-standing cultural identity. This heritage helps the brand feel established and emotionally rich, but it must be communicated in a modern way so that it does not appear outdated.

- **Premium pricing as a perception signal**

Vespa's higher price acts as a signal of exclusivity. In premium branding, price is not only a cost; it is also part of the brand message. However, this works only if consumers believe the design, brand image, and ownership experience justify the premium. Otherwise, the same price can become a barrier.

- **Showroom and ownership experience as brand reinforcement**

For a premium lifestyle brand, the buying experience must match the brand promise. Boutique-style showrooms, premium display, lifestyle-led communication, and personalized engagement reinforce the idea that Vespa is not an ordinary commuter scooter. The customer experience therefore becomes part of the repositioning.

- **Digital image-building among younger consumers**

Vespa's target audience is influenced by digital platforms, visual content, influencer culture, and social identity. Social media helps Vespa project itself as stylish, urban, and aspirational. This matters because the consumer's perception of Vespa may be shaped as much by digital imagery as by showroom visits.

- **Status and self-expression as purchase motivations**

Vespa appeals to consumers who want their vehicle to communicate something about them. Ownership can signal creativity, independence, premium taste, and lifestyle orientation. This makes Vespa relevant to consumers who use brands as tools of self-expression.

- **Price sensitivity as a behavioural constraint**

Even aspirational consumers may hesitate if the price difference between Vespa and mass-market scooters feels too large. This means Vespa's repositioning depends on maintaining a strong perceived value gap. If consumers see the scooter only as stylish but expensive, purchase intention may weaken.

Theoretical Framework

- **Core framework**

Vespa's repositioning can be explained through the relationship between brand strategy, consumer perception, and purchase intention. The brand uses repositioning levers to reshape consumer meaning. Consumers interpret these levers through identity, aspiration, trust, and perceived value. This eventually influences brand equity and purchase intention among a niche audience.

- **Conceptual model**

Heritage + Retro-Modern Design + Premium Pricing + Selective Experience + Digital Storytelling

→ *Perception of Style, Exclusivity, Authenticity, and Lifestyle Value*

→ *Emotional Connection and Brand Equity*

→ *Purchase Intention among Aspirational Urban Consumers*

→ *Sustainable Premium Niche Positioning*

- **Brand positioning theory**

Brand positioning explains how a brand creates a distinct place in the consumer's mind. Vespa's position is not built around being the cheapest or most practical scooter. It is built around being distinctive, premium, stylish, and emotionally expressive.

- **Brand identity theory**

Brand identity includes the stable elements that make a brand recognizable and meaningful. Vespa's identity includes Italian heritage, classic scooter design, individuality, and cultural style. Repositioning works because Vespa modernizes its appeal without abandoning these identity elements.

- **Customer-based brand equity theory**

Customer-based brand equity explains how consumer associations create brand value. Vespa's value depends on whether consumers associate it with premium design, authenticity, status, and lifestyle. These associations can create strong brand equity even if the brand does not dominate the mass market.

- **Heritage branding theory**

Heritage branding explains how history and authenticity strengthen emotional connection. Vespa's heritage gives it depth and legitimacy. However, heritage must be balanced with modern relevance, otherwise the brand may become nostalgic but not aspirational.

- **Premium positioning theory**

Premium positioning uses higher price, controlled access, superior design, and aspirational communication to create perceived value. Vespa applies this by charging a premium and communicating design-led exclusivity. The risk is that premium positioning can fail if the perceived value does not justify the price.

- **Experiential marketing theory**

Experiential marketing explains that consumers form stronger attachments when brands create memorable experiences. Vespa's showroom environment, riding culture, events, and lifestyle campaigns support this by making ownership feel emotional and social rather than purely functional.

- **Consumer identity theory**

Consumer identity theory suggests that consumers choose brands that reflect who they are or who they want to become. Vespa's repositioning appeals to consumers who want to be seen as stylish, individualistic, creative, and premium.

Need and Importance of the Study

- **Importance for understanding repositioning in a competitive category**

The scooter market is crowded and largely functional. Vespa's case shows how a brand can escape direct price-based competition by creating a differentiated emotional and lifestyle position.

- **Importance for heritage brands**

Many heritage brands face the challenge of staying relevant to younger consumers. Vespa demonstrates how a brand can preserve its legacy while adapting its design, communication, and consumer experience for a modern audience.

- **Importance for premiumization in India**

Urban Indian consumers are increasingly open to premium products in categories that were once dominated by utility. Vespa's case helps explain how premiumization works when consumers begin to value design, status, and identity along with functionality.

- **Importance for marketers and brand managers**

The study highlights that repositioning cannot depend on advertising alone. Product design, pricing, distribution, showroom experience, digital communication, and consumer community must all support the same brand promise.

- **Importance for consumer behaviour understanding**

Vespa's repositioning shows that consumers do not always buy vehicles only for functional reasons. Emotional benefits, identity expression, and symbolic value can influence purchase decisions, especially in premium segments.

- **Importance for digital-era branding**

Although Vespa is a physical mobility product, its perception is increasingly shaped through digital platforms. This makes digital storytelling and visual branding important parts of modern repositioning.

- **Academic importance**

The paper contributes to understanding brand repositioning, heritage branding, consumer perception, emotional branding, and lifestyle marketing through a case-based secondary research lens.

Scope of the Study

- **Geographical scope**

The study focuses on Vespa's repositioning in the Indian market. Global references are used only where they help explain Vespa's heritage or brand identity.

- **Conceptual scope**

The paper focuses on brand repositioning, consumer perception, heritage branding, premium positioning, experiential marketing, and lifestyle consumption.

- **Competitive scope**

Vespa is compared conceptually with mainstream scooter brands that emphasize affordability, utility, and reach. The comparison is used to clarify Vespa's differentiated position rather than to conduct a technical product comparison.

- **Consumer scope**

The study focuses on urban, aspirational, design-conscious, and lifestyle-oriented consumers. It does not claim to represent all Indian scooter buyers.

- **Marketing scope**

- The study includes product aesthetics, pricing, communication, digital branding, showroom experience, community engagement, and consumer-facing brand touchpoints.

Exclusions

The paper does not focus on engineering design, engine performance, production efficiency,

financial accounting, or detailed sales forecasting. These may affect business performance, but they are outside the branding focus of this paper.

- **Secondary research boundary**

The study does not present new survey data, interviews, field observations, or experiments. It is based on secondary literature, case material, industry-based insights, and conceptual analysis.

- **Cautious use of numerical indicators**

Any trend-based or correlation-based indicators from the base project are treated as supportive interpretation, not as independent proof of causality. This is important because detailed internal company data such as exact marketing budgets or consumer analytics may not be publicly available.

Research Design and Methodology

- **Research design**

The study follows a secondary research design. It uses existing literature, brand case material, company-related information, and industry-oriented sources to analyse Vespa's repositioning.

- **Nature of the study**

The study is descriptive and analytical. It is descriptive because it explains Vespa's repositioning strategy and market context. It is analytical because it evaluates how Vespa's brand levers shape consumer perception and strategic positioning.

- **Research approach**

The approach is qualitative and conceptual. The paper does not attempt to collect fresh primary data. Instead, it synthesizes existing knowledge to develop a structured understanding of Vespa's repositioning.

- **Method of analysis**

The study uses thematic analysis. The material is grouped into themes such as heritage branding, premium positioning, lifestyle consumption, emotional branding, experiential marketing, digital engagement, consumer identity, and competitive differentiation.

- **Comparative analysis**

Vespa is compared conceptually with mass-market scooter brands. The comparison focuses on positioning logic: Vespa emphasizes lifestyle and exclusivity, while mainstream competitors generally emphasize utility and accessibility.

- **Methodological limitations**

Since the study is based on secondary research, it cannot directly measure current consumer attitudes. It also depends on the availability and reliability of published sources. Therefore, the conclusions should be understood as strategic and conceptual, not statistically conclusive.

CONCLUSION

Vespa's repositioning in India demonstrates how a heritage brand can adapt to a changing market while preserving its core identity. In a two-wheeler category largely dominated by utility, affordability, mileage, and service reach, Vespa chose a different strategic path. Rather than competing directly with mass-market scooter brands, it positioned itself around Italian heritage, retro-modern design, emotional appeal, premium pricing, and lifestyle meaning. This repositioning allowed Vespa to create a distinct identity in a crowded scooter market.

The study shows that Vespa's repositioning is strategically coherent because its major brand elements support the same premium lifestyle image. Its design communicates distinctiveness, its heritage provides authenticity, its pricing signals exclusivity, its showroom experience reinforces premium ownership, and its digital communication connects the brand with younger, urban, aspirational consumers. Together, these elements help Vespa move beyond the idea of a scooter as a basic commuting vehicle and position it as a symbol of individuality, taste, and self-expression.

A key insight from the paper is that Vespa's repositioning works because it changes the basis of consumer evaluation. Instead of asking whether Vespa is the most affordable or practical scooter, the target consumer is encouraged to see Vespa as a product that reflects personal style and lifestyle aspiration. This shift from functional value to symbolic value is central to the brand's repositioning strategy. Vespa's success, therefore, should not be assessed only through mass-market share, but also through brand equity, premium perception, emotional differentiation, and niche loyalty.

However, the repositioning also involves clear limitations. Vespa's premium pricing strengthens its aspirational image, but it may also reduce purchase intention among price-sensitive consumers. Similarly, selective distribution supports exclusivity, but limited dealership and service reach can create concerns about ownership convenience. These challenges are particularly important in India, where after-sales support and value-for-money perceptions strongly influence two-wheeler purchase decisions. Therefore, Vespa must

continuously justify its premium through design, experience, reliability, service support, and emotional value.

The paper also highlights that successful repositioning is not achieved through advertising alone. A brand cannot simply claim a new position; it must consistently deliver that position across product design, pricing, communication, distribution, customer experience, and post-purchase engagement. Vespa's case shows that repositioning becomes stronger when all consumer-facing touchpoints communicate the same brand meaning. This alignment is what makes Vespa's repositioning credible rather than superficial.

From a managerial perspective, Vespa's future growth depends on maintaining its premium identity while improving accessibility. The brand should avoid diluting its exclusivity through aggressive discounting, but it can reduce purchase barriers through financing options, stronger service support, curated ownership packages, and selective expansion into suitable urban and Tier-2 markets. Vespa can also strengthen its relevance by localizing communication for Indian consumers while preserving its Italian identity.

In conclusion, Vespa is a strong example of brand repositioning in an emerging-market context. Its journey shows that a product traditionally viewed through functional criteria can be repositioned as a lifestyle and identity-driven brand when heritage, design, pricing, communication, and customer experience are aligned. Vespa's long-term sustainability will depend on how effectively it balances heritage with innovation, exclusivity with accessibility, and global brand identity with Indian consumer expectations.

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