

***Optimal Distinctiveness: A Critical  
Reflection On What We Have Learned  
And Way Forward***

***Matthew A. Barlow***

***August 1, 2021***



**Future Research**

***IN OUR GRIT, OUR GLORY™***

- **A lot of the prior work in OD at the product level has examined products that operate in a single product category**
  - For example, apps on the Google Play store.
- **However, many products span multiple product categories.**
- **What are the unique implications of spanning product categories on optimal positioning strategies for products?**





- **Being a member of multiple product categories leads to an increase in the possible number of reference points for choosing an optimal positioning strategy.**
  - Each category has different sets of competitors.
  - Each category likely has one or more Exemplar products (which may/may not be similar to one another).
  - Each category has its own prototypical members (but potentially could have multiple based on different aspects).
- **How does an organization choose which reference points to concentrate on when choosing a positioning strategy?**

- **There are multiple ways to signal similarity or differentiation**
  - Product Category Memberships
  - Product Features
  - Product Descriptions
  - Others
- **Can an organization use one (or more) of these to signal both similarity and differentiation in different ways?**
- **For example, a product can share product categories with an exemplar, while using the product description and features to differentiate.**







## Example from the Board Game Industry





## Reference Points: Top Ranked Games in Select Categories

**Age of Reason – Spirit Island**  
**Civilization – Twilight Imperium: Fourth Edition**

**Economic – Brass: Birmingham**

**Exploration – Gloomhaven**

**Napoleonic – Command & Colors: Napoleonics**

**Negotiation – Twilight Imperium: Fourth Edition**

**Pike and Shot – Sekigahara: The Unification of Japan**

**Political – Twilight Imperium: Fourth Edition**

**Renaissance – Azul**

**Video Game Theme – Mechs vs. Minions**

**Wargame – Twilight Imperium: Fourth Edition**



# Multidimensionality: Signaling Similarity/Distinctiveness

## Categories

Age of Reason

Civilization

Economic

Exploration

Napoleonic

Negotiation

Pike and Shot

Political

Renaissance

Video Game Theme

Wargame



## Product Features/Game Mechanisms

Action Points

Area Majority / Influence

Area Movement

Campaign / Battle Card Driven

Dice Rolling

Hand Management

Scenario / Mission / Campaign Game

## Game Description

Govern one of Europe's great nations through the Ages of Discovery, Reformation, Absolutism and Revolutions — spanning more than three hundred years of history. Lift your nation out of the slumber of the Dark Ages and create a glorious empire, through clever diplomacy, brave exploration and ruthless conquest. Each of the playable nations have their own very unique opportunities and challenges.

*Europa Universalis* is a strategy board game that gives players a full 4X game experience in a historical setting. Through strategic use of cards and careful management of resources you can expand your realm on the map board, while at the same time developing the internal machinery of the state on your player board. You must build diplomatic relations that support your ambition, and you can explore far-away parts of the world. By recruiting skilled advisors and carefully investing monarch power in great ideas, province development, and long-term strategies, you may well be able to outshine your historical counterparts.

This is a game for 2–6 players (depending on the various scenarios included). The goal of the game is to build the most successful empire, and points are scored for (amongst other things) owned provinces, explored territories, diplomatic relations, victories in wars, and secret objectives that have been accomplished.

The board game is based on the famous strategy game series by Paradox Interactive and captures the heart and soul of the grandness that makes the computer game so magnificent.

*Includes solo mode by Dávid Turczi  
—description from the publisher*

Link to Example Game



[https://boardgamegeek.com/image/5038922/  
europa-universalis-price-power](https://boardgamegeek.com/image/5038922/europa-universalis-price-power)