

The Effects of Brand Name Suggestiveness on Advertising Recall

The authors report the results of a laboratory experiment examining the effects of the meaningfulness of brand names on recall of advertising. The findings indicate that a brand name explicitly conveying a product benefit (e.g., PicturePerfect televisions) leads to higher recall of an advertised benefit claim consistent in meaning with the brand name compared with a nonsuggestive brand name (e.g., Emporium televisions). Conversely, a suggestive brand name leads to lower recall of a subsequently advertised benefit claim unrelated in product meaning (e.g., superior sound) compared with a nonsuggestive brand name. The authors discuss implications of these findings for marketers with respect to advertising strategies and the optimal use of meaningful brand names in building and managing brand equity.

Brand names come in many different forms—they can be based on real people, places, animals, birds, things, and objects or just be made up. The choice of a brand name has been suggested as one important means to build brand equity for a new product (Aaker 1991, 1996; Keller 1993, 1998). Choosing the proper brand name—often the centerpiece of introductory marketing programs—can enhance brand awareness and/or help create a favorable brand image for a newly introduced product. Recognizing the important and complex role of brand names as part of marketing strategy, several different possible criteria have been proposed for choosing brand names to build brand equity (Robertson 1987).

One often-noted branding objective is to choose “inherently meaningful” brand names, so that the name itself conveys relevant product information. Brand names can be made meaningful in a variety of different ways. For example, brand names can be chosen to reinforce semantically the corresponding product category (e.g., Lean Cuisine low-calorie frozen foods, JustJuice juices, *Newsweek* weekly news magazine) or a particular attribute or benefit making up the main selling point of a brand (e.g., DieHard auto batteries, Mop’n Glow floor cleaner, Beautyrest mattresses). The first branding strategy should enhance brand name awareness and identification with the product category. Our interest is in the second branding strategy—which we refer to as choosing a “suggestive” brand name—and its costs and benefits.

To illustrate some of the key issues involved with suggestive brand names, assume that a new brand of luggage is to be positioned initially as “durable.” In such a case, is it easier to develop a strong brand image initially by giving it a brand name suggestive of that positioning, such as LifeLong, compared with giving it a nonsuggestive brand name, such as Ocean? On the basis of an associative strength theory of memory, we argue that judiciously choosing suggestive brand names can facilitate initial brand positioning. Under the same scenario, if the brand later were to be advertised as having a “fashionable appearance,” which brand name would be more beneficial? If branding the luggage as LifeLong initially does create stronger brand associations in memory, do these more developed knowledge structures facilitate the linkage of new associations?

On the basis of interference theories of memory, we argue that choosing suggestive brand names actually can hamper subsequent marketing communication efforts to reposition the brand in new, unrelated directions. That is, when strong links have been formed in memory between a suggestive brand name and its original product positioning, consumers might fail to create new brand associations when exposed to marketing communications designed to reposition the brand. Moreover, even if new brand associations are formed, consumers might overlook them in favor of brand associations related to the original product positioning when later thinking about the brand. Consequently, it may be easier to add new brand associations if the luggage initially is named Ocean than if named LifeLong.

Thus, our general research interest is in how the suggestiveness of a brand name influences marketing communication effectiveness. Our specific research questions are whether (1) a suggestive brand name facilitates initial positioning of a product, but (2) a nonsuggestive brand name facilitates later repositioning if necessary. To address these issues, the article is organized as follows: First, we review relevant prior research to develop hypotheses; after describing the experimental methodology and results, we discuss implications of the research findings.

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Conceptual Background

Independent of the decisions made about the product and how it is marketed, brand names can be chosen to build as much brand equity as possible. That is, brand names can be chosen (1) that are inherently memorable and therefore facilitate recall and/or recognition in purchase and/or consumption settings, and/or (2) whose inherent meanings enhance the formation of strong, favorable, and unique brand associations consistent with that meaning.

A memorable and meaningful brand name offers many advantages. Because consumers often do not examine much information in making product decisions, brand names must be recognized and recalled easily and be inherently descriptive and persuasive. Moreover, memorable or meaningful brand names can reduce the burden on marketing communications to build awareness and link brand associations. The different associations that arise from the likability and appeal of brand names also can play a critical role in the equity of a brand, especially when few other brand associations exist in memory.

Suggestive Brand Names

Thus, one key consideration in choosing a brand name is the extent to which it conveys descriptive or persuasive information. First, in terms of descriptive meaning, to what extent does the brand name suggest something about the product category? How likely would it be that a consumer could identify correctly the corresponding product category or categories for the brand on the basis of the brand name alone? Relatedly, does the brand name seem credible in the product category? In other words, is the content of the brand name consistent with what consumers would expect or want to see from a brand in that product category? Second, in terms of persuasive meaning, to what extent does the brand name suggest something about the particular kind of product the brand is—for example, in terms of key attributes or benefits? Does it suggest something about a product ingredient or the type of person who might use the brand?

A *suggestive* brand name can be defined as a brand name that conveys relevant attribute or benefit information in a particular product context. For a brand name to be deemed suggestive, it must have well-defined associations or meanings that could be seen as relevant in a product setting. In other words, associations for a suggestive brand name must be both salient and relevant in a particular product context. A meaning-laden name might be suggestive in different ways depending on the product context involved and the particular associations that are evoked. For example, though "Chief" might convey stain removal when used as a brand name of detergent, it might convey heritage and leadership if used as a brand name of gasoline. Thus, in some sense, there is a continuum of the suggestiveness of a brand name, ranging from completely nonsuggestive to highly suggestive, depending on the latent and evocable meaning of the name as well as the product category contexts involved.

A brand name that is suggestive in a particular product category should offer two important benefits. First, even in the absence of any marketing activity, the semantic meaning of a suggestive brand name should enable consumers to infer certain attributes or benefits. For example, consumers

might assume on the basis of their names alone that Day-break cereal is wholesome and natural, Chief laundry detergent removes tough stains, and Diamond toothpaste whitens and brightens teeth. Second, the suggestiveness or meaningfulness of a brand name should facilitate marketing communication efforts designed to link corresponding attributes or benefits to the brand (e.g., claims related to product attributes or benefits). Research has shown that meaningful brand names that are visually represented are easier to remember (cf. Childers and Houston 1984; Lutz and Lutz 1977) and can enhance development of memory structures for brand-related information communicated in advertising. Furthermore, in a series of studies, Keller (1987, 1991a, b) shows that nonsuggestive brand names containing no product meaning often serve as poor reminders for communication effects stored in memory. In such cases, supplementary retrieval cues containing information more specifically related to the advertisements themselves are necessary for successful recall of the corresponding brand claims.

These research findings are consistent with the associative strength theory of information recall, which maintains that the effectiveness of a retrieval cue depends on how strongly associated it is with target information (Ellis and Hunt 1983). According to this theory, a brand name that semantically suggests a product benefit might be associated more strongly in memory and facilitate recall of that benefit, especially in those situations in which the brand name is used as a retrieval cue by consumers (e.g., when making an in-store decision). This reasoning suggests the following hypothesis:

H₁: Suggestive brand names will lead to greater recall of advertised benefit claims that are consistent in meaning than nonsuggestive brand names.

Brand Repositioning

Because of changing consumer needs, competitive actions, or any other changes in the marketing environment over time, managers may need to reposition their brands through new marketing communication campaigns. A brand may need to advertise new claims to link associations that function either as additional points of difference for the brand versus competitors or as points of parity designed to negate competitors' intended points of difference. One problem that potentially can arise when advertising attempts to link a new, unrelated brand association is that consumers still might continue to think of the brand in the "old way" because of strong associations already in memory. As a result, consumers might fail to incorporate new advertising information into their brand knowledge structures or fail to retrieve new advertising information when making later brand-related decisions.

Interference effects. One important cause of forgetting of information is "interference" as a result of additional, related information in memory (Murnane and Shiffrin 1991; Postman and Underwood 1973). Two types of interference exist: *Proactive interference* arises from existing information in memory encountered before exposure to target information; *retroactive interference* arises from new information encountered after exposure to target information. A

variety of mechanisms help explain interference effects. For example, related information already existing in memory can result in weaker associations to target information during initial encoding (Melton and Irwin 1940) and/or the inability to access target information during later retrieval (Tulving 1974). Retrieval-based explanations are based on the notion of response competition (McGeoch 1942). For example, the associative network memory model predicts that the more pieces of information linked to a particular node, the more likely it is that the "spreading activation" elicited from that node when it is cued will fail to reach the threshold level necessary for recall of any one specific piece of information.

In marketing, interference effects due to competitive advertising have been demonstrated (Burke and Srull 1988; Keller 1987, 1991b): The more competing brands advertising in a product category, the greater the likelihood that the target brand and its advertised claims will be either confused with other information or inaccessible. In other words, if multiple brands advertise in a product category, overlapping advertising memory traces might confuse the correspondence of advertisements and brands in the product category or result in sufficiently weak associations between brands and their advertising memory traces so that some communication effects cannot be recalled at all. Besides advertisements for other brands, Burke and Srull (1988) also show that another possible source of interference effects is from related advertising for different products for the same brand; that is, advertising for different models in a brand's product line might interfere with one another.

Effects of prior advertising. Along these lines, previous advertising for a brand could inhibit recall of a newly advertised claim for the brand that is unrelated in meaning. Existing brand associations created by old advertising campaigns could create proactive interference effects, so that consumers fail to form strong brand associations to newly advertised benefit claims during encoding or to access any newly stored communication effects during later retrieval. In terms of the latter effects, research has shown that factors that increase recall of some information from an advertisement can reduce recall of other information from that advertisement (Alba and Chattopadhyay 1985; Keller 1991a). These inhibition effects might result because people either "fixate" on information that they can recall, which makes it more difficult to recall other information not yet recalled, or fail even to try to search memory for other information.

Thus, strong associations to the original benefit claims might make it difficult to link new associations at encoding or to access new benefit claims at retrieval. These interference or inhibition effects may be particularly likely with suggestive brand names. As stated in H_1 , initially advertising a benefit claim consistent in meaning with a suggestive brand name should lead to strong brand associations and facilitate later recall of that claim. If a suggestive brand name serves as a strong cue in part because of its semantic meaning, however, it may continue to facilitate recall of previously advertised benefit claims and inhibit recall of new benefit claims that are unrelated in meaning. A nonsuggestive brand name, conversely, will not provide the same semantic cue, which suggests that consumers might be less

likely to overlook newly learned product information. Thus, a nonsuggestive brand name might be more flexible and accommodate more easily subsequently advertised benefit claims. Thus, in repositioning a brand, the following hypothesis can be made:

H_2 : Suggestive brand names will lead to lower recall of new, unrelated benefit claims than nonsuggestive brand names.

Methodology

Procedure

One hundred sixty adult subjects enlisted from the local university community participated in the study in return for \$10 and a chance to win cash prizes. Eighty-five percent of the sample were female, 30% had college degrees, and approximately half of the sample were more than 35 years of age. Subjects were given the cover story that an electronic information and shopping service was being developed that they were being asked to evaluate (Keller 1987; Ray and Sawyer 1971). With one feature of this service, subjects were told, consumers would be able to examine magazine-type advertisements on their television screens by means of a computer hookup. These advertisements could be requested for a particular brand, for all brands within a product category, or in a random order, as determined by the service providers. Thus, consumers might see an advertisement more than once or see more than one advertisement for a brand, just as they would on television or in a magazine.

The experiment was conducted in two sessions over the course of three days. Subjects were told in the first session that they would view some illustrative advertisements for the electronic information and shopping service and be asked to evaluate the advertised brands. After viewing each of nine advertisements for 30 seconds, subjects provided their overall evaluations of the brands as a whole and their general reactions to the proposed new service (in terms of perceived advantages and disadvantages). Subjects then were dismissed and asked to return two days later to answer additional questions about the service. At this second session, subjects viewed each of nine advertisements for 30 seconds, provided additional general evaluations, and completed a five-minute filler task regarding other aspects of the service. Memory measures then were collected for five target brands.

Measures

The primary dependent measure was an aided recall measure of main benefit claims. Subjects listed the appropriate claims for the target brands when given product category and brand name cues. Subjects were asked to indicate all claims recalled for a brand if more than one claim had been advertised. Research assistants unaware of the experimental design and manipulations coded subjects' responses on the basis of the "gist" of the protocol in terms of correct recall of none, one, or both (if appropriate) of the advertised brand claims.

Covariate measures also were collected as proxies for subjects' inherent product category involvement and atti-

tudes that potentially could affect their responses to advertising. These five measures, assessing subjects' purchase and usage frequency, knowledge, importance of brand selection, and perceived quality differences among brands in each product category, were combined to form a scale of category involvement with a satisfactory coefficient alpha reliability estimate of .72.

Stimuli

Five target product categories were chosen among durable goods with which subjects could have had some involvement and of sufficient complexity to justify advertising multiple benefits: cameras, luggage, personal computers, television, and tennis racquets. New advertisements were created for these products, each with an identical format. The top half contained a color-reproduced photograph of the product (with no brand identification). The bottom half of the advertisement contained a headline, one paragraph describing the main benefit of the advertisement (either a consistent or unrelated product benefit), and a concluding tag line summarizing the main claim. The brand name was mentioned four times in the advertisement (see Figure 1).

Suggestive brand names were created by explicitly embedding key product benefits into the name (e.g., PicturePerfect televisions). Thus, suggestive brand names were both salient and relevant in the product category. Nonsuggestive brand names were chosen to contain no product meaning (e.g., Emporium televisions). One set of advertised benefits was chosen to be consistent in meaning with suggestive brand names (e.g., superior picture for televisions). Another set of benefits was chosen to be unrelated in meaning to suggestive brand names (e.g., superior sound for televisions) and, by definition, the nonsuggestive brand names.

Pretests confirmed these differences. Specifically, 53 subjects rated the likelihood that products given different brand names would possess various benefits on nine-point scales (1 = extremely unlikely/9 = extremely likely). The results indicated that suggestive brand names ($M = 7.75$) were rated as significantly more likely ($p < .05$) to possess the consistent benefit than nonsuggestive brand names ($M = 5.00$). There were no significant differences ($F < 1$), however, between suggestive brand names ($M = 5.25$) and nonsuggestive brand names ($M = 5.00$) for the likelihood of possessing unrelated benefits. The pretests also indicated that the conditional probabilities (i.e., the likelihood that an advertisement for benefit 1 would mention benefit 2) were roughly average (at the scale midpoint) for the two sets of consistent and unrelated benefits, which suggests that the benefits were, as desired, essentially uncorrelated.

For each of the five target product categories, four advertisements were created. Two advertisements contained the consistent benefit claim with either the suggestive or nonsuggestive brand name, and two advertisements contained the unrelated benefit claim with either the suggestive or nonsuggestive brand name. Seven filler advertisements were created with the same basic format for golf clubs, leather handbags, computer software, stereo receivers, stereo speakers, tennis balls, and watches. In each session, two filler advertisements were seen first to control for primacy effects, and either two or three filler advertisements,

depending on the session and the ad exposure group (as described subsequently), were seen last to control for recency effects. Table 1 contains a summary of the advertisement and brand stimuli.

Research Design and Manipulations

The objective behind the experimental design was to maximize external as well as internal validity. As a result, great care went into creating experimental conditions that would permit fair and representative tests of the hypotheses. Specifically, two factors were manipulated: (1) *brand name suggestiveness* in terms of whether a brand name explicitly conveyed a product benefit and (2) *ad exposure sequence* in terms of the number, nature, order, and timing of advertisements. Specifically, the design was a 2 (brand name suggestiveness: suggestive versus nonsuggestive) \times 12 (ad exposure sequence) incomplete block design. The ad exposure sequence depended on the number of advertisements seen for the brand (1, 2, or 3), the particular benefit claims that were advertised (consistent or unrelated in meaning with the suggestive brand name), and the timing and order in which the advertisements were seen during the two sessions.

Brand name suggestiveness was manipulated between subjects, so that half of the sample viewed advertisements for products that used suggestive brand names and the other half viewed advertisements for products that used nonsuggestive brand names. Brand names for filler advertisements were selected to correspond in suggestiveness with the brand names of the target advertisements to avoid undue attention to the nature of target brand names.¹

The ad exposure sequence was a mixed within- and between-subjects manipulation in which each subject was assigned to one of four ad exposure groups so that they were exposed to and provided measures for 5 of the 12 different possible ad exposure sequences. Each sequence included advertisements for a brand in one of the five different product categories. The 12 ad exposure sequences are shown in Table 2.

To illustrate, subjects who saw sequence 7 as one of their five ad exposure sequences would have seen an advertisement for a brand in one product category that promoted the benefit claim consistent in meaning with the suggestive brand name in the first session and in the second session would have seen an advertisement for the same brand that promoted the benefit claim that was unrelated in meaning to the suggestive brand name.

Single and double exposures were employed for both the originally advertised and newly advertised benefit claims. Incorporating ad repetition levels permits a wider range of brand association strength, so that more informative tests of hypotheses are possible. Employing a variety of exposure sequences also better approximates the realities of consumer experiences in the marketplace, where campaigns for ini-

¹The suggestive and nonsuggestive brand names for the filler product categories were, respectively, Horizon and Lanford (golf clubs), Guardian and Gallery (leather handbags), UniSolution and Tennant (e.g., computer software), FlexiSound and Sovereign (stereo receivers), Harmony and Glaser (stereo speakers), Sure-Bounce and Coopers (tennis balls), and Eternal and Medallion (watches).

FIGURE 1
Advertising Stimuli Example



**LifeLong Luggage is so durable
that it will be your travel
companion—for life!**

Heavy-duty Duktex fabric and special webbing make LifeLong Luggage tough enough for all kinds of travel.

This durable construction ensures that LifeLong Luggage will withstand the wear and tear of repeated use.

Count on LifeLong Luggage to protect all of your personal possessions when you travel!

TABLE 1
Advertising Stimuli Summary

Product Category	Suggestive and Nonsuggestive Brand Names	Consistent Benefit Claim	Unrelated Benefit Claim
Camera	EasyPro Watson	Ease of use	Flexibility and attachments
Luggage	LifeLong Ocean	Durability	Fashionable appearance
Personal Computer	CompuQuick Criterion	Speed and ease of use	Compatibility
Television	PicturePerfect Emporium	Superior picture	Superior sound
Tennis Racquets	PowerStroke Crown	Powerful performance	Special design for men and women

tially or subsequently advertised benefit claims may be more or less salient, depending on the particular budget, media buy, and so forth. Conducting the study over two sessions allows for some separation between the initial positioning and the later repositioning, which increases the likelihood that the initially advertised claims become sufficiently strongly encoded in memory.

Single and double exposures to advertisements with consistent or unrelated benefit claims were used as benchmarks or points of reference to compare with the effects on memory of also having advertised the other claim either once or twice. Each sequence provides information related to the research hypotheses. Sequences 1-6 permit tests of H_1 regarding the effects of brand name suggestiveness on the recall of initially advertised benefit claims. Sequences 7-12 permit tests of H_2 regarding the effects of brand name suggestiveness on the recall of subsequently advertised benefit claims.

TABLE 2
Experimental Design: Ad Exposure Sequences

Sequence	Session 1	Session 2
(1)	C	—
(2)	—	C
(3)	C	C
(4)	U	—
(5)	—	U
(6)	U	U
(7)	C	U
(8)	CC	U
(9)	C	UU
(10)	U	C
(11)	UU	C
(12)	U	CC

Note: C represents exposure to an advertisement promoting a benefit consistent in meaning with the suggestive brand name; U represents exposure to an advertisement promoting a benefit unrelated in meaning with the suggestive brand name.

To implement the ad exposure sequence manipulation, subjects were assigned to one of four ad exposure groups so that they saw two one-advertisement sequences (i.e., two of sequences 1, 2, 4, or 5), two two-advertisement sequences (i.e., two of sequences 3, 6, 7, or 10), and one three-advertisement sequence (i.e., one of sequences 8, 9, 11, or 12). Let Cf and Uf represent single ad exposures to consistent and unrelated benefits, respectively, in the first session only; let Cs and Us represent single ad exposures to consistent and unrelated benefits, respectively, in the second session only; and let "I" separate exposures in the first session from those in the second session. Schematically, the four ad exposure groups saw different ad exposure sequences across five different product categories, as shown in Table 3.

Thus, subjects in the first ad exposure group saw an advertisement for a consistent benefit claim in the first product category (Cs), an advertisement for an unrelated benefit claim in the second product category (Uf), two advertisements for a consistent benefit claim in the third product category (C|C), an advertisement for an unrelated benefit claim in the fourth product category (U|C), and an advertisement for a consistent benefit claim followed by two advertisements for an unrelated benefit claim in the fifth product category (C|UU).

Product category also was counterbalanced between subjects by rotating the different products and brands

TABLE 3
Experimental Design: Ad Exposure Groups

Groups	Product Category				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	Cs	Uf	C C	U C	C UU
2	Us	Cf	U U	C U	U CC
3	Cf	Us	C C	C U	UU C
4	Uf	Cs	U U	U C	CC U

through the ad exposure sequences in each ad exposure group so that each product category was associated with each ad exposure sequence an equal number of times. As a result, responses to any one sequence were based on reactions by different groups of subjects to each of the five different brands and product categories, which increased the generalizability of the findings.

Moreover, to ensure that subjects saw a varied set of advertisements, the ad exposure sequences were combined so that target advertisements for the different brands and products were intermingled and combined with filler advertisements. Specifically, subjects saw advertisements for the particular ad exposure sequences in their ad exposure groups in the order shown in Table 4.

Results

H₁ and H₂ were tested through a series of two-sided planned comparisons conducted by subject and target advertisement. All contrasts were between subjects and used the within-subjects error sum of squares from the overall ANCOVA analysis—consistent with guidelines by Keppel (1982, pp. 428–32)—with 1 and 766 degrees of freedom in the numerator and denominator, respectively. The ANCOVA analysis

included product category type and product category involvement as covariates.² Table 5 contains cell means for the key dependent measure—aided recall of main benefit claims.

Initially Advertised Benefit Claims

H₁ hypothesizes that suggestive brand names cue advertised benefit claims consistent in meaning more effectively than do nonsuggestive brand names. H₁ was tested by comparing recall of consistent benefit claims for the appropriate single- and double-exposure conditions (i.e., the Cf, Cs, and C|C sequences) for suggestive (SBN) and nonsuggestive (NBN) brand names. As hypothesized, recall of the consistent benefit claim when it was advertised in the first session was significantly higher for a suggestive brand name than for a nonsuggestive brand name (SBN = .33, NBN = .15; $F = 2.74, p < .05$). There were no significant differences, however, in recall of the consistent benefit when it was advertised in the

²Significant effects were observed for the recall measure for both the product category involvement and product category type covariates, which indicates that the advertisements differed somewhat in their memorability and higher levels of involvement were associated with greater recall.

TABLE 4
Experimental Design: Ad Exposure Order

Ad Exposure Groups	Session 1									Session 2								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	F	F	U₂	C ₃	U ₄	C ₅	F	F	F	F	F	C₁	U ₅	C ₃	C ₄	U₅	F	F
2	F	F	C₂	U ₃	C ₄	U ₅	F	F	F	F	F	U₁	C ₅	U₃	U₄	C₅	F	F
3	F	F	C₁	U ₅	C ₃	C ₄	U ₅	F	F	F	F	U₂	C₃	U₄	C₅	F	F	F
4	F	F	U₁	C ₅	U ₃	U ₄	C ₅	F	F	F	F	C₂	U₃	C₄	U₅	F	F	F

Note: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 represent the five product categories; F represents a filler advertisement; last exposure of each sequence in bold.

TABLE 5
Aided Recall Measure of Main Benefit Claims:
Cell Means (Standard Deviations)

Ad Exposure Sequence	N	Unrelated Benefit Claim		Consistent Benefit Claim	
		Nonsuggestive Brand Name	Suggestive Brand Name	Nonsuggestive Brand Name	Suggestive Brand Name
C _f	40	—	—	.15 (.36)	.33 (.47)
C _s	40	—	—	.35 (.48)	.40 (.50)
CC	40	—	—	.45 (.50)	.54 (.51)
U _f	40	.08 (.27)	.05 (.22)	—	—
U _s	40	.43 (.50)	.38 (.49)	—	—
U U	40	.45 (.50)	.35 (.48)	—	—
C U	40	.50 (.51)	.35 (.48)	.23 (.42)	.45 (.50)
CC U	20	.50 (.51)	.20 (.41)	.20 (.41)	.40 (.50)
C UU	20	.35 (.49)	.30 (.47)	.25 (.44)	.50 (.51)
U C	40	.15 (.36)	.13 (.33)	.50 (.51)	.48 (.51)
UU C	20	.20 (.41)	.15 (.37)	.55 (.51)	.60 (.50)
U CC	20	.16 (.37)	.05 (.22)	.50 (.51)	.65 (.49)

Note: C represents an advertisement for a consistent benefit claim; U represents an advertisement for an unrelated benefit claim; C_f and U_f represent single ad exposures to consistent and unrelated benefits, respectively, in the first session only; C_s and U_s represent single ad exposures to consistent and unrelated benefits, respectively, in the second session only; "|" separates exposures in the first session from those in the second session.

second session (i.e., the Cs or C|C sequences), perhaps because the advertising information was too salient and accessible in memory—the delay from ad exposure to recall measurement for advertising claims from the second session was only five minutes or so compared with two days for advertising claims from the first session. Nevertheless, the results provide at least some support for H₁ and the notion that a suggestive brand name serves as a more effective cue to advertised brand claims consistent in meaning with that brand name.

There were no significant differences in recall of the unrelated benefit claim between the suggestive and nonsuggestive brand names ($p > .20$) for the appropriate single- and double-exposure conditions (i.e., the Uf, Us, and U|U sequences). Thus, as was expected, both types of brand names were equally effective at cueing advertised brand claims unrelated in meaning with the two types of brand names.

Subsequently Advertised Benefit Claims

H₂ hypothesizes that a suggestive brand name, compared with a nonsuggestive brand name, results in lower recall of advertised benefit claims unrelated in meaning to the brand name if benefit claims consistent in meaning with the suggestive brand name already have become associated with the brand through prior advertising. Given the indication that a suggestive brand name improved recall of a consistent benefit claim that was advertised in the first session, it is appropriate to consider the effects on consumer memory of subsequently advertising a new benefit claim in the second session. H₂ was tested by comparing the recall of unrelated and consistent benefit claims for suggestive versus nonsuggestive brand names in the case in which the consistent benefit claim was advertised in the first session, but the unrelated benefit claim was advertised in the second session (i.e., the CC|U, C|U, and C|UU sequences).

Consistent with H₂, recall of the unrelated benefit claim when it was advertised in the second session was significantly lower for the suggestive brand name than for the nonsuggestive brand name for both the CC|U sequence (SBN = .20, NBN = .50; $F = 7.02, p < .01$) and the C|U sequence (SBN = .35, NBN = .50; $F = 2.95, p < .09$). Thus, though the two types of brand names served as equally effective cues to unrelated benefit claims when there had been no prior advertising, when a claim consistent in meaning with the suggestive brand name already had been advertised in the first session, recall of the unrelated claim was significantly lower for the suggestive brand name compared with the nonsuggestive brand name. The difference in recall was not significant in the C|UU sequence (SBN = .30, NBN = .35; $F < 1$), however, perhaps because the double exposure in the second session made the unrelated claim sufficiently salient and accessible.

Conversely, recall of the consistent benefit claim that was advertised previously in the first session was significantly higher for a suggestive brand name than for a nonsuggestive brand name for the CC|U sequence (marginally, SBN = .40, NBN = .20; $F = 2.51, p < .11$), the C|U sequence (SBN = .45, NBN = .23; $F = 4.55, p < .05$), and the C|UU sequence (SBN = .50, NBN = .25; $F = 3.45, p < .06$). Com-

bined, these analyses imply that the suggestive brand name, compared with the nonsuggestive brand name, was more likely to continue to access the original benefit claims after repositioning at the expense of recall of the new benefit claims. These results lend additional support for H₁ and the reasoning behind H₂.

Finally, to gain additional insight into how brand name suggestiveness affected consumer memory performance, it is also instructive to look at those ad exposure sequences in which the unrelated benefit claim was advertised first followed by advertising for the consistent benefit claim (i.e., the UU|C, U|C, and U|CC sequences). There were no significant differences in recall for either the unrelated claims or the consistent claims between suggestive and nonsuggestive brand names for any of the three sequences ($F < 1$).

There are several possible interpretations for the lack of differences between suggestive and nonsuggestive brand names for recall of the unrelated brand claims in these sequences. It might indicate that little retroactive interference effects exist for a suggestive brand name. In other words, if an unrelated claim already has become associated with a suggestive brand name, then subsequent advertising of a consistent claim does not necessarily inhibit later recall of the unrelated claim. Alternatively, it might just be a result of the fact that relatively low levels of recall occurred for unrelated claims when they were shown in the first session (i.e., “basement” effects were present).

Relatedly, the lack of differences between suggestive and nonsuggestive brand names for recall of the consistent brand claims in these sequences once again might reflect the fact that, because these claims had been shown in the second session, they were relatively salient and accessible during the recall task regardless of the nature of the corresponding brand name.

Discussion

Summary

A suggestive brand name was defined as a brand name that conveys relevant attribute or benefit information in a particular product context. To examine the effectiveness of suggestive and nonsuggestive brand names as cues to advertised product claims, we conducted an experiment that manipulated whether a brand name explicitly conveyed a particular product benefit and the number, nature, order, and timing of advertised benefit claims for the brand. The results indicate that a suggestive brand name—compared with a brand name that contains no product meaning—can

1. facilitate recall of initially advertised benefit claims consistent in meaning with the brand name but
2. inhibit recall of subsequently advertised benefit claims unrelated in meaning to the brand name.

The capability of suggestive brand names to cue advertising information effectively extends the research of Keller (1987, 1991a, b), who showed that nonsuggestive names can be ineffective advertising retrieval cues. Conversely, the fact that strong associations in memory with a benefit claim consistent in meaning with a suggestive brand name lowered the recall of a subsequently advertised benefit claim that

was unrelated in meaning extends prior research by demonstrating interference and inhibition effects in a different domain than has been shown previously in consumer behavior research.

Implications

These study findings have important implications for marketers regarding advertising strategies and the optimal use of meaningful brand names in building and managing brand equity. Research in this area has pointed out that one way to build brand equity is through the initial choice of brand elements—for example, the brand name, logo, or symbol (Aaker 1991, 1996; Keller 1993, 1998). This research provides some guidance to the naming decision by considering how different brand name strategies affect consumer memory for advertising effects.

On the one hand, choosing a brand name that is concrete and evokes imagery that suggests a certain product benefit can, by producing strong brand associations, contribute to brand equity by facilitating initial positioning. On the other hand, choosing a brand name that suggests a certain product benefit can, by producing interference and inhibition effects in memory, affect adversely the capability of advertising to link new brand associations at a later time. Such processes help explain why a brand such as Jack-in-the-Box restaurants has found it difficult to establish a more adult, product-focused image; why brands such as Old Spice after-shave, Oldsmobile automobiles, and John Hancock financial services have struggled to create more youthful images; and why Hidden Valley Ranch salad dressing has encountered problems in expanding beyond its flagship ranch flavors.

One implication of these research findings is that marketers may be better off adopting more flexible branding strategies when introducing new products by using nonsuggestive brand names if they anticipate the possibility of later needing to advertise additional benefit claims. In other words, it is important in choosing a meaningful brand name to consider the possible contingencies in later repositioning or other associations that may become relevant or desirable. Consumers might find it more difficult to accept—or just too easy to forget—the new positioning if the brand name continues to remind them of other product considerations.

Alternatively, if marketers choose suggestive brand names to introduce new products, they must be willing to commit enough time and resources to reposition the brand if it later becomes necessary or must be willing to introduce new brands or sub-brands to capture product positions that would be difficult to attain with existing meaning-laden brand names. With sufficient time and properly designed and supported marketing programs, there is at least anecdotal evidence that the restrictive nature of suggestive brand names can be overcome. For example, Compaq computers initially was named to convey the fact that it was a small computer. Through subsequent introductions of “bigger” personal computers, advertising campaigns, and other marketing activity, Compaq seems to have been able to transcend the initial positioning suggested by its name as a maker of only small computers. Nevertheless, such marketing maneuvers could be a long and expensive process—imagine the difficulty of repositioning brands such as I

Can't Believe It's Not Butter margarine or Gee, Your Hair Smells Terrific shampoo.

Limitations and Further Research

The previous discussion of research implications should be interpreted in light of the limitations of the experiment that was conducted. These considerations and others suggest several future research opportunities. One research priority is to provide a more detailed theoretical account of exactly how the suggestiveness or any other properties of a brand name influences marketing communication effectiveness. A clearer understanding of the role of encoding and retrieval—and other possible mediating factors—most likely will require experimental manipulations and measures carefully designed to affect and capture particular memory processes.

In a more specific sense, it is also of interest to examine other aspects of the manipulations of brand name suggestiveness and the ad exposure sequences and other possible moderating factors to assess the robustness of these facilitating and inhibiting effects. For example, it may be that a suggestive brand name still can serve as a better cue after repositioning, compared with a nonsuggestive brand name, if subsequently advertised benefit claims are more consistent in meaning with brand knowledge from previously advertised claims and the brand name itself. In other words, the interference effects encountered for subsequently advertised benefit claims may be less prevalent with new benefit claims that are more consistent in meaning with existing brand knowledge structures, because consumers will be better able to use this knowledge.

It is also important to explore the generalizability of these effects to real-world situations in which consumers might have strong prior associations built up in memory (due to numerous repeated exposures to advertisements and product usage) and/or might be targeted by concerted, well-executed marketing programs designed to reposition the brand. In terms of the former consideration, Kent and Allen (1994) find that interference effects from competitive advertising are substantially reduced for familiar brands compared with unfamiliar brands. Similarly, to the extent that a suggestive brand name has built up rich brand knowledge structures in consumers' minds, there may not be as much difficulty in linking new associations from repositioning. In terms of the latter consideration, one key communication decision in repositioning a brand is the extent to which the brand's previous positioning and heritage is explicitly acknowledged and addressed in a new advertising campaign. Prior research on one-sided versus two-sided arguments in advertising might be illuminating there.

In this study, ad exposures were concentrated in two sessions with short delays. The boundary conditions of the facilitation and interference effects of brand names should be explored by employing less compressed exposure and measurement sequences. Generalizability also should be assessed by examining the effects of suggestive brand names on other types of products (e.g., consumer nondurables) and advertisements (e.g., less information-laden television advertisements) in which the level of involvement may not be as high as was the case in this experiment. Because the effects that

were observed in this study, though significant, were not large (e.g., the omega-squared effects size estimates of significant contrasts generally were only approximately .01), facilitation and interference from brand name suggestiveness might not be present under some circumstances.

Finally, two broader research areas are suggested by this research. First, it also might be instructive to explore other possible explanations and outcomes of positioning and repositioning—for example, in terms of principles from social cognition research, such as schema congruity theory and how brand names or other marketing communications affect consumer expectations and the brand evaluations that are formed. Understanding the persuasive impact of repositioning is an important research priority. For example, under what circumstances are repositioning efforts seen as lacking credibility? How flexible can brands be in the minds of consumers? What is the optimal balance between continuity and change for a brand?

Second, a better understanding of the choice criteria for brand names is an important managerial priority. As noted previously, brand names can be chosen to enhance brand awareness and the formation of favorable, strong, and unique brand associations. This research shows not only how a suggestive brand name can facilitate the creation of initial brand associations, but also how a nonsuggestive brand name can accommodate additional benefit claims more effectively. Relatedly, Meyers-Levy (1989) shows how a suggestive brand name that evokes many associations sometimes leads to lower brand name recall, because these associations cue competing concepts and produce interference. Thus, under some circumstances, choosing a meaningful name can facilitate consumer inference making and brand evaluations but potentially at the expense of advertisement and brand recall. Other trade-offs in brand name choice criteria should be considered, particularly in terms of consumer memory versus persuasion.

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