

## **Developing Memory Structures for Brand Identity Elements in Packaged Goods Markets**

*Jenni Romaniuk, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, University of South Australia,  
Jenni.Romaniuk@marketingscience.info*

*Magda Nenycz-Thiel, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, University of South Australia,  
Magda.Nenycz-Thiel@marketingscience.info*

*Nicole Hartnett, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, University of South Australia,  
Nicole.Hartnett@marketingscience.info*

*Armando Corsi, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, University of South Australia,  
Armando.Corsi@marketingscience.info*

### **Abstract**

Consumers learn a brand's identity elements through direct experience when buying and using a brand, and indirect experience via advertising. This research looks at the relative effects of these experiences on the memory structures developed by brand users and non-users, for four identity elements (colours, slogans, images and jingles) across 18 brands. We found that using identity elements on packaging *and* in advertising enhanced the link between each element and the brand in users' memory. This suggests using brand identity elements across different avenues enhances brand users' learning. The recency of usage, however, had no impact on the development of memory structures for all elements, except colour. Since colours are important for brand identification on-shelf, we recommend colours should be used prominently in advertising campaigns to reinforce the link to the brand in memory.

Keywords: Brand identity, distinctive assets, memory, brand usage, recency, colour

# **Developing Memory Structures for Brand Identity Elements in Packaged Goods Markets**

## **Introduction**

Brand identity is an important part of Consumer Based Brand Equity (Keller, 1993; Keller, 2005). This is evidenced by the derivative concept of ‘visual equity’ that has emerged in the packaging literature, whereby a brand’s appearance contributes to the brand’s equity in its own way (Lightfoot and Gertsman, 1998). Brand identity consists of both visual and audio elements, including shapes, colours, slogans, logos or images, fonts, characters, jingles or music (Gaillard, Romaniuk and Sharp, 2005). These are non-brand name elements that distinguish a brand from competitors, and so are referred to as distinctive brand elements. These elements often assist us in identifying a brand at a relevant time, such as when standing in front of a supermarket shelf or when exposed to advertising (Rossiter, Percy and Donovan, 1991). Moreover, consumers learn identity elements through either a *direct experience* of buying or consuming a brand, or by an *indirect experience*, such as exposure to advertising. As these two avenues involve different encoding processes to develop memory structures (Kempf and Smith, 1998; Singh, Goodhardt and Ehrenberg, 2004), the question addressed by this research is: What is the relative role of direct versus indirect experiences in developing memory structures for brand identity elements? We further explore this across different types of identity elements, including visual, semantic and audio elements. The relevant literature for this research question is now discussed.

## **Learning a Brand’s Identity Elements**

There are two key ways in which consumers develop brand associations: through direct experience with a brand, and indirect experiences via marketing communications and word-of-mouth (Krishnan, 1996). Brand users obtain associations from both direct and indirect sources, whilst brand non-users only have indirect sources at their disposal. The distinction is important, because direct experience has a stronger impact on developing brand associations than indirect experience (Kempf and Smith, 1998; Singh, Goodhardt and Ehrenberg, 2000). It is an established empirical pattern that brand users have a higher propensity to hold a perception of a brand than non-users (e.g. Bird, Channon and Ehrenberg, 1970). However, there are exceptions – brand users and non-users are equally likely to associate a brand to an image attribute that is descriptive of the product or category, or is stressed throughout all communications (Barwise and Ehrenberg, 1985; Hoek *et al.*, 2000). In these instances, direct experience with the brand is not essential to learn the association.

Direct and indirect experiences with a brand also influence how consumers learn and process brand identity elements. However, both avenues are not equally available to all elements. For example: audio elements, such as music or jingles, are predominantly learned indirectly via advertising. On the other hand, in a packaged goods context, colours are often on packaging and so are processed during direct experience with the brand, as well as indirectly via advertising. We now discuss how direct or indirect experience contributes to consumer learning across the different types of identity elements, and set up the research hypotheses for this paper. We also consider the impact of recency of brand usage on the strength of associative links.

## Slogans

Slogans are used on packaging and in advertising. Despite claims that slogans should always be on packaging (Kohli, Leuthesser and Suri, 2007), this is not necessarily universal practice. For example, of the 13 slogans tested in this research, only seven were printed on the packaging. It is important to consider that textual information is more difficult for consumers to learn and recall from memory than pictures (Childers and Houston, 1984). Moreover, when images are used in conjunction with text, they are likely to gain attention before text on packaging (Rettie and Brewer, 2000). Consequently, on packaging, slogans will be the least likely element users will absorb. However, brand users should still have a higher propensity to link the brand name to the slogan, due to unequal learning opportunities. This leads to the first set of hypotheses:

*H1a: When slogans appear on packaging, brand users will be more likely to correctly link the slogan with the brand name than non-users.*

*H1b: When slogans do not appear on packaging, brand users and non-users will have a similar propensity to correctly link a slogan with a brand name.*

*H1c: When slogans appear on packaging, recent brand users will be more likely to correctly link the slogan with the brand name than non-recent brand users.*

*H1d: When slogans do not appear on packaging, recent brand users and non-recent brand users will have a similar propensity to correctly link a slogan with a brand name.*

*H1e: The difference between brand users and non-users will be greater when the slogan is used in both packaging and advertising.*

## Images

Images are a visual element that includes characters, such as *Mr. T* for Snickers, and scenes, such as a beach landscape for *Bounty*. Images are powerful memory triggers because they are very rich in stimuli and rely on peripheral attention processes that are faster and more automatic (Loftus, 1983; Stolk, Boon and Smulders, 1993). Images are also more elaboratively and distinctively encoded into memory, compared to semantic text, making such 'information' more mentally available and slower to erode (Childers, Heckler and Houston, 1986). Many brand images are commonly used in advertising, thus having an equal propensity to be processed by both users and non-users of a brand. This leads to the second set of hypotheses of H2a-H2e, which are not presented here due to space limitations, but are the same as for H1a-H1e proposed above.

## Colours

Colour is another visual element that helps consumers identify brands on-shelf by making the brand come to the foreground of consumers' visual attention (Gaillard, Sharp and Romaniuk, 2006; van der Lans, Pieters and Wedal, 2008). For packaged goods, users have a great deal of interaction with the packaging when locating the brand on-shelf, buying it and taking it home (Louw and Kimber, 2006; Underwood, 2003), as well as reinforcement through advertising. Therefore, while both brand users and non-users have the opportunity to build links between the brand and colours, the direct experience of brand users should lead to stronger links being formed than for non-users. Further, the more recent this direct experience is, the stronger the link should be. This leads to the third set of hypotheses:

*H3a: Brand users will have a higher propensity to link a colour with a brand name than non-brand users.*

*H3b: Recent brand users will have a higher propensity to link a colour with a brand name than non-recent brand users.*

## **Jingles**

One of the most common devices used in advertising to enhance memory for the brand or the message is a jingle. Jingles can be a newly developed piece, such as ‘Happy little Vegemites’ or an adaptation of the lyrics of a known song, such as Cadbury’s use of ‘Wouldn’t it be nice’ originally performed by *The Beach Boys*. Jingles are widely used in advertising as they are said to enhance ‘purchase intent, brand attitude, recall facilitation, and affective response’ (Oakes, 2007 p. 38). Communicating jingles is confined to advertising, thus we hypothesise:

*H4a: Brand users and non-users will have a similar propensity to correctly link a jingle with a brand name.*

*H4b: Recent brand users and non-recent brand users will have a similar propensity to correctly link a jingle with a brand name.*

## **Research Method**

The data for this research was obtained from a continuing online tracking survey, as a part of commercial brand health tracking for a confectionery company. Datasets from three consecutive quarters were utilised, with over 1,000 respondents per dataset. Four types of identity elements were collected: colours and slogans (n=9 and n=13 respectively, Dataset 1), images (n=20, Dataset 2) and jingles (n=7, Dataset 3). In order to obtain the associations to brand identity cues, respondents were provided a brand identity cue (e.g., ‘Work, rest play’) and then asked which chocolate brands they associated with it. Respondents were provided with an open-ended text box and could type in as many brands as they wanted or none at all. Colours were presented in colour blocks along with the colour name, and images were presented in black-and-white to remove the potentially confounding influence of colour. Only correct brand-to-cue links were included in the analysis. The respondents were also asked about how recently they had used each brand. Consumption ranged from *in the last week* to *never tried* a brand. Respondents were online panellists in Australia and the demographic characteristics of the datasets were representative of the Australian chocolate buying population – 51% female and 49% male, and dispersed across the following age groups; 8% 12-15 years, 17% 16-24, 19% 25-34 years, 22% 35-44 years, 19% 45-54 years and 16% 55-64 years.

To address the hypotheses, respondents were categorised as *recent users* (eaten in the last four weeks), *non-recent users* (eaten in the last three to 12 months), or *non-users* (eaten longer than 12 months ago or never) for each brand. This usage variable was cross-tabulated against each brand identity element. Chi-square tests were used to determine differences between the usage groups. Each brand’s packaging was audited to see if it contained the image or slogan.

## **The Results**

In the interests of space, we present the full results for slogans in Tables 1 and 2, and then the summarised results for all distinctive elements in Table 3. Tables 1 and 2 show a difference between brand users (both recent and non-recent) and non-users, regardless of the presence of the slogan on packaging. This provides support for H1a but not H1b. However, as there little to no differences between recent and non-recent users, H1c and H1d are not supported.

Comparing the average difference between users and non-users across slogans used on packaging (Table 1) to slogans used only in advertising (Table 2), we see the difference between groups is larger when direct and indirect experience can be accessed (11% and 8% points versus 5% and 6% points). This suggests that having the slogan on packaging does have a stronger effect on the memory structures for brand users, providing support for H1e.

**Table 1: Slogans communicated via advertising only, correctly linked to the brand**

Slogan	Brand	Correct link (%)			Difference between groups (%)		
		Recent users	NR users	Non-users	RU & NRU	RU & NU	NRU & NU
Wouldn't it be nice	Cadbury	58	52	36	6**	22***	16
Deliciously ugly	Picnic	25	31	25	-6	0	6
Cherish the moment	Cherry Ripe	24	21	21	3	3	0
.... your day	Mars	14	15	8	0	6*	6**
Working like a machine?	Kit Kat	11	14	13	-3	-2	1
Inside out genius	Pods	11	14	10	-1	1	5**
<b>Average</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>

Note: Chi-square test significant at: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01 and \*p<0.05

**Table 2: Slogans communicated via packaging and advertising, correctly linked to the brand**

Slogan	Brand	Correct link (%)			Difference between groups (%)		
		Recent users	NR users	Non-users	RU & NRU	RU & NU	NRU & NU
A glass and a half full of joy	Cadbury	72	63	47	9**	25***	15**
Have a break, have a ...	Kit Kat	79	84	80	-5	-1	4
Work, rest, play	Mars	63	65	54	-2	9*	11*
Get some nuts	Snickers	42	39	28	4	15***	11***
Master chocolatier	Lindt	36	21	13	14***	23***	9**
The taste of paradise	Bounty	24	28	23	-4	1	5
Legendary taste, half the fat	Mars Red	18	15	12	4	6	3
<b>Average</b>		<b>48</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>

Note: Chi-square test significant at: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01 and \*p<0.05

The summarised results for the other types of distinctive elements follow in Table 3. The results for images mirror that for slogans, thus confirming hypothesis H2a-H2e in the same way we discussed H1a-H1e. For images, there was very little difference based on recency of usage, but the impact of usage was greater if the image was also used on packaging. Colours were the only element to show a substantive difference between the memory structures of recent and non-recent users of the brand, thereby supporting both H3a and H3b. Links to jingles, which are communicated via advertising *only*, were equally apparent in all usage groups, providing support both H4a and H4b.

**Table 3: Summary of averaged results for all distinctive elements tested**

Identity element	Condition	Correct link (%)			Difference between groups (%)		
		Recent users	NR users	Non-users	RU & NRU	RU & NU	NRU & NU
Slogans (n=6)	Ad only	24	25	19	1	5	6
Images (n=10)	Ad only	40	39	31	1	9	8
Jingles (n=7)	Ad only (All)	25	26	25	-1	0	1
Slogans (n=7)	Ad and pack	48	45	37	3	11	8
Images (n=10)	Ad and pack	77	76	64	1	13	12
Colours (n=18)	Ad and pack (All)	16	11	7	5	9	4

### Discussion, Implications and Future Research

This research examined the impact of direct and indirect experience on the formation of brand identity links in a packaged goods market. The overall results show that the combined use of brand identity elements on packaging *and* in advertising enhances memory links amongst brand users. Doing so increases the potential for processing all visual devices, whether pictorial images or text-based slogans. The lack of difference found for recency of usage contradicts that found in research into brand image type associations (Bird, Channon and Ehrenberg, 1970). This suggests that the sensory characteristics of brand identity elements make them less dependent on recent reinforcement for accessibility from long-term memory.

The exception to this finding was for colours, which may be due to the highly competitive nature of colour association. Multiple competitor brands can be linked to the same colour and these links may inhibit retrieval, thus increasing the value of recent reinforcement from usage. Therefore, given the importance of colour in identifying brands on-shelf (Gaillard, Sharp and Romaniuk, 2006; van der Lans, Pieters and Wedal, 2008), we recommend strong use of desired colours in advertising campaigns to keep the association accessible in consumer memory. The different finding for colours supports the need for research across the different brand identity elements to compare and contrast results.

Finally, linkage of the brand with jingles, which can only be learnt via marketing communications, did not differ across usage groups. This suggests if a marketer wants to use memory for jingles to bring a brand to mind at a purchase occasion, the words from the jingle need to be incorporated on the packaging or the jingle must be played via in-store advertising.

We did not test distinctive elements that were *only* available on packaging and were not used in advertising. This would be a useful extension to test the difference between packaging and advertising to communicate and build brand identity elements. Also, this study measured each brand identity element in isolation. It would be interesting to observe which possible combinations of elements stimulate the strongest brand memory linkage across advertising and packaging contexts. This would provide useful information for brand managers to increase the recognisability of their packaging and advertising. Further research could also explore the specific execution of brand identity elements in advertising and on packaging, to determine the degree to which different executions enhance or inhibit consumer processing. Finally, our research was conducted in one category only, so we encourage replication in other packaged goods categories. Further extension to other markets, such as services, where the packaging is substituted for the retail environment and websites, as the main form of brand interaction, would test the impact of other buying interactions on memory processing.

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