

CREATING BRAND IDENTITY: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF EVALUATION OF NEW BRAND NAMES

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on branding strategies for new products. The longitudinal study reported here is the first such investigation of evaluation of brand names over time. It examines how consumer evaluations of brand names and product attributes develop with repeated exposures to the brands with meaningful and non-meaningful names.

Building strong brands is becoming more difficult. There has been an explosion in new products, as well as in the ways to communicate with consumers, from cable channels, to the Internet, to displays on mobile phones, and product placements. Rising above this clutter can require a significant financial commitment. As these costs continue to increase, companies need to get smarter about branding.

The dilemma faced by marketers, however, is that meaningful names are inherently limited to the products and product categories for which they have meaning, whereas non-meaningful names can potentially be applied, or extended, to any product or product category. The increasingly global nature of many markets requires that meaningful brand names be translated to achieve consistent meaning, a problematic task that, even if successful, results in a plurality of names for the same product. Because both sets of branding objectives are typically of high importance to marketers, it would be extremely useful to have a sense of the tradeoffs involved. That is what our research seeks to accomplish.

We conducted the study with approximately 60 undergraduate students at a major university. All students were enrolled in one of two business classes. The target product categories included all-purpose cleaners and flu remedies. Respondents were asked to rate meaningful and non-meaningful brand names in each category on overall liking, and also to rate the products on quality, a related attribute, and an unrelated attribute.

The study was conducted over a period of five weeks. During the first meeting of each week, the *Campus Watch* magazines were distributed to the students, who were instructed to look through the magazine as they would normally. Students took five to ten minutes to browse through the magazines. In the second class meeting of each week (two days later), questionnaires were distributed.

In weeks 1, 3, and 5 (after one, three and five exposures to *Campus Watch*), students rated several brand names (those under investigation plus a few distracters) on overall liking. They then rated products in a variety of product categories, including the two target product categories and a few distracter categories, on several product attributes. In each category, students were asked to rate a single brand name (either meaningful or non-meaningful). All measures were obtained using five-point Likert-type scales, with a higher rating reflecting a more favorable evaluation.

Overall Liking (H1a). We hypothesized that overall liking of brand names would increase with repeated exposure. The results indicate that this is indeed the case with a highly significant linear contrast.

Evaluation of Product Attributes (H1b). We hypothesized that the evaluations of product attributes would increase with repeated exposure. H1b was partially supported. The results indicate support for H1b on quality and unrelated attribute but very weak support for related attribute.

Evaluations for Meaningful versus Non-meaningful Names (H2a and H2b). We hypothesized that the overall liking of meaningful brand names, as well as the evaluation of attributes of products with meaningful brand names, would be more favorable than the corresponding evaluations for non-meaningful brand names. The results indicate strong support for this hypothesis.

Repeat Exposure Effects for Meaningful versus Non-meaningful Names (H3a and H3b). Hypothesis H3a predicted that evaluations of overall liking, quality and related attribute for non-meaningful brands would show greater improvement with repeated exposure than the corresponding measures for meaningful brands. The results show partial support for hypothesis H3a. Finally, Hypothesis H3b, which predicted that improvement in evaluations of unrelated attribute would not be significantly different for meaningful versus non-meaningful brands, was supported.

The longitudinal nature of this study provides important insights into how brand names are perceived and evaluated. This has several important managerial implications.