Naming Brands: Implications for Children's Brand Awareness

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Abstract

Many marketers aim plant the seed of brand recognition into the mind of young consumers. This paper examines whether brand name characteristics influence children's brand awareness. Brands were assessed by three judges on the five name characteristics of simplicity, distinctiveness, meaningfulness, emotion and semantic appropriatenes. Brands also were evaluated with respect to the use of twenty-two specific linguistic devices. In total 192 children between the ages of eight and eleven years of age were asked whether they recognised six brand names. Results showed higher levels of recongition for brand names evaluated as the most representative for all name characteristics, with the exception of Emotion. Higher levels of brand recognition were also identified for brands that employed several linguistic devices.

Keywords: children, brand name, brand recognition

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Introduction

Children present not one, but three distinct market opportunities: they are consumers (primary market), influencers and the future market (McNeal, 1998; Götze, 2002). The 'future market' segment is suggested to provide greater marketing potential than a combination of both the primary and influential markets (McNeal, 1998). As a result, many marketers are aiming to gain a head start on branding themselves, in the hopes of creating future loyal customers (Torres, 2001; Ji, 2002). Researchers have indicated that brand awareness plays a pivotal role in this strategy. Ross and Harredine (2004) suggest the earlier a child establishes awareness of a brand, the stronger brand associations are likely to be when the child becomes an independent consumer.

Brand names are a key element facilitating product differentiation and demand (Bao, Shao and Rivers, 2008). Brand names are an effective shorthand means for brand communication capturing "*the central theme of key associations of a product in a very compact and economical fashion*" (Keller, 2003, p. 182). One dimension in which an effective brand name should be judged is the "*inherent ability of the name to be easily encoded into, retained in, and retrieved from memory*" (Robertson, 1989, p. 62). While it may take a consumer thirty seconds to comprehend an advertisement or possibly hours to understand a sales call, an effective brand name can be noticed, and its meaning registered in memory, in just a matter of seconds (Keller, 2003). The effectiveness of a 'cradle-to-grave' marketing strategy, therefore, may be dependent on the creation of a brand name that is noticed and remembered from a young age.

Despite the apparent link between brand names and the development of an effective 'cradle-to-grave' marketing strategy, a study has not been found that examines brand name chacteristics and children's brand awareness. This paper aims to fill this gap by assessing brand names from two different perspectives. First, Robertson's (1989) guide for creating memorable brand names is applied. Next, Bergh, Adler and Oliver's (1987) four-fold lingustic topology, involving 22 linguistic devices,is used. Specifically, this paper aims to determine which brand name characteristics and linguistic devices achieve higher levels of children's brand recognition.

This paper begins by examining the nature of brand names. This is followed by a description of the data collection method implemented. Finally, the results of the study are presented and the implications of the research discussed.

Literature Review

Creating a Memorable Brand Name

Robertson (1989) suggested five key brand name characteristics that impact consumer memory for brands. Brand awareness is said to improve if a brand name is: 1) simple, 2) distinctive, 3) meaningful, 4) an emotional word and 5) a sound associate of the product class.

A brand name should be simple to pronounce and/or spell. The benefits of a simple name are two-fold. First, a simple piece of information can both attract and maintain an individual's attention (Robertson, 1989). Once attended to, a simple brand name requires less cognitive effort on behalf of the consumer to comprehend and process (Keller, 2003). Marketers, however, face the challenge of creating a simple brand name, which is also distinctive. The creation of a distinct brand enables the brand to stand out amongst other competing brands, with consumer attention being drawn to the novel, unique and unusual names within the product category (Robertson,

1989, Keller, 2003). Keller (2003) suggests that a distinctive brand name can be a word uncommonly associated with a product category, an unusual combination of real words or a made up word (one that does not follow linguistic conventions). Brand names should also be familiar. Familiar words are those which are frequently used in the English language (Kanungo, 1968; Robertson, 1989, p. 64). The creation of a familiar brand name enables marketers to tap into already formed consumer knowledge structures (Keller, 2003). Lerman and Garbarino (2002) found that awareness was significantly higher for word brand names (68.8%) than non-word brand names (38.1%).

The use of emotional words also has been found to promote memory. Bock and Klinger (1986) examined the emotional properties of words and their effect on awareness. Results indicated that words that aroused stronger emotions achieved higher levels of awareness than less emotionally arousing words. Finally, Robertson (1989) suggested that a brand name should be a sound associate of the product class. In other words, brand names should 'fit' the product class. A brand name is suitable if it resembles (in form, sound or meaning) a word frequently associated with the product class (Kanungo, 1968, p. 290). Kanungo (1968) examined the relationship of brand awareness and brand name 'fit'. Results indicated that brand awareness is higher for compatible brand names than incompatible brand names. Results also showed that brand name fit may be more important than meaningfulness. Kanungo (1968) found that meaningfulness did not influence brand awareness when the brand name was considered fitting. When a brand name was considered incompatible, the use of a meaningful brand name was found to enhance brand awareness.

A Linguistic Perspective

With the ever increasing number of brands entering the market place, marketers are turning to linguistics to link raw sounds to specific meanings and emotions. In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of brand names that have neither historical origin nor meaning outside the brand itself (Mandagirli, 2008). Bergh, Adler and Oliver (1987, p. 42) implemented a four-fold lingustic toplogy to evaluate the frequency of phonetic devices in top brand names. The four-fold linguistic topology included: (1) phonetic, (2) orthographic, (3) morphological and (4) semantic catgeories.

The first dimension, phonetics, is associated with describing sounds in speech. Phonetics examines what sounds are produced, how they fall into a pattern and whether sounds are necessary to convey meaning (Ladefoged, 1993). The phonetic dimension contains eight linguistic chacteristics: alliteration, assonance, consonance, ryhmes (masculine, feminine and imperfect), clipping, blending, onomatopia and plosives. Bergh, Adler and Oliver's (1987) second linguistic category is orthographics, which refers to systems of writing (Schickedanz, 1999). The orthographic category considers the use of unusal or incorrect spelling, abbreviations and acronyms. The third linguistic category, morphological or 'morphology', refers to the internal structure of words. A morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of language (Peccei, 2006). Two morphological devices explored by Bergh, Adler and Oliver (1987) are affixation and compounding. Semantics is the final category examined by in Bergh, Adler and Oliver (1987). Semantics is the study between words and what these words represent (Condon, 1975). The semantic dimension considers the use of metaphors, similes, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, oxymoron, paronomasia and semantic appropriatness (i.e., sound associate identified by Robertson, 1987). Although a study has not been identified that evaluated the use of

lingusitic devices on brand recognition, Bergh, Adler and Oliver (1987) suggest that brands "*that employ several linguistic devices are both interesting and memorable*" (p. 43).

Methodology

To determine the extent to which design characteristics affect children's recognition of brand names, a three stage research design was implemented. First, brand selection commenced with six, child-appropriate brand names chosen via a content analysis of child-directed advertising (television, Internet, magazines). Selected brand names represented varying degrees of exposure during the content analysis period from frequent through to seldom. Three broad product categories were represented: retail/clothing (*Target*), toys/entertainment (*Playstation*, *Village Roadshow* and *Dreamworks*) and food (*Uncle Toby's*).

Stage two involved the assessment of the selected brand names in relation to both Robertson's (1989) guide for selecting memorable brands and Bergh, Adler and Oliver's (1987) four fold linguistic topology. Each of the six names was assessed by the researcher and two trained judges. Judges were asked to rate each brand name on a seven-point likert scale (with 7 being most representative). The assessments were used to establish the most and least representative name for each characteristic. Next, brands were categorised according to a list of twenty-two linguistic characteristics. A brand was not categorised unless all judges agreed that the name possessed the specific characteristic (as per Bergh, Adler and Oliver, 1987).

The final data collection stage consisted of a school survey. Questionnaires, designed for *young* children, were used to collect data regarding children's brand awareness, specifically name recognition. To improve understanding and reliability, the questionnaire contained simple language (Harrison, 2000). The questionnaire contained a series of recognition items for each of the six brand names. Brand names were presented in plain text and were contained in a box 80mm by 30mm to ensure they were of a similar size. After gaining permission from school principals, 707 information sheets and consent forms were sent home with students enrolled in years three, four and five at six government schools located in a major city on the Australian eastern seaboard. The researcher administered the questionnaires to those children who obtained parental consent, during class time in the presence of a teacher. A total of 192 responses were obtained, equating to an approximate response rate of 27%. The sample consisted of children aged between eight and 11 years with a mean age of 9.6 years. Of the total sample 40.6% were male and 52.6% were female.

Results

Brand Recognition

Brand recognition was measured by asking respondents to indicate whether they had seen each test brand previously. Respondents were provided with five response options, ranging from (1) "No I have not" to (5) "Yes I have". Mean recognition values were calculated for individual brands. Results showed relatively high levels of recognition for five of the six brands: *Playstation* (mean = 4.92), *Target* (mean = 4.91), *Dreamworks* (mean = 4.78), *Streets* (mean = 4.73), *Uncle Toby's* (mean = 4.52). *Village Roadshow* (mean = 2.27) received the lowest level of recognition.

To determine whether a significant difference existed between the mean recognition scores, a Friedman Test was conducted as required when normality is violated. Results indicated that there was a significant difference between the recognition scores for the six brands (χ^2 = 598.5, p =

.000). To ensure that the significant difference was not attributed to *Village Roadshow* (due to the substantially lower mean recognition score) a second Friedman test was performed on the remaining five brands. Once again a significant difference was found ($\chi^2 = 501.8$, $p = .000$).

Name Characteristics and Brand Recognition

Judges demonstrated clear consensus in their assessments across the five characteristics. *Target* was seen to be the most simple name and *Village Roadshow* the least simple name. *Target* received the highest score for Familiarity and *Dreamworks* the lowest. But, *Dreamworks* recieved the highest score for Distinctivness and *Target* the lowest. Although no brand name was assessed as being 'highly' emotional, *Playstation* was deemed the most Emotional word and *Target* the least. When considering the brand name as a sound associate of the product class, *Playstation* was deemed the most representative whereas *Target*, *Streets* and *Uncle Toby's* were not seen to reflect their product class. Across all five name characteristics, *Playstation* (mean=4.2) and *Target* (mean=3.95) received the highest evaluations while *Dreamworks* (mean=3.35) and *Village Roadshow* (mean=3.00) the lowest. Refer to Table 1 for name characteristic mean scores.

Table 1: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests Comparing Recognition Scores for Most versus Least Representative Brand Names for Five Name Characteristics

Judge Characteristic Scores		Child Recognition Scores	Z	Sig.
Simplicity	Target (6.75)	4.91	-10.706	**0.000****
	Village Roadshow (3.00)	2.27		
Distinctiveness	Dreamworks (5.75)	4.78	-1.985	**0.048***
	Target (4.25)	4.91		
Meaningfulness	Target (6.75)	4.91	-1.985	**0.048***
	Dreamworks (3.00)	4.78		
Emotion	Playstation (3.75)	4.92	-0.045	0.964
	Target (1.00)	4.91		
Sound Associate	Playstation (4.25)	4.92		
	Uncle Toby's (1.00)	4.52	-4.152	**0.000****
	Target (1.00)	4.91	-0.045	0.964
	Streets (1.00)	4.73	-2.848	**0.004****

To determine whether design characteristics were related to brand name recognition, a series of Wilcoxon signed ranked tests were performed. Brand recognition for names evaluated as being the most representative were compared to those least representative for each of the five name characteristics. Table 1 shows significant results for all name characteristics, with the exception of emotion. *Playstation*, the name evaluated as having the highest level of emotion, was recognised similarly to *Target*, the name with the least amount of emotion.

Linguistic Devices and Brand Recognition

Brand names can employ more than one linguistic device. As a result a brand can achieve a score between 0 (no devices used) and 22 (all evaluated devices employed). Judges agreed that the selected test brands employed between 0 and 4 linguistic devices when considering the 22 devices originally evaluated. *Target* and *Uncle Toby's* employed one linguistic device, initial

plosive and personification respectively, whereas *Playstation* employed four lingusistic devices (i.e., compound, paronomasia, initial plosive and semantic appropriateness).

To determine whether the presence of linguistic devices was related to brand name recognition, a Wilcoxon signed ranked test was performed. Brand recognition for the name that possessed the most linguistic devices (Playstation) was compared to the name that employed the least number of linguistic devices (Streets). Results indicated that *Playstation*, who employed four linguistic devices, achieved a higher level of recognition than *Streets*, which employed no linguistic devices.

Discussion

Keller (2003) acknowledges that the creation of a brand name is both an art and a science. A number of approaches are available to marketers when creating brand names with simplicity, distinctiveness, meaningfulness, emotion and semantic appropriateness seen as key elements for creating a memorable brand name (Robertson, 1989). In addition to these brand name characteristics, this study also sought to identify whether the use of linguistic devices can affect children's brand awareness. Interestingly, across all five name characteristics, judges deemed *Playstation* to be the most representative, and *Village Roadshow* to be the least. This evaluation is complimented by the recognition scores obtained, whereby *Playstation*, achieved the highest level of recognition and *Village Roadshow* the lowest. Overall, results found that with the exception of emotion, the presence of brand name characteristics plus employing several linguistic devices did facilitate children's brand recognition.

Although this study did not include a large number of brands, it does provide initial support for the notion that the use of linguistic devices does make a brand more memorable (Bergh, Adler and Oliver, 1987).

It is important to acknowledge that level of exposure can have an impact upon brand recognition (Henderson and Cote, 1998). As previously expressed brands selected represented varying degrees of advertising exposure. Although *Playsation* and *Village Roadshow* were found to have similar levels of advertising exposure, the sample respondents' exposure to this communication remains unkown. It is recommended that a true experimental design be employed in the future to assess brand name characteristics and brand awareness. An experimental design would allow control for level of advertising exposure and product category, both of which may have affected the results of the current study.

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