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## The role of brand exposure and experience on brand recall—Product durables vis-à-vis FMCG

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of brand exposure and experience on brand recall, mediated by three affectional drivers: brand trust, brand image and self-image congruence. The study distinguishes between an individual consumer's brand exposure and experience, and how these impact brand recall. Using original data collected from a survey of 219 consumers, brand recall models in two product categories (Fast Moving Consumer Goods FMCG and durable goods) were tested. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was applied, resulting in models for the two types of goods, establishing notable differences between durables and FMCGs. Experience influences brand recall in durable goods while brand recall is established via exposure for fast-moving consumer goods. This suggests that consumers are better able to recall durable goods brands if they have personally used them, while consumers of FMCG are more heavily influenced by advertising. Our study also established that brand trust has a significant role in mediating both of these relationships. Ultimately, the study establishes key differences between the brand recall of product categories, as well as the mediating role of brand trust, providing a framework for future brand recall research.

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## 1. Introduction

As consumers are increasingly inundated with marketing communication messages, recent studies have emphasised the importance of brand recall research (Keller, 2009). Our study picks up from Keller's call and investigates brand recall in two distinct product categories, namely durables and non-durables. The importance of brand recall for practitioners as well as scholars is undisputed. What is less clear, however, is what ultimately leads to the formation of consumers being able to recall brands, and naturally, hopefully ultimately will buy, and repeat purchase such brands. A clear gap in theory and practice is specifically the role that emotion plays in the formation of brand recall, and our study is designed to fill precisely this gap.

There is quite a substantial amount of a literature on how consumers relate to brands in various forms and shapes. In particular it is well established that brand recall is related to a consumer's exposure and experience with a brand (Nedungadi et al., 2001; Shapiro and Krishnan, 2001; Warlop et al., 2005). Both constructs relate to how a consumer interacts with a brand (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Brakus et al., 2009) but there remains a clear distinction between the two

constructs. Traditionally, exposure refers primarily to advertising exposure, and is thought of as a type of 'indirect exposure' (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Kent and Allen, 1994; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012). In contrast, experience is subjective and internalised, and is related to a consumer's actual use of brands and products (Brakus et al., 2009): past experience with a product or brand leads to improved recall of brand information (Mikhailitchenko et al., 2009; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012). Our study builds on previous studies such as Krishnan (1996), Korchia (2006) and Park et al. (1994), who have made a distinction between familiarity and awareness pointing towards exposure and experience not affecting consumers in the same way. Selnes and Grønhaug (1986) establish that product knowledge is developed via search and use of information as well as through experience. In contrast, Wright and Lynch (1995) found that exposure had a greater impact upon search attributes than experience. The constructs of exposure and experience together have been termed 'brand familiarity' (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012), and it has been demonstrated that increased brand familiarity can lead to improved brand recall (Gardner, 1983; Heckler et al., 2012). For the purposes of this study, exposure does not only refer to advertising exposure, but also "incidental exposure to features of the everyday environment can influence product evaluation and choice" (Berger and Fitzsimons, 2008, p. 1).

Brand recall is "a consumer's ability to retrieve [a] brand when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or

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some other type of probe as a cue" (Keller, 1993); in short, brand recall is unaided awareness of a particular brand. Therefore, coupled with the intense competition between brands (Valls et al., 2011), brands increasingly need to become more memorable than their competitors. Brand recall research is characterised in the realm of cognition and memory, particularly as it pertains to understanding its drivers (Keller, 1993; Cowley and Mitchell, 2003; Mullainathan, 2002). However consumer theory indicates that such memory processes, as well as broad consumer behaviour processes in general, are also influenced by affection or emotion (Loken, 2006; Bagozzi et al., 1999). More recent research has argued that affect intertwines and influences various constructs of branding and brand equity, ultimately a key measure of marketing effectiveness (Mirzaei et al., 2011), for example brand relationships (Heath et al., 2006), brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), and brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Baumann et al., 2007); however the dynamic relationship between affect and brand recall has been investigated to a lesser extent. Research in the field of psychology has identified a strong link to affect and memory; specifically, memories and events are more easily recalled if there are stronger affectional or emotional ties (Bradley et al., 1992; Cahill and McGaugh, 1995).

In this study we offer a new perspective to explain brand recall. As an overall roadmap for our approach, we propose that the way consumers are exposed and also experience a brand will then impact their affection, and ultimately their brand recall. These associations however depend on the involvement with the respective product category. For products in different categories consumers have varying degrees of involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985). For high involvement products there is typically a higher price point, a greater level of research and length of search; therefore the formation of an affection, and subsequent hypothesised higher level of brand recall may well be in marked contrast to low involvement products (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Our study probes these associations comparing cars, representing high involvement products, to shampoo, a placeholder for FMCG and low involvement products. While it could be seen as a limitation to have only two products, intentionally two different product categories were chosen to represent very different consumer behaviour processes (shampoo representing a cheap, fast purchase process with low research, in contrast to cars that are expensive, with long purchase processes and intense research).

We hypothesise that the association between experience through product usage and exposure through advertising on brand recall will be mediated by a consumer's affections. In other words the chain of action is for consumers to be emotionally affected by experience and exposure, and subsequently they will or will not recall a brand. Consumer affections we have split into three affectional drivers: perceived brand image, self-image congruence and trust.

The shortcomings of evaluating brands purely on a cognitive or objective basis lies in the fact that it overlooks the role of the emotional or subjective image that people may have of themselves and of a brand; or in short, whether they 'click' with the brand. The role of brand image is well established in the branding literature, and we have included this dimension to explain brand recall. In broader terms, image is seen as a classic construct in branding, and therefore we have included brand image and self-image congruence as affectional drivers. Drawing inspiration from a recent study that included trust as a key driver of customer loyalty (Walsh et al., 2010) we include trust as an affectional driver in brand recall as well. Self-image congruence has received much less attention in the marketing literature, which is perplexing given that consumers may well choose their brands in accordance with how they view themselves. We therefore now include this crucial dimension as a mediating factor based on the premise that

the more a brand matches our personality, the higher our emotional attachment, and by the very logic, the stronger our brand recall. Naturally the same logic applies to the aforementioned traditional brand research dimensions of a consumer's brand image perception, as well as their trust in the brand.

## 2. Affectional drivers of brand recall

Past research on brand recall has focused on various aspects of memory, exposure and experience as key influences (Hutchinson, 1983; Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Hutchinson et al., 1994). In this study we distinguish between brand recall and brand awareness. However, since various aspects of consumption are reliant upon both cognitive and affective functions (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Laros and Steenkamp, 2005), it is also important to examine the 'affectional drivers' (a term coined in this study) of brand recall.

Marketing theory dictates that exposure and experience influence the information that consumers gain about brands, thereby influencing consumers' feelings about brands. Although the terms 'emotion' and 'affect' (affection) are often used interchangeably to describe feelings, emotion refers to "a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts" (Bagozzi et al., 1999, p. 184), while affection is an "umbrella [term] for a set of more specific mental processes including emotions, moods, and attitudes" (Bagozzi et al., 1999, p. 184). For the sake of consistency, the term 'affection' (using the definition stated above) will be used henceforth in this study.

Zajonc (1980) argued that the affective quality of the original input is the first element to emerge when people retrieve an object from memory. Seminal research by Isen (1987) supported this assertion by experimentally identifying a link between positive affect and recall. Although it is impossible to exclude the actual descriptive (i.e., cognitive) features of memory (as they are the fundamental objects and cues memorised), Zajonc's study (1980) demonstrated the important role of affect in consumer brand recall and recognition. These findings highlight the fact that memories associated with greater affection are easier to recall, as opposed to memories containing neutral or no affect.

Examinations of affection in marketing and branding research are broad, and include its application to both exposure and experience. It has been argued that consumers' exposure to marketing communications (e.g., advertising) evokes some form of affect (Batra and Ray, 1986; Olney et al., 1991). In addition, research on affection has shown that consumers are drawn to specific brands and advertising due to their emotional appeal (Holbrook and Batra, 1987; Heath et al., 2006). Rossiter and Percy (1991), p. 100, established that a key role of advertising is to "elicit appropriate emotions in the target audience". Similarly, experience with a brand has been found to trigger a range of mild and strong, and positive and negative affects for the brand (Schmitt, 2012; Andrade and Cohen, 2007).

The mediating nature of affection in brand recall can be measured using three affectional drivers: perceived brand image (how a consumer perceives the image portrayed by a brand) (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990; Keller, 1993), self-image congruence (the extent to which consumers identify with a brand) (Sirgy, 1982; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998), and brand trust (the extent to which consumers feel a brand is reliable, safe and honest) (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

### 2.1. Perceived brand image

The literature has shown associations between a brand's image and brand equity (Gardner and Levy, 1955; Park et al., 1986; Swait et al., 1993; Faircloth et al., 2001), but little work has been done to examine this relationship from the perspective of individual

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