

Conceptualising and measuring brand accessibility

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to further develop the link between the Associative Network Theory (ANT) of memory and marketing theory, specifically in the areas of brand awareness and brand image measurement. Drawing from ANT, brand awareness is conceptualised as the accessibility of brand information from consumer memory. Brand image is conceptualised as the brand associations that are linked to the brand name, or to which the brand name is linked.

Further drawing from ANT, two criteria when measuring brand awareness are developed and tested. The first is based on the retrieval cue used, namely whether it is the brand name or brand associations. The second is based on whether a breadth (proportion of the population retrieving) or a depth (speed of retrieval) measure is recorded.

The study involved a total of 213 Bachelor of Managements students who were read out a series of prompts about two markets during tutorials of 10-20 people. The questionnaire had been initially pretested on 24 students and was found to be appropriate in terms of both the markets and the implementation setting chosen. The total prompts were divided into two parts to minimise salience effects and respondent fatigue. The questionnaire was also designed with 'clearing' questions between unprompted cues to minimise any potential salience effects. For the first market all measures were found to be generally convergent. For the second market, few responses were elicited in response to retrieval cues, therefore the value of a depth construct is limited. The differences between the markets suggest that there may be an additional factor influencing the measurements. This is hypothesised to be frequency of purchase and is an area that needs future research.

These operationalisations were compared with a current method of collecting data used in Correspondence Analysis based perceptual mapping. In this method, data is collected in the form of a 'pick any' table where respondents are prompted with both the brand name and brand associations. No order effects are measured and the relationship between the brand name and the brand association is expressed as the proportion of respondents identifying the link.

Comparing the measures, a systematic relationship between breadth of recall and the 'pick any' table was found. The difference in brand name-brand association relationships was inversely proportional to the breadth of accessibility of the brand name with the product category as the retrieval cue. There were significant differences found when comparing depth of recall with the 'pick any' measure however the managerial relevance of this is questionable when few responses are elicited (thus depth does not vary between brands).

The implication for marketing theory and practice is that generally the breadth of recall measure is an effective measure of accessibility. That is no additional measures are required. There also appears to be a systematic relationship between prompted and unprompted measures which suggests that this distinction is not necessary, as long as the breadth of accessibility with the product category as the retrieval cue is known. The results also suggest that brand awareness may need to be measured differently according to the type of market.

The limitations of the study include that firstly the analysis was done on an aggregate rather than an individual level. Second, a convenience sample was used, and finally a proxy time measure of the rank order of responses was used to determine the depth of awareness, rather than the actual time taken to retrieve information from memory.