Brand Salience for Durables: An Empirically Based Model

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Abstract

The research reported in this paper proposed and tested a model of brand salience for durables, which incorporates knowledge and brand image as antecedents. A full model of brand salience has not been tested previously, nor has a model of brand salience for durables been tested. A quasi-experimental method was utilised. Respondents undertook a free recall exercise using category cues, and then completed multi-item measures of brand knowledge, brand associations, and purchase likelihood. Past purchase was tested via a recall exercise. A usable sample of 270 respondents was gained, and the data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Analysis of the data found support for a model of brand salience for the durable category, and found a relationship between brand salience and most recent brand purchased. This paper contributes to the field of branding by proposing and testing a model of brand salience. The research reported in this paper may suggest that advertisers need to design their communications to increase accessibility of brands in the memory of consumers, and that the last brand purchased by consumers influence recall, especially in the consumer durable category.

Track: Consumer behaviour
**Introduction**

The research reported in this paper proposed and tested empirically a model of brand salience for durables (cars). Brand salience had been tested previously for fast-moving consumer goods, but only as a simple recall or recognition test. The research in this paper proposes a model of brand salience that captures both the breadth and depth of awareness and recognises the role of consumer knowledge, and the contribution of media consumption to the brand salience construct. In addition, the behavioural outcomes of brand salience, such as purchase likelihood and purchase, had not been tested previously. The section following discusses the proposed model of brand salience.

**Brand Salience**

Residing within a framework of brand equity (Keller, 1993; 2001) is the concept of brand salience, which has been defined as “the prominence or level of activation of a brand in memory” (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986, p. 363). Alternatively, brand salience has been defined as “… more than mere awareness of a brand in a product category and is vital for a brand to remain in one’s consideration set” (Ehrenberg, Barnard, Kennedy and Bloom, 2002, p. 8). Brand salience has been linked to: improving the effectiveness of advertising (Miller and Berry, 1998; Moran, 1990); improving a brand’s position in the consideration set (Moran 1990); brand purchase intention (Axelrod, 1968; Hasher and Zacks, 1984); purchase likelihood (Domke, Shah and Wackman, 1998; Wyer and Srull, 1989); and purchase behaviour (Ambler, 2003; Ambler et al., 2004). In addition, salient information gains disproportionate amounts of attention, is recalled in disproportionate amounts (Alba, Hutchinson and Lynch, 1991), and inhibits recall of competing information (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986). Figure 1 shows a proposed model of brand salience.

![Figure 1: A Proposed Model of Brand Salience](image)

**Antecedents of Brand Salience**

Figure 1 shows the proposed model of brand salience, including the antecedents of brand knowledge and media consumption. The media consumption variable has a significant relationship with brand knowledge, and fits the model of brand salience for a consumer durable; however, brand image does not fit the model of brand salience. The basis for brand salience is brand awareness (Keller, 2003a), and brand knowledge forms the basis of brand awareness. For a brand to be salient customers must have brand knowledge, and have higher order awareness and a richness of information associated with each brand in their
consideration set (Fazio et al., 1992). The section following discusses current measures of brand salience and the need for an improved model.

**Current Measures of Brand Salience**

The most common way to measure the brand salience of a product from the consumer research literature has been via a simple recall test from a part-category cuing experiment (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986; Rundus, 1973). Higgins and King (1981) discussed the need to measure both the prominence and distinctiveness of a construct in memory. These methods, however, do not account for, or measure, how customers view a product and the space or position that a product occupies in a customer’s mind, or the effects of media consumption on brand awareness. A brand that is retrieved early and easily in the recall process will have a dominant effect on other brands recalled (Alba and Chattopadhyay 1986; Taylor and Fiske, 1978), and on consideration set size (Hauser and Wernerfelt, 1990; Nedungadi, 1990), and have an influence on purchase. Keller (2003a) indicated that brand salience requires both depth and breadth of awareness, and indicated that this requires measurement of what is recalled and under what condition the information is recalled.

More recently, Romaniuk (2005) and Romaniuk and Sharp (2003), who conceptualised brand salience in very broad terms as the probability that a customer will think of a brand at some point in time, measured brand salience for subscription markets for services (banking and insurance). The measurement approach for this conceptualisation consisted of image measurement and recognition, or top-of-mind awareness. Romaniuk and Sharp (2003) utilised a method of measuring brand salience, which proposed that a customer would mention a highly salient brand more frequently across a range of image attributes. Arguably, this may be a better reflection of the brand’s enhanced ability to be recognised, or evaluated positively and chosen, than simply top-of-mind awareness with the product category cue. This adds further depth to the measurement of salience, but the operationalisation of image measurement, arguably, did not tap into the consumer’s own knowledge stores, and used a recognition process instead. A recall process would require the consumer to delve into memory stores and undertake the act of retrieving information to memory, which has an effect on other brands (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986). The method used for the research in this paper takes into account the retrieval of information, the structure of brand knowledge, brand associations and brand image, and outcomes for brand salience. Thus, the research in this paper offers a richer measure of brand salience than those used currently.

**Brand Knowledge**

Consumer brand knowledge relates to the cognitive representation of the brand (Peter and Olson, 2001), and can be defined in terms of the personal meaning about a brand stored in consumer memory (Keller, 2003b). Alba and Hutchinson (1987) measured knowledge as a multi-dimensional construct, consisting of familiarity (product-based experiences with a brand), and expertise (the ability to perform product-related tasks successfully). Brand knowledge has been envisioned as a collection of associations — brand related ideas, observations, and sentiments (Keller 1993). Higher brand knowledge should lead to increased brand salience. This relationship is addressed in hypothesis H$_1$.

H$_1$: **Brand knowledge is related positively to brand salience.**

**Brand Associations**

Consumers use brand associations to help process, organise, and retrieve information in memory to aid in making purchase decisions (Aaker, 1991; Low and Lamb, 2000). Activating favourable brand associations facilitates rehearsal, which is a process that strengthens and reinforces associative linkages, thereby allowing associations to be retrieved more readily.
(Fazio et al., 1982; 1986; Roehm et al., 2002). Brand image has been defined as a collection of brand associations (Krishnan, 1996).

**Brand Image**
Brand image is a consumer construct (Kapferer, 1992) that resides in the associative memory network that is critical to consumer decision making and provides potentially biased brand evocation and evaluation, contributing ultimately to brand equity (Faircloth, Capella and Alford, 2001). Keller (1993) stated that brand associations acquired through the firm’s marketing mix activities and product use, contribute to, and define ultimately the brand’s image to the consumer. Brand image, measured by brand associations, should be related to brand knowledge, and brand salience. This is addressed in hypotheses H2.

**H2:** Brand knowledge is related positively to brand image.

**Media Consumption**
Consumers are exposed continuously to multiple forms of media. Radio, television (pay and free-to-air), magazines, and newspapers have a strong influence on consumers and provide a means for advertisers to communicate with current and potential customers. The consumption or use of media by consumers leads to greater brand awareness and brand knowledge (Ehrenberg 1974). Higher brand awareness means that a consumer has a larger number of brand associations for a broader range of products (Keller 2003). The more media that a person consumes, the greater that person’s chance of being exposed to a greater number of brand claims, which may lead to a degree of brand expertise (Keller 1997). Media consumption has been measured in a range of literature from psychology (Harrison and Cantor 1997; Miller and Halberstadt 2005) to adolescent health (Borzekowski et al. 1999). Media consumption, especially amongst the “baby boomer” generation, is particularly high (Paul 2003). The relationship between media consumption and brand knowledge and brand salience are addressed in H3 and H4.

**H3:** Brand knowledge is related positively to media consumption

**H4:** Brand salience is related positively to media consumption

**Purchase Likelihood**
It has been shown that brand salience is linked to brand purchase likelihood (Axelrod, 1968; Hasher and Zacks, 1984). In order to test this in the overall brand salience model, a measure of purchase likelihood was examined. The scale used to test intention to undertake purchase behaviour was the Juster scale (Juster, 1960; 1966). The Juster scale has been found to be superior to traditional intention scales (Day et al., 1991), and a strong correlation between the Juster scale and actual behaviour has been found (Brennan and Esselmont, 1994). A salient brand will be more accessible, which means that there is greater ease in processing brand information. Ease of processing leads to higher product evaluation and purchase likelihood (Berger and Fitzsimons, 2007; Lee and Labroo, 2004; Nedungadi, 1990). In addition, brands that have been purchased recently are more likely to be chosen (Shapiro, 1999). Thus, a brand that is more accessible, and has more brand associations, should have higher brand salience. Heightened brand salience should have an influence on purchase likelihood, which should lead to purchase. Hypothesis H5 addresses the relationship between brand salience and purchase likelihood.

**H5:** Brand salience is related positively to purchase likelihood.
Sample
It is known that users of a product see a brand as more salient, and have greater brand knowledge, than non-users (Romaniuk and Sharp, 2003). The population of interest for this research was male or female purchasers or consumers of cars, who were residing in Australia, and who were aged 18 years or older. A sample of 275 respondents was recruited to participate in the research from a local family centre. Five respondents chose not to complete the questionnaire, and their responses were withdrawn, leaving a sample size of 270 respondents.

Research Method
Respondents undertook a one-minute free recall episode for the car category, and then answered a series of multi-item questions relating to brand and product knowledge derived from Kleiser and Mantel (1994), and Smith and Park (1992). In the study, the questions were adapted to reflect the car category as the original items for the brand knowledge measures were based on knowledge of cameras. For the purpose of this research, cars brands both local and international were included due to the globalisation of the market, and the dominance of foreign brands in Australia. The act of purchase was considered to be the use of cars and car products. The recall exercise provided an indication of the consideration set size of the respondent, and a direct measure of brand knowledge. Respondents were then asked to list brand associations for each of the first five brands recalled, and indicate if these associations were positive or negative. Brand associations were assessed for uniqueness. Finally, respondents answered questions relating to media consumption and purchase likelihood.

Results and Discussion
A model of brand salience (see Figure 1) was developed and tested for durables (cars). The model indicated that there was a fit between the model and the items that represent brand salience for cars (CMIN/DF= 2.31; p = 0.06; GFI = 0.90; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.07). Respondents recalled an average of 10.4 brands of car. This would indicate that respondents went outside of their short-term recall (Miller, 1956), and delved into long-term memory to access more brands. Although respondents may have one main vehicle that they use, they may use other vehicles or be exposed to many other vehicles daily. This may increase the secondary associations with the brands, and the number of different circumstances under which brands may be recalled in response to a cue (Keller, 2003a). The knowledge model for cars was related strongly to the cognitive knowledge and understanding of the brand, and the ability of the consumer to analyse the brand, and the brand automaticity factor, or the use of heuristics to determine purchase. The result was a four-factor knowledge construct.

The relationship between brand salience and brand knowledge was significant (β = 0.82, p < 0.05), thus, H1 was supported. Brand knowledge accounted for 68 per cent of the variation in the brand salience variable. Brand and category knowledge for consumers leads to higher brand salience. That is the brand is recalled more readily to the consumer’s memory. The relationship between brand knowledge and brand image was not significant (β = 0.21, p > 0.05), indicating that H2 was not supported. The media consumption variable had a positive relationship with brand knowledge (β = 0.62, p < 0.05) supporting H3, but interestingly, a negative relationship with brand salience (β = -0.68, p < 0.05) rejecting H4. The more media a respondent consumed, the greater the brand knowledge the respondent may have with regard to products and brands. In this instance, three items related to magazine consumption represented the media consumption variable. The negative relationship between brand salience and media consumption indicated that greater magazine consumption might not increase respondents’ salience or their ability to recall more brands, or to recall them sooner in the process. A further argument for the negative relationship between media consumption...
and brand salience may relate to information overload, where consumers feel that they are getting too much information for the choice at hand. Consumers who have greater knowledge of the car and feel more expert in their understanding of car brands, may have an ability to develop more associations in memory. This might provide a depth of awareness for consumers of car information. The depth of awareness for car information might allow consumers to develop more associations with the brand, and should allow the consumers to develop more net positive images for the car brands (Krishnan, 1996). The lack of influence of brand image may be related to the long purchase cycle for cars, or the high involvement nature of the decision. Generally, the longer purchase cycle and high involvement nature of the category may have influence both brand image and behavioural outcomes. Constant exposure and use of vehicles may have influenced knowledge of cars, but other factors, such as purchase cycles may have influenced brand image, and purchase.

Brand salience did not have relationship with purchase likelihood (β = -0.12, p >0.05), which indicated that brand salience for durables did not influence a consumer’s likelihood to make a purchase. Thus, H5 was rejected. The findings indicate that the brand and product knowledge are important and contribute to brand salience. However, consumers may process information in a different manner for high involvement decisions. Respondents indicated that the first car recalled was the last car purchased (50.7 per cent) but although 84 per cent of respondents used a car daily, 84.1 per cent had not purchased a car for six months. Additionally, the top four brands recalled by respondents represented the top four brands by share in the category at the time of the research. Although a product is salience, is recalled early and consumers have knowledge for the product, they also have an ability to recall numerous products, and have information for a variety of products. Further, for car purchase decisions and purchase likelihood, consumers may take various other factors into consideration, such as age of current vehicle, financing, costs and ongoing costs. All of these factors may have an influence on purchase likelihood, which may have an influence on the role of a salient brand. The brand awareness construct (measured by recalled brands and response latency) was subsumed into the brand salience construct. Please note that due to space constraints, the full factor analysis, and SEM modelling cannot be shown in this paper.

**Conclusions and Limitations**

This paper offered and tested a model of brand salience for durables (cars) that incorporated brand knowledge and media consumption constructs. Further, the model tested for behavioural outcomes. The full model of brand salience for cars has a four-factor knowledge construct but does not have a relationship with purchase behaviour. When respondents use cars, they rely on heuristics to a degree, to recognise their brand and products. Consumers’ knowledge of the car contributes to the level of brand salience that they have with that brand. However, a salient car brand will not lead to a higher purchase likelihood or purchase. The model of antecedents to car brand salience represents both the depth and the breadth of brand salience. The findings in this paper indicate that marketers may need to use communications to build the number of associations that consumers have with a brand, and increase the accessibility of information in memory, in order to increase brand salience, and purchase likelihood. However, marketers may also work on other factors that may influence the purchase likelihood for consumers. This research collected data on previous brand driven and used, but did not have behavioural data on previous brand purchased, which is a limitation of the research. Future research may track behavioural patterns of actual purchase data with the brand salience for consumers.

*For a copy of the questionnaire, please contact the author.*
References


