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# Conceptualizing and measuring brand salience

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**Abstract.** *Historically, brand salience has been considered synonymous with the brand being ‘top of mind’ (mentioned first) when the product category is used to cue retrieval from memory. In this article we argue that this conceptualization (and associated measure) is too narrow. We show that there is value in distinguishing salience from the concepts of awareness and attitude by conceptualizing brand salience as the brand’s propensity to be noticed or come to mind in buying situations. Brand salience reflects the quantity and quality of the network of memory structures buyers’ hold about the brands. This article offers guidelines to facilitate research on the role of brand salience in brand choice and buyer behaviour that are an important progression from the evaluation (attitude) focus of contemporary marketing theory.* **Key Words** ● advertising ● brand image ● brand salience ● buyer behaviour ● memory

## Introduction

Drawing mainly from social psychology, the concept of salience is most commonly associated with the ability of an item to ‘stand out’ from its environment or background (Guido, 1998). Its origins in brand research are often attributed to a discussion on attitudes by Krech and Crutchfield (1948) who state ‘Saliency refers to the fact that not all of man’s beliefs stand out with equal prominence in his cognitive field. He may be more aware of certain of his beliefs than others, they may enter his thoughts more readily’ (cited in Myers and Alpert, 1977: 163). This ‘prominence’, from a cognitive perspective, is typically translated to accessibility from long-term memory (Guido, 1998). Put simply, some things are noticed more easily, and some things are easier to retrieve from long-term memory, so they have a higher propensity to enter working memory.

While the salience of attributes or beliefs has received attention as a moderating effect between brand beliefs and buyer behaviour (Fazio and Williams, 1986; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), the salience of the brand has also been considered (Alba



and Chattopadhyay, 1986; Miniard et al., 1989). It is this latter 'brand salience', which we define as the propensity of the brand to be thought of by buyers (i.e. 'stand out' from memory) in buying situations, that is the focus of this article.

In marketing literature and research, brand salience has often been neglected in favour of concepts such as brand attitude, image and, more recently, equity. In part this is due to an over emphasis on evaluation as part of the buying process. But it is also due to salience being conceptualized simply as 'top of mind' (TOM) awareness. TOM awareness refers to whether or not buyers recall the brand first (strictly speaking before any other brands in the category) when asked to name brands from a given product category (i.e. the product category is the cue to retrieve items from memory (e.g. Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986)). Thus it is frequently used either interchangeably with, or as a subset of, brand awareness (Keller, 1993), rather than being considered as a stand-alone concept.

Recently brand salience has assumed a greater prominence in both brand and advertising literature. There have been calls for the consideration of building brand salience as an outcome of effective advertising (Bullmore, 1999; Ehrenberg et al., 2000a; Miller and Berry, 1998), as well as discussion of the role of brand salience from a brand management perspective (Ehrenberg et al., 1997; Keller and Davey, 2001; Romaniuk, 2002). Therefore it seems timely to re-examine what the concept of brand salience should mean in a marketing context and the implications for measurement. In this article, we explore how brand salience is relevant to brand buying. The aim is to draw from a wide field of research, particularly consumer memory and behaviour, to increase our understanding of this concept and specify the requirements for a valid (and useful) measure. This will allow researchers to examine empirically the contribution of brand salience to the understanding and prediction of buyer behaviour.

## Background

The most popular conceptualization of brand salience is as the accessibility or 'prominence' of the brand in buyer memory (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986; Fazio, 1990). From a human memory perspective, prominence can be apparent in two ways. The first is a 'current' prominence whereby the very recently retrieved brand is in working memory (e.g. when an Elvis Presley song is playing on the radio, Elvis becomes easier to recall as a singer). The second is the longer-run average accessibility from long-term memory (e.g. for most people, most of the time, Elvis has more chance of being retrieved than say, Marvin Gaye). It should be noted that we focus in this article on the latter, the accessibility from long-term memory. While it is possible that there is interest in the accessibility of the brand name under varying conditions (e.g. when viewing an ad, or when talking with friends), arguably situations of most interest for the vast majority of marketers are buying or media consumption situations. Therefore we are concerned with the 'prominence' of the brand when people are in these situations. We are concerned with the buyer memory structures about



the brand that, as commented by Keller and Davey (2001), affect how often and easily the brand is evoked under various situations or circumstances. Brand salience is part of brand equity (the differential effects of having the brand name (Ailawadi et al., 2003), being the effect of heightening propensity to be thought of/noticed in buying situations.

Throughout the marketing literature and in market research practice the concept of brand salience has been linked strongly to a single operationalization. This is a buyer's ease of recalling the brand (name) as a member of the product category (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986). In doing this, researchers implicitly tie the concept of brand salience to first, being the first mentioned or 'top of mind' (TOM) and second, with the product category label as the specific (and typically only) retrieval cue. This measure of link to the product category cue is a subset of the brand recall or recognition measures of brand awareness (Rossiter and Percy, 1997) and contributes to the ambiguity between the brand awareness and salience concepts. It assumes that the product category cue is the only mechanism for buyers to think of the brand in buying and media consumption situations. However, research regarding how information in memory is accessed suggests that this implicit assumption is not valid. Recalling brands from memory does not just depend on a single cue (the product category) and noticing a brand is more than simply recognising it (linking the name to the product category). We will explore this in more detail, but first we briefly discuss the key literature about the structure and processes of human memory.

### Retrieval from memory

Since the 1980s, theories of how humans encode, store and retrieve information have permeated marketing thought and theory development (e.g. Keller, 1987). One of the theories most widely adopted into marketing is that of the Associative Network Theories (ANT) of memory (e.g. Anderson and Bower, 1979). Fundamentally, under these theories, memory consists of nodes that hold information/concepts. If two pieces of information are 'associated', connections are conceptualized as existing between them, thus making up a network of associated information. If the information is new (e.g. seeing an ad for McDonalds and salads for the first time) new links can be formed (i.e. 'McDonalds' and 'salads' become linked). If the consumer had prior exposure to these two concepts together (seeing an ad for McDonalds offering salads for the second time), further exposure is thought to reinforce the existing link (the link between 'McDonalds' and 'salad' becomes 'stronger'). Both of these processes result in improved accessibility of the information at a later point in time.

The links between concepts are asymmetric in strength (probability of activation/recall). So when asked to list all the things associated with McDonalds a consumer might very well say 'salads', but be far less likely to say McDonalds if asked to list all the things they associate with salads. Rossiter and Percy (1997: 110) point out that some product categories are bought largely by recall (services), in which



case a strong product category need to brand name link is desirable, whereas others are bought by recognition (groceries) in which case a strong brand name to category need link is perhaps more desirable.

It is important to note that while we refer to retrieval from memory, we do not confine the relevance solely to memory-based purchase situations (in line with Lynch and Srull, 1982). Even when all or most brands are present at the point of choice (e.g. at a supermarket) consumers still retrieve information from memory and only notice specific brands, as evidenced by the short amount of time taken to choose brands despite wide ranges on offer (Dickson and Sawyer, 1990). Therefore the issue of retrieval of brand name information from memory is still relevant in that context. Recently, Chandon and Wansink (2002) found that heightening salience of a product (through pictures and pantry shelf position) resulted in increased consumption incidence for high-convenience products. They postulate that this higher salience resulted in the product being noticed more frequently and therefore considered as an option to consume.

When a customer is exposed to the brand in a specific context, links in memory between the brand name and specific concepts can be created or reinforced. This network of information linked to the brand name constitutes what has been referred to as the brand's image (Keller, 1993) or more recently brand knowledge (Keller, 2003). These linked concepts can be retrieved when the brand name is used as the retrieval cue (e.g. thinking of Persil [brand name acting as cue] conjures up thoughts of *in tablet form* (attribute)), and/or cues to retrieve the brand name when stimulated in a buying situation (e.g. want *something refreshing* (attribute acting as cue) brings to mind Coca-cola (brand name)) (Holden, 1993; Holden and Lutz, 1992). This second point is frequently neglected in marketing, with most attention on the brand to attribute link. While it has been acknowledged that the requirement of buyers to consider/think of the brand is a crucial first step to purchase (e.g. Rossiter and Percy, 1987), it has usually been taken for granted that the link to the product category is the cue that activates this process (some noticeable exceptions to this being Holden and Lutz, 1992; Nedungadi, 1990). This means that work in building brand consideration has focused on increasing awareness between the product category cue and the brand name. Once this is established, brand awareness is typically taken as a given ('everyone has heard of Coca cola' mentality). As a consequence, brand awareness is rarely considered to be a key marketing objective for established brands (Macdonald and Sharp, 2003). However, the appropriate objective should be to ensure that the brand continues to be noticed and/or thought of as an option to buy, not brand awareness per say. Just because the brand is known or recognized as a member of the category does not mean it will come to mind in buying situations, as retrieval is dependent on the cue and the accessibility of the linked information (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1985; Holden and Lutz, 1992; Tulving and Pearlstone, 1966).

The commonly accepted process for retrieving information from long-term memory is that a stimulus/cue activates a stored memory (Anderson and Bower, 1979). This 'activation' travels to memories linked to that initial cue. These concepts can be retrieved and therefore used in working memory and/or can act as



retrieval cues to access further information (e.g. Collins and Loftus, 1975). Consequently, the cues employed are a key influence of what is retrieved from memory as only information linked to those cues is available. Any brand name association can potentially act as a cue for accessing the brand name. Whether it does or not, however, depends on the buying situation.

The cues that have received the majority of the attention in the literature are those representing product categories (e.g. 'offers home loans', 'soft-drinks'). A relationship that links the brand, product category labels and stated brand choice/preference, has been claimed by multiple researchers since the 1960s (e.g. Axelrod, 1968; Cohen, 1966; Nedungadi, 1990). The emphasis on the product category cue probably stems from early consumer behaviour models (e.g. Howard and Sheth, 1969). In these models, the product category cue is used to access memory to create the list of options (also referred to as the evoked/consideration set) the buyer then considers/evaluates prior to choice. Other concepts or attributes are then posited to affect choice from within this set of considered brands. In these models the consideration set for a buyer was thought to be a fixed entity, with the same brands retrieved at different points in time and in different situations. Variation in brand choice across time/situations was thought to be due to variation in the relative importance of attributes (Howard and Sheth, 1969; Miller and Ginter, 1979). For example, when in a hurry, 'quick service' is more important, while on a hot day 'refreshing' is more important.

However, empirical research has shown that in buying situations, customers can (and do) use cues other than product categories to think of potential brands to buy (Holden, 1993; Nedungadi, 1990). The cues used by buyers come from both internal influences and the external environment. These are highly variable factors and as such, the cues used in the brand choice process can vary between buyers and for the same buyer over time. The impact of cues on retrieval is largely subconscious and thus often unnoticed by buyers. We often have no conscious appreciation of why we happen to be humming a particular song, or why we suddenly thought of Cadbury chocolate. Even more importantly, we seldom notice ourselves not noticing or not retrieving things. Rarely do we give thought to why we visited a particular store to look for a new shirt *and yet did not* consider a number of other stores we knew sold shirts. This is perhaps another reason why the area of brand salience has been relatively neglected in the past by marketing theorists. We have been distracted by what can happen to the information once it is in buyer memory so we have neglected to understand the mechanisms for getting the information there initially.

Cues are situation specific and how they impact can be circumstance specific. Buyers can use combinations of cues at the one occasion (e.g. 'Italian biscuits', or 'Italian biscuits for eating with an espresso'). Cues need not concern functional aspects or benefits of the brand or its product category. Nor are cues necessarily actual words or even easily able to be described by words. Buyers can also narrow the list of retrievable items to a subcategory such that something easily retrieved at the category level, is no longer accessible (Nedungadi and Hutchinson, 1985). Therefore cues need not directly elicit the brand name but may instead simply



enhance the likelihood of a particular brand, or set of brands, being elicited should another cue be encountered. Being at the beach in itself may not make someone think of ice cream (sometimes, but probably mostly not). But if that person on the beach encounters a cue like 'a treat' then they may be far more likely to think of ice cream in that situation than they would if they encountered that cue when in a shopping mall. Different cues frequently result in different 'sets' of options being retrieved from memory (Holden and Lutz, 1992; Ratneshwar and Shocker, 1991).

Variability of cues is one factor that influences retrieval. Other reasons are linked to the characteristics of buyer memory. First, there is the limited capacity in working memory (e.g. Miller, 1956), which means there is only so much people can think of at any one time. So while they might be able to name 20 brands of chocolate bars when they are probed, rarely in 'real life' will they think of more than a few at any one time. Second, the importance buyers place on brand choice is typically low (Heath, 1999) and therefore there is little motivation to go beyond the easily accessible on any one occasion. These factors combine with the influence of other brands ('competitors' linked to the relevant cues) to influence (and vary) retrieval of any specific item. This makes retrieval from memory a highly variable and unpredictable outcome at any one occasion.

This individual level variability is well documented for respondents' statements about their attitudes, perceptions and beliefs (e.g. Mills and Nelson, 1977; O'Brien and Ford, 1988; Schuman and Presser, 1981). For instance, despite the total proportion of respondents who associate a brand with a particular attribute remaining the same over two interview waves, typically only around 50 per cent of those who associate a brand with an attribute at Time A will do so again at Time B (Castleberry et al., 1994; Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 1997; Sharp et al., 2002). This variability is cue independent in that it is present in both directions; that is, from attribute-to-brand and from brand-to-attribute (Sharp and Romaniuk, 2002).

That the individual level repeat rate of attribute responses is far from 100 per cent shows that retrieval is variable. However, it has been recently discovered that the repeat rate (RR) is systematically linked to the proportion of respondents who associated the brand with the attribute on the first interview (roughly of the relationship  $RR = \text{initial response level} + 20$ ). This suggests that retrieval is probabilistic, and possibly reflecting an underlying propensity that is different for each individual (Sharp, 2002), in other words, their level of brand salience. This notion of probabilistic retrieval is further supported by the modelling of the relationship between initial response levels and repeat rates using a derivation of the NBD-Dirichlet model (Rungie and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999) – a theory which describes the probability distributions of brand choice (Ehrenberg et al., 2000b; Goodhardt et al., 1984). Therefore, the probabilistic nature of brand choice seen in buying behaviour is also evident in buyer's retrieval of brands. Indeed, this probabilistic retrieval may, at least partially, explain the probabilistic nature of repeat buying.

In summary, the cues that customers use in buying situations are many and varied and extend beyond the product category cue. The accessibility of the brand for each of these cues, and their various combinations, is also variable due to



memory limitations (both ability and motive) and the presence of other brands/options competing for retrieval. This suggests that a brand's salience is not reliably based on the strength of the single link to cue of the product category name (as is traditionally supposed), but is better reflected in the propensity for the brand to be retrieved/mentioned across a range of cues likely to be 'used' by buyers in buying situations. This broadens brand salience from a conceptualization based on the strength of association with a single cue/attribute to being based on the presence of links across a range of attributes. This is a 'prominence' based on the 'quantity' of links as well as the more traditional 'quality' of a single link.

### Salience versus attitude

Brand attitude is a lasting evaluation (Solomon, 1992) that can act as a mental reminder to act. It is well established that attitudes have only a weak influence on future behaviour (Kraus, 1995; Wright and Klyn, 1998). This is because they are often not recalled (as shown in Dall'Olmo Riley, 1995; Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 1997, 1999) and typically when they are, they are only weakly motivational. Attitudes' influence on buyer behaviour depends on first, the attitude being remembered (e.g. 'did I like this wine when I had it last?') and second, how motivationally strong the attitude is (e.g. 'I *really* liked this wine'). We don't always have attitudes to draw upon to guide our behaviour, and many times all of the options are effectively equally liked or disliked (they will all 'do'). Consequently the impact of attitudes on buying behaviour is generally weak, especially in terms of influencing brand choice. In contrast, salience differentials have a huge impact on individuals' personal brand repertoires, and at aggregate level they do much to explain the market share differences between brands.

We see the influence of brand salience as being quite different to that of brand attitude. Attitudes are about evaluating the brand (do you think it is a good brand?), whereas salience is largely about having a chance of being thought of (are you likely to notice or retrieve the brand in that buying situation?).

Indeed, brand attitudes are, we think, often largely a function of salience, in that we have a tendency to like the familiar (Harrison, 1968; Zajonc, 1968). If a brand is more salient (under our conceptualization), then it will also be more likely to be positively evaluated. Just as attitude research over the past few decades has steadily moved in the direction of pointing up situational (non-attitudinal) aspects (Foxall, 2002) we downplay the evaluative role of stored/created past evaluations and emphasize the role of the extent of the network of brand information.

### Brand salience: selection from considered options

While we do see a distinction between salience and attitude, we do not confine the role of salience to influencing the brand's ability to be considered (and thereby indirectly affecting brand choice, see Nedungadi, 1990). We also see a further role





for brand salience during the selection from the options that the buyer is considering. That is, brand salience also has a positive influence on that brand being selected from that set of considered options, when more than one brand presents itself to the customer (Macdonald and Sharp, 2000).

When the brand is retrieved, along with the brand name there is also evoked some sense of whether this is a brand that the customer knows will do what they require at that point in time. This provides a sense of assurance. Consumers have something of a tendency to 'assume the worst' in the case of missing information about brand attributes (Johnson and Levin, 1985). Therefore the more 'gaps' in knowledge, or uncertainties about the brand, the lower the sense of assurance (relative to other brands) and so the lower the probability of selection.

This assurance combines with customers' inherent tendency to 'satisfice rather than maximise' when buying brands (Simon, 1957, cited in Johnson and Puto, 1987). The lack of motivation to devote substantial cognitive processing efforts to a brand purchase means that rather than carefully evaluate brands in order to make the 'best' choice at any one point in time, buyers typically buy what they can be reasonably confident will 'do the job'. They do not attempt to evaluate all the alternatives on the market, nor even all the ones they conceivably know of. Nor do they usually work hard to choose the very best from the selected group of alternatives they consider. Instead, buyers show a degree of loyalty in that they happily adopt restricted repertoires of brands (Ehrenberg et al., 2004). This is evident even in 'involving' or high-value choices (such as choosing a mortgage or a car). Even those buyers who actively 'research the market' typically only evaluate a tiny fraction of the available offers (Alba and Chattopadhyay, 1986; Hauser and Wernerfelt, 1990; Howard and Sheth, 1969; Mitra, 1995; Narayana and Markin, 1975; Nedungadi, 1990). Indeed 'consideration' sets of one are far from uncommon.

## Summary: conceptualizing brand salience

Brand salience is conceptualized as the propensity of the brand to be thought of in buying situations. This is reflected in the quantity (how many) and the quality (how fresh and relevant) of the network of brand information in memory, or the brand's 'share of mind'. This conceptualization is based on buying situations being complex multi-cue environments, which means that buyers are affected by a range of cues, beyond the product category, when eliciting options (typically but not necessarily brands (Holden and Lutz, 1992)) for buying. This variability in cues is one explanation as to why there is variability in the retrieval of brands as an option to be considered – not all brands are linked to all cues for all buyers. However, the lack of motivation/ability to retrieve everything from memory and the presence of competing brands that, through links to the same cues, also have a probability of being thought of, means that even when the same cue is used brand retrieval is not guaranteed. The more cues to which the brand is linked the more likely it will be linked to the cues the customer is likely to come across in



buying situations, and hence the brand can be considered to have a greater propensity to be *thought of as an option to buy*.

In addition, when the brand is retrieved, the customer also gets some sense of how much they know about the brand. This provides a sense of assurance that the brand will be appropriate for the situation. Thus, brand salience provides a further benefit by then making the brand, once thought of, more likely to be chosen. This benefit is, however, secondary to the influence of the brand being thought of in the first instance, as without that initial step, positive evaluations will have no effect on buyer behaviour (e.g. Holden and Lutz, 1992; Rossiter and Percy, 1987).

This concept of brand salience is distinct from the concept of brand attitude, where the focus is on evaluation of the brand rather than the quantity and quality of the memory structures. It provides a different perspective and explanation for the fact that buyers buy different brands in different circumstances and situations (and even in the same situations).

In the following sections we discuss the framework for measuring brand salience, how to interpret the results and some expected relationships with other constructs to aid in future validity testing.

### Framework for measuring brand salience

We now draw on the prior discussion to develop the key aspects that need to be incorporated into a brand salience measure. We provide the framework for researchers to measure brand salience, and then test the relationship between brand salience and buyer behaviour. We suggest three key factors a measure of brand salience should exhibit, which are as follows:

1. Contain a representative range of attributes/cues used to *'think of'* brands;
2. Measure recall/noticing relative to competitors rather than for a single brand independently;
3. Focus on whether the brand is thought of rather than seeking to determine how favourably the brand is judged.

We now discuss each of these.

#### Contain a representative range of attributes used as cues

Previous salience measures have focused on links to the product category labels. As discussed however, there is evidence that consumers use all sorts of different attributes when retrieving brands. Buyers can use multiple cues both at a single point in time and over different purchase occasions. Types of attributes that may be relevant include buying/consumption situations (e.g. take to a barbecue, give as a gift); benefits (e.g. something refreshing, low fat); or functional qualities (e.g. has a lid I can screw back on, is red). For a list of categories of possible cues see Holden (1993); Holden and Lutz (1992). In designing a list of attributes for a



salience measure, a diverse range should be incorporated to capture the quantity (as well as quality) of the network in memory. Empirical testing should also be directed to uncover if there are any attributes that are more or less appropriate in a measure of brand salience. For example should 'descriptive' non-evaluative attributes, given that they follow atypical usage response patterns (as per Barwise and Ehrenberg, 1985), be included?

### Measure relative to competitors rather than a single brand in isolation

Including competitors ensures that the measure is closer to replicating the actual buyer experience. Retrieval from memory is a competitive activity, with linked items in memory competing with each other when each cue is stimulated. A measure that asks respondents to assess association between the brand and the attribute individually will not capture the competitive interference effects. This suggestion is supported by prior evidence that comparative scales (relative to competitors) perform better than absolute scales (a single brand in isolation) in studies looking to predict future purchase (Axelrod, 1968; Clancy and Garsen, 1970).

### Focus on retrieval rather than how favourably respondents judge the brand

Most brand measurement instruments focus solely on evaluations of aspects of the brand (e.g. good value, excellent service). While we are not saying these attributes should be totally excluded from a salience measure, we suggest that the majority of the attributes should be those that are used to think of brands/options. These may often not be evaluations of specific brands, but concern more the internal and external situation that the buyer is in.

This also has implications for the nature of the scale for measurement. Items from memory are thought to be stored as concepts and generally either retrieved or not. This suggests brand salience should be measured via a 'yes/no' measure rather than a 'degrees of association' measure (such as rating scales). Scales (particularly) also imply a deliberation about the merits of the brand to develop an evaluation, which is much more cognitive processing than generally seems to happen. Thus it is more appropriate to use a measure that gives buyers attributes (i.e. potential cues) and identifies links with brands than to give customers an attribute and ask them to rate the brand on, say, a five-point scale.

There are some areas of measurement that are debatable as to their importance. The first is whether the measure be brand-to-attribute or attribute-to-brand? Given that we are focusing on the retrieval of the brand and competitor links, we would suggest that attribute-based measures, where the attribute is given and brands are linked would be more appropriate. However, this is an area for empirical testing to see if there is a substantive difference in the results provided by different cue directions. The second is whether brand names should be prompted or unprompted. There has been research that suggests that prompted/recall and unprompted/recognition retrieval of the brand name are just different ways



of measuring the same underlying construct in memory (Laurent et al., 1995). Others have argued, however, that these are very different mechanisms (Rossiter and Percy, 1997). Therefore we recommend this also be included as a facet in empirical testing of measures of brand salience.

## **Interpretation of results**

This point concerns the output of measurement, or what specific information we are trying to ascertain. A measure of brand salience should capture the extent to which a customer knows and thinks about a brand. Given the variability of likely cues and variability in responses to each of these cues over time (as per Castleberry et al., 1994; Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 1997; Sharp et al., 2002), this indication of pervasiveness in memory (or size) is more important, and indeed probably more reliable, than the information pertaining to specific links.

Therefore analysis should focus on the overall results for each customer, such as the proportion of instances a customer mentions the brand across a representation of likely cues/attributes. Traditionally, researchers are concerned with the proportion of customers that associate a brand with one specific attribute, the product category label. While advocating an overall measure, we still recommend a decompositional approach, which builds up from the attributes to create the overall pictures of memory structures. While it would be good to have a single measure that could capture this, the complexity of both memory and the interaction of cues and the lack of awareness of the buyer of these processes mean we think it unlikely that a single survey question can capture brand salience.

These guidelines should form the basis for a valid measure of brand salience. One clear implication is that, as we have argued, a single item measure using only the product category cue should be an inadequate measure.

## **Future research agenda**

This article suggests a new direction for research into the relationship between brand perceptions and buyer behaviour. Clarifying this brand salience concept and how it should be measured is important if we are serious about testing its contribution to knowledge about why buyers buy the brands they do. However this is only the start. The next step is to identify measures that fit the guidelines we have established here and establish that the measures are valid. This article is deliberately conceptual in nature to avoid tying this new conceptualization of brand salience to a single measure and thereby repeating the mistakes of the past, where the measure and the concept become one. Our objective is to provide the basis such that multiple researchers can empirically test the role of brand salience in buyer behaviour.

To aid in the identification of brand salience measures, we now state where we would expect a salience measure to have a higher or lower correlation. This is to



allow researchers to undertake convergent and discriminant validity tests on any proposed measure of brand salience. Based on our conceptualization of brand salience, we would expect a brand salience measure to have:

1. A higher correlation with measures of brand familiarity than with brand attitude as it is related to knowledge about the brand rather than evaluations of the brand;
2. A higher correlation with the longer term brand repertoire than the brands used at any one point in time as it should tap into the long term memory structures. So brand salience should also show some ability to predict future repertoire composition;
3. More stability over time at individual level than individual attribute responses.

A key test of a brand salience measure is its ability to predict future change in behaviour. We would expect that using a measure that is closer to the thought processes would yield a measure that is more predictive than Top of Mind brand awareness, attitudinal, image or equity measures have been. However, this needs to be tested empirically.

Further research also needs to examine to what extent these salience measures are sensitive to marketing activity. This will provide some insight into what effect marketers, with their marketing activities, can reasonably expect to have on buyers' propensity to consider/buy.

There is much to be learnt about salience such as, for example, what makes an item become more salient in memory. It is possible that much of the establishment and reinforcement of salience occurs through unconscious mechanisms. For instance, the frequency to which someone is exposed to a concept is thought to have an unconscious effect on future salience (Hasher and Zacks, 1984). Also, little is known about what characteristics make something more likely to be noticed at the point of encoding the brand name or associated attribute (as per Craik and Tulving, 1975). The exploration of these (and related) aspects from a brand salience perspective should lead to further insights in how to influence brand salience and therefore buying behaviour.

Should the testing of the causal impact of brand salience continue to prove fruitful, there are important implications for advertising strategy. It would give more weight to the marketing importance of getting the brand name noticed, rather than communicating a persuasive message (Miller and Berry, 1998). A salience perspective to branding would also require a reformulation of advertising pre-testing instruments and advertising effectiveness measures. However, before such steps are taken, as Axelrod (1968) suggests, extensive empirical testing of validity, predictive accuracy and sensitivity needs to be undertaken. We encourage marketing researchers to take on this challenging new area.



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