Brands As Categories: Graded Structure and Its Determinants

Christopher Joiner, George Mason University, USA

Brand categories, also referred to as "umbrella brands," "brand portfolios," and "family brands" have become increasingly common in the marketplace. This research focuses on the structure of brand categories by examining the overall graded structure as well as a number of alternative determinants of graded structure in two existing brand categories. The results confirmed that brand categories possess identifiable graded structure and that a number of relevant potential determinants of graded structure are highly correlated and related to overall typicality judgments, including a measure of individual product coherence.

[to cite]:


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Christopher Joiner, George Mason University, USA

ABSTRACT
As a result of many years of brand leveraging by marketers many brands now consist of multiple products sharing a single brand name. An outcome of this is that one of the ways that consumers’ product information is likely to be organized is as brand categories.

Although these groups of related products are alternatively referred to as “umbrella brands,” “brand portfolios,” and “family brands,” since it is the goal of this paper to investigate the nature of these groups as cognitive structures, the term brand categories is used. There are other possible organizations of consumer knowledge (e.g., by product categories, consideration sets, usage situations, etc.) however, the growing importance of brand categories to practitioners and academics alike suggests that brand organization is increasingly relevant. This research focuses on the structure of brand categories by specifically examining a number of alternative determinants of graded structure in two existing brand categories.

A series of surveys were used in order to collect individuals’ perceptions of the two focal brand categories. Analysis of variance, factor, correlation, and regression analyses were all used to examine the internal structure of the brand categories. Analyses confirmed that brand categories do in fact possess graded structure as do the majority of other previously identified categories. The data suggests that all of the determinants of typicality that were examined (ideals, familiarity, frequency-of-instantiation, attribute structure, coherence) were highly correlated and closely related to overall typicality judgments. Further analyses suggested that both coherence and frequency/frequency-of-instantiation were the best determinants of subjects’ typicality ratings in the two brand categories examined here. The findings for the coherence measure were particularly interesting as this variable has rarely been empirically examined as a possible determinant of typicality judgments prior to this research. Significantly, this measure performed as well as other determinants that have been looked at in prior studies. Finally, as has been found in past research, the typicality of individual products in both brand categories was positively related to overall attitudes for the individual products. Theoretical and managerial implications of the findings are discussed.

It is now common for companies to have a series of products, more or less related, that are on the market under a single brand name. For example, Haagen-Dazs started out with a single product—premium ice-cream—but through a series of extensions and licensing agreements, now offer an array of products under the Haagen-Dazs brand name including frozen yogurt, sorbets, ice-cream bars, frozen yogurt bars, sorbet bars, and even liqueur. This market phenomenon suggests that one of the ways that consumers’ product information is likely to be organized is as brand categories (e.g., Barone and Miniard, 2002; Boush and Loken, 1991; Boush et al., 1987; Cowley and Mitchell, 2003; Lee and Sternthal, 1999; Park, Milberg, and Lawson, 1991; Wanke, Bless, and Schwarz, 1998). Brand categories have also been labeled “umbrella brands,” “brand portfolios,” and “family brands”. However, since it is the goal of this paper to investigate the nature of these groups of products as cognitive structures, the term brand categories will be used. Although there are other possible organizations of consumer knowledge (e.g., by product categories, consideration sets, usage situations, etc.) the growing importance of brand categories to practitioners and academics alike suggests that brand organization is increasingly relevant. This research focuses on the structure of brand categories by specifically examining a number of alternative determinants of graded structure in two existing brand categories.

BRAND CATEGORY STRUCTURE
Cognitive structure is a hypothetical construct referring to the organization of concepts in memory. Structures in memory influence whether a particular piece of information will receive attention, and if so, the manner in which it will be encoded, organized, and subsequently retrieved. They also function as interpretive frameworks and thereby influence evaluations, judgments, predictions and inferences; and finally, overt behavior (Markus and Zajonc 1985).

Brand Category Graded Structure
A common characteristic of categories is their internal organization in a graded structure (Mervis and Rosch 1981). Graded structure means that a category consists of a continuum of category membership, ranging from typical (prototypical) members through unclear cases to prototypical nonmembers (Barsalou 1982). Typicality ratings predict performance in a wide variety of tasks, including categorization, remembering, naming, or reasoning about a concept’s instances, with better performance associated with more typical instances (Barsalou 1992). Additionally, past research has suggested that an exemplar’s typicality is related to overall attitudes towards the exemplar (Barsalou 1983, 1985; Loken and Ward 1990; Nedungadi and Hutchinson 1985) with more typical exemplars being more highly evaluated.

One of the important implications of graded structure, in the context of brand categories, is that typical instances of a category are used more often as cognitive reference points in comparisons (Mervis and Rosch 1981). This implies that if brand categories do possess the property of graded structure, the most typical products in the category may play a relatively larger role in how consumers think about the brand. Product categories have been shown to have graded structure with characteristics of both goal derived and taxonomic categories (Loken and Ward 1990) as have brand categories consisting of existing and hypothetical products (Boush 1988). In the context of brand categories, graded structure implies that some products are more representative of a brand name than are others (Boush and Loken 1991; Loken and John 1993).

Conceptually, it is possible that brand categories may be different from other types of categories with respect to graded structure. Boush (1993) noted that applying a common brand name to products differs from the way names are applied to objects in common taxonomic categories. Categorization of objects in common taxonomic categories frequently involves making the categorization decision (“Is it a member of category X?”) after observing its characteristics. Unlike members of taxonomic categories, a branded product is categorized as a member of the brand category from the outset simply by being labeled with the brand name. When consumers see a branded product, they are essentially told that it is a member of an existing brand category. Other research has shown that how objects are grouped or organized together can influence which properties are used in judgments of the similarity of the objects (Tversky 1977). A specific grouping may determine the similarity of the objects in the group, rather than similarity judgments about the objects determining the grouping or classification. This suggests that grouping a set of products under a common brand
name may influence the selection of the particular properties that are attributed to the brand category (i.e., determine the dimensions of similarity that make the products cohere or fit, cf. MacInnis, Nakamoto and Mani 1992) and to some degree form the basis for categorization. As a result, because the products are by definition grouped together as “Brand X products,” all products sold under that brand name may be perceived as equally good, or typical, members of the brand category. Their organization under a common brand name may influence which properties are used to judge their similarity and select “common” features that individuals then use to “explain” the brand category. For example, because a wide range of products like athletic shoes, socks, t-shirts, hats, etc., are all sold and labeled as “Nike products,” consumers may attribute specific properties to the brand based on this grouping (e.g., “sportiness”) and view all of the products as highly similar on this dimension and therefore equally good examples of the Nike brand category.

However, it is more likely that brand categories have the property of graded structure with the typicality of products in a brand category determined by factors that have been identified as relevant to other categories (e.g., attribute-structure, ideals, coherence, familiarity).1

In order to investigate the graded structure of categories, researchers have attempted to define some of the determinants of typicality. Frequently used measures that have been examined as possible determinants of global typicality ratings (e.g., Hampton and Gardiner 1983; Loken and Ward 1990) include: familiarity and frequency-of-instantiation (Barsalou 1985; Hampton and Gardiner 1983; Loken and Ward 1990; Martin and Stewart 2001; Read, Jones, and Miller 1990), attribute-structure (Loken and Ward 1987, 1990), ideals (Barsalou 1985; Martin and Stewart 2001; Read et al. 1990), coherence (Dawar and Anderson 1994). More recently, Viswanathan and Childers (1999) developed an alternative measure of product category gradedness based on fuzzy-set theory. A brief description of these measures is presented in the next section.

**Determinants of Typicality**

*Familiarity.* Past research has been mixed in finding that familiar exemplars are perceived as more typical than unfamiliar exemplars. Familiarity is measured in a category-free context in contrast to the frequency of instantiation measure described below. Barsalou (1985) found that familiarity was not a significant determinant of the graded structure of either taxonomic or goal-derived categories, Loken and Ward (1990) found that it was positively related to typicality for some product categories, while other researchers have found a significant positive relationship (e.g., Hampton and Gardiner 1983). Because of the unique characteristic of brand categories, familiarity may be an important determinant of their graded structure.

*Frequency of Instantiation.* Frequency of instantiation refers to a measure of the frequency with which people have experienced a particular exemplar as a member of a particular category, rather than a measure of the absolute frequency with which an exemplar is experienced and has been proposed as a more appropriate determinant of typicality than familiarity (Barsalou 1985). Exemplars that appear more frequently should have greater influence on the representation of the category and therefore typicality judgments (Barsalou 1985). Research using this measure has found it to be a significant determinant of graded structure (Barsalou 1985; Loken and Ward 1990).

*Ideals.* Barsalou (1985) defined ideals as characteristics that exemplars should have if they are to best serve a goal associated with their category and found that they were an important determinant of graded structure in both common taxonomic and goal-derived categories. Loken and Ward (1990) demonstrated that ideals were a significant determinant of the graded structure of product categories (see also Read et al. 1990). Brand categories may also be structured by ideals since consumers may view a brand as a means to an end or associate it with a particular function, and typicality judgments may reflect the likelihood that a product will help achieve the consumption goal (cf. Broniarczyk and Alba 1994), as e.g., Lysol products and a “disinfectant” goal.

*Attribute-Structure.* The attribute-structure measure is based on the view that consumers judge the typicality of a product less by its family resemblance to other products and more by the degree to which the product has salient attributes related to the goals or uses of the category. The measure is assumed to encompass a more complete set of beliefs rather than a single ideal. Loken and Ward (1987, 1990) found that attribute-structure is particularly relevant to product categories in which graded structure was a function of salient beliefs about the member’s utility to consumers.

*Coherence.* Coherence, a measure used previously in brand extension research (Dawar and Anderson 1994), refers to how logical individual products are, and how much sense they make, as members of the brand category. This measure may be an important determinant of graded structure in the context of branded products. It attempts to assess consumers’ perception of the coherence (Lakoff 1987; Dawar and Anderson 1994; Medin and Wattenmaker 1987) of the brand category, or the extent to which the collection of products make sense under the brand name. This measure may account for consumers’ theories (cf. Murphy and Medin 1985) about why a group of products are sold under a particular brand name. The coherence measure focuses on “explanation” as a key variable in categorization decisions (Rips and Collins 1993). Because brand categories are essentially created and defined by marketers, coherence may be a particularly appropriate measure for accounting for consumers’ judgments about product typicality. Those products that make sense or are logical, given a consumer’s theory about what the brand means, may be viewed as the brand category’s most typical members.

**Prior Consumer Research on Category Structure**

Earlier research examined the determinants of typicality in product categories (Loken and Ward 1990, see also Viswanathan and Childers 1999) and demonstrated that new brand extensions vary in their typicality with respect to a brand category (e.g., Boush and Loken 1991; Loken and John 1993). Boush (1988) did measure the typicality of products in existing brand categories, however, it only examined a few (2-3) existing products in addition to a group of hypothetical products not sold by the brand. This research replicates and expands these results by considering the graded structure of existing products in real brand categories. In addition to confirming the existence of a graded structure for the exemplars within each brand category, it also addresses the ability of individual measures identified in previous work to predict global measures of typicality (cf. Loken and Ward 1990). Finally, because past research has demonstrated that an exemplar’s typicality is related to overall attitude towards the exemplar (Barsalou 1983, 1985; Loken and Ward 1990; Nedungadi and Hutchinson 1985), this relationship is examined as well.

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1In addition to research showing that different brand extensions vary in perceived typicality, some researchers have claimed that no categories have been discovered to date that do not have this property (Barsalou and Sewell 1985).
STUDY & EMPIRICAL RESULTS

All participants were undergraduate students enrolled in introductory marketing courses who participated as a class requirement. A series of pretests were conducted in order to develop the stimuli used in the main study.

Pretest 1. The first pretest was used to choose two existing brand categories that were familiar to participants and which consisted of a reasonable number of products currently sold in the local area under the brand name. A survey of local grocery, drug, and discount stores as well as of magazines, local newspapers, and Consumer Reports, was used to generate a list of eight potential brand categories. Thirty-nine respondents completed Pretest 1. Twenty of the respondents listed “as many of the specific products that you are aware of that are sold under the brand name” for four of the brand names. They then rated the typicality of the individual products for the other four brand names on an 11-point scale from “not at all typical” to “extremely typical.” The other 19 respondents completed the same tasks for the brands in the opposite order. Finally, all respondents rated their familiarity with “products sold with the brand name” for each of the eight brand names on an 11-point scale from “never heard of them” to “extremely familiar.” Based on the average number of products listed in the open-ended questions, the rated typicality of the individual products in the brand category, and the familiarity with the brand name, the Haagen-Dazs and Levi’s brand categories were chosen. Each were familiar to most individuals and had a reasonable number of products (Haagen-Dazs = 8; Levi’s = 12) that varied in perceived typicality.

Pretest 2. A second pretest was conducted to obtain a list of ideals and attribute beliefs, for each of the brand categories selected in Pretest 1. Ideals were selected by asking a sample of 29 participants to “list your goals or purposes for purchasing the following brand name”. Two ideals for each category were chosen by taking the most frequently mentioned goals or purposes, mentioned by at least 34% of respondents (cf. Loken and Ward 1990).

This pretest sample also was used to develop the attribute dimensions used in the attribute-structure measure in the main study. Specifically, they were asked to list the “positive and negative attributes, qualities, or characteristics of this brand name that would increase (or decrease) your chances of purchasing one of its products.” The most frequently mentioned attributes, mentioned by at least 39% of respondents, were used to form four belief statements for Haagen-Dazs and five for Levi’s.

Graded Structure Measures and Data Collection Procedure. Four separate sets of respondents (total N=231) were used for the graded structure data collection. For each set of measures, the most typical individual product (based on Pretest 1 results) was presented first with the remaining products in the brand category presented in random order. This was done in order to anchor each person’s judgments on the same prototypical product. Individuals were informed that all products in the survey were real products sold in the area.

The first set of 56 respondents provided global measures of typicality for each individual product in the two brand categories. Typicality was measured on two scales: typicality and representativeness. Subjects rated each product on a range from 0 (not at all typical of Brand X products) to 10 (extremely typical of Brand X products) and a scale ranging from 0 (very unrepresentative of Brand X products) to 10 (very representative of Brand X products). Instructions were adapted from Loken and Ward (1990) and Hampton and Gardiner (1983).

A second set of 56 respondents provided measures of familiarity and frequency of instantiation for the two brand categories. Familiarity was measured on scales ranging from 0 (not at all familiar) to 10 (extremely familiar). Instructions explained that:

“You should judge how familiar you are with the specific product not just with the brand name.” The frequency of instantiation measure was adapted from the procedure used by Loken and Ward (1990). It was measured by asking the same respondents to rate how frequently they encountered each category member (product), in stores, advertisements, at a friend’s, as a member, or example, of the category (made up of all the products sold under the brand name) on scales ranging from 0 (not at all frequently) to 10 (extremely frequently). Instructions noted the difference between this measure and the familiarity judgments. As in Loken and Ward (1990), respondents rated the two brand categories on both measures in order to increase the likelihood that they would discriminate between the two tasks.

The ideals and attribute-structure measures were completed by a third set of 58 respondents. Each rated (i) the extent to which category members fulfilled each ideal on scales ranging from 0 (very low amount) to 10 (very high amount), and (ii) the likelihood that each product possesses each attribute on scales ranging from 0 (extremely unlikely) to 10 (extremely likely). An attribute structure score for each individual product was computed by summing across the belief ratings for each subject.

A fourth set of 61 participants completed the coherence and attitude measures for the brand categories. Based on the definition described above, individuals were asked to decide “whether each product makes sense to you, or is logical, as a product of each brand name.” Coherence was measured on two scales, the first ranging from 0 (makes no sense as a Brand X product) to 10 (makes a great deal of sense as a Brand X product), the second ranging from 0 (is very illogical as a Brand X product) to 10 (is very logical as a Brand X product). The same participants reported their attitude towards each product in the brand categories on three 0-10 evaluative semantic differential scales (unfavorable/favorable, very negative/very positive, poor/excellent). All measures were averaged across individuals to provide an overall rating for each individual product. Each of the multiple item measures (typicality, coherence, attitude) were summed to form composite scales. The resulting scales (TYPIC, COHER, ATTT) were assessed to ensure their reliability. For the 8 Haagen-Dazs products, the average coefficient alpha for the TYPIC measure was .89 (range: .798 to .960), for the 12 Levi’s products, the average was .92 (range: .786 to .964). For the COHER measure, the average was .98 (range: .955 to .994) for the Haagen-Dazs products and .98 (range: .955 to .997) for Levi’s. Finally, for the ATTT scale, the average was .97 (range: .947 to .997) for the Haagen-Dazs products and .98 (range: .975 to .990) for the Levi’s products.

Graded Structure Results

Analysis of the data focused on confirming that the brand categories do possess a graded structure (Barsalou 1983, 1985) and in determining which measures are the best determinants of this structure. The typicality ratings for the individual products in the two brand categories were analyzed in a one way repeated measure analysis of variance with the products as a within subjects factor. The results indicate that the individual products in both brand categories varied in subjects’ perceptions of their typicality, with the products factor significant at p<.000 in both multivariate and univariate tests for both categories. Follow-up comparisons were conducted on the individual products in each category (see Table 1). The Haagen-Dazs brand category is characterized by a single prototypical product (ice cream), while jeans are clearly the prototypical product in the Levi’s brand category. There was clear evidence of graded structure in both brand categories. The individual products represented a significant range of perceived typicality ratings.
A series of correlation, factor, and regression analyses were conducted to investigate the relationships between the determinants, typicality, and attitude (cf. Loken and Ward 1990). Table 2 presents the correlation matrix between the typicality and attitude measures and the six potential determinant measures for the 20 products in the two brand categories. First, it is clear that all of the measures are highly related, with slightly higher correlations in the Levi’s brand category. Although past research has found distinctions between the various determinants of typicality investigated in this study, for these stimuli all of the determinants appear to be highly related to perceived typicality. The measure with the lowest simple correlation with typicality was the attribute structure measure, and it was still a highly significant .832. Correlations between the various determinants were also high. For example, in this sample, measures of frequency-of-instantiation (FOI) and familiarity (FAMIL) are virtually indistinguishable (r=.994). Additionally, ratings of the two ideals measures were highly correlated (r=.963).

To further examine these findings, a factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation) was conducted. A single factor, accounting for 88.9% of the variance in the data, was extracted. All of the individual measures loaded on this factor with typicality and all factor loadings were above .89. Although it was apparent that each of these measures was highly related to typicality in these brand categories, further analyses were conducted in order to examine their relative contributions. Because of the very high correlations between the FOI and FAMIL, and two Ideals measures, each of these pairs was combined for the remaining analysis (FAMFOI and IDEALS). The four variables (COHER, FAMFOI, IDEALS, Attribute Structure) were entered in a regression with typicality as the dependent variable. The overall regression equation was highly significant (F(4,15)=217.24, R^2=.983, Standard Error=.295) and the two significant predictors were the COHER (β=.524) and FAMFOI (β=.358) measures.

Although these results should be interpreted with caution, there is some evidence that for these brand categories, the more an individual product makes sense, or is logical, as a member of the brand category, and the more familiar the product is, the more it is seen as a typical member of the brand category.

Finally, the simple correlation between TYPIC and ATTIT was a highly significant .879 (.862 and .954 in the Levi’s and Haagen-Daz’s brand categories respectively), replicating the relationship found for these two measures in past research (Barsalou 1983, 1985; Loken and Ward 1990; Nedungadi and Hutchinson 1985). In the two brand categories examined in this study, the typicality of a product is highly related to its evaluation.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levi’s</th>
<th>Haagen-Daz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jeans</td>
<td>ice cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jean jacket</td>
<td>ice cream bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jean shorts</td>
<td>frozen yogurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denim shirt</td>
<td>frozen yogurt bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jean vest</td>
<td>sorbet and cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t-shirt</td>
<td>sorbet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flannel shirt</td>
<td>sorbet bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sweatshirt</td>
<td>liqueur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>polartec vest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wallet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Products sharing a superscript are not significantly different in pairwise comparisons (p<.05)

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The results confirmed that brand categories do in fact possess graded structure as do most other previously identified categories. There were significant differences in the rated typicality of the individual products in both of the brand categories examined in this research. There were different patterns of typicality ratings for the products in the two brand categories, but it did not appear that there was a simple division between typical and less typical products. For example, Haagen-Dazs had an extremely prototypical product (ice cream) and a very atypical product (liqueur) with the remaining six products all viewed as moderately typical. The Levi’s brand category consisted of products with a broader range of typicality ratings. Clearly, consumers judge certain products to be better examples of a brand category than others.

Although it was apparent that each of these measures was highly related to typicality in these brand categories, further analyses were conducted in order to examine their relative contributions. Because of the very high correlations between the FOI and FAMIL, and two Ideals measures, each of these pairs was combined for the remaining analysis (FAMFOI and IDEALS). The four variables (COHER, FAMFOI, IDEALS, Attribute Structure) were entered in a regression with typicality as the dependent variable. The overall regression equation was highly significant (F(4,15)=217.24, R^2=.983, Standard Error=.295) and the two significant predictors were the COHER (β=.524) and FAMFOI (β=.358) measures.

The data suggests that all of the determinants of typicality that were examined were closely related to typicality judgments. Further analyses suggested that both coherence and familiarity/frequency-of-instantiation were the best determinants of subjects’ typicality ratings in the two brand categories examined here, however, these results must not be overstated given the high
The correlations between all of the determinants examined and typicality. It appears that multiple determinants may influence consumers’ perceptions of the typicality of products in a brand category.

The findings for the coherence measure were particularly interesting. Although this measure has been used previously in brand extension research (Dawar and Anderson 1994), and has its roots in the categorization literature in psychology (e.g., Lakoff 1987; Murphy and Medin 1985), it has never been empirically examined as a possible determinant of typicality judgments prior to this research. Significantly, this measure performed as well as other determinants that have been looked at in prior studies. The coherence measure seems particularly well-suited for studies of the graded structure of brand categories, capturing consumers’ perceptions of how logical a product is, or how much sense it makes, as a member of a brand category. These judgments may be one of the best indicators of a products perceived typicality in categories which are essentially created and defined by marketers.

In the two brand categories examined here, the familiarity and frequency-of-instantiation (FOI) measures were virtually identical (r=.994). Chairs and firewood provide the classic example of when these two measures diverge. Most people are very familiar with chairs, but do not frequently encounter them as a member of the category firewood. It is likely that for many brand categories these two measures will be highly similar. In most situations, consumers will encounter a product as a member of the brand category. Sub-brands provide a likely exception to this generalization. Consumers may be highly familiar with Band-Aid bandages, or Nyquil medicine, but may not frequently encounter them as members of the Johnson & Johnson, or Vick’s brand categories. In situations where there are multiple brand names associated with a product, and differences in the relative emphasis the names receive in marketing efforts, there may be differences between these two measures. Finally, as has been found in past research, the typicality of individual products in both brand categories was positively related to preferences (overall attitudes) for the individual products.

Developing knowledge of the relative importance of various predictors of typicality within brand categories is an important task that can be useful for brand managers in understanding consumers’

### TABLE 2
Correlations: Typicality, Attitude, and Individual Determinant Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levi’s (N=12 products)</th>
<th>Haagen-Dazs (N=8 products)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TYP</td>
<td>COH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typicality (TYP)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence (COH)</td>
<td>.974</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity (FAM)</td>
<td>.974</td>
<td>.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Instantiation (FOI)</td>
<td>.974</td>
<td>.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals 1 (IDLS1)</td>
<td>.938</td>
<td>.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals 2 (IDLS2)</td>
<td>.955</td>
<td>.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribute Structure (ATST)</td>
<td>.857</td>
<td>.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude (ATTIT)</td>
<td>.862</td>
<td>.790</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlations greater than .710 are significant at p<.05, two-tailed
perceptions of their brands and products and for managing brand leveraging strategies. Many of the factors examined in this study may be differentially influenced by various marketing efforts, suggesting that marketers may be able to influence consumers’ perceptions of the typicality of various products. This is particularly important since it was found that attitude and typicality are positively correlated in brand categories. Interestingly, the data suggest that there may be various ways for marketers to influence these perceptions. For example, a product’s coherence may be affected by the effectiveness of marketing communications in convincing consumers that a product is a logical addition to the brand family. Alternatively, because familiarity/frequency of instantiation were also identified as important determinants, marketers may be able to pay less attention to the initial typicality of a new product they introduce to the brand category, instead focusing on increasing consumers’ frequency of advertising exposure and product usage, which will in turn influence the product’s perceived typicality (cf. Alba and Hutchinson 1987). The data suggests that marketers may be able to pursue multiple routes in influencing consumers’ perceptions of the typicality of products in their brand categories.

It is possible that unlike in other types of categories (e.g., ad hoc, taxonomic) where a single, or small number of determinants account for observed typicality ratings, the typicality of individual products in brand categories are equally influenced by a wide range of factors.

Limitations

The results reported here should be interpreted in light of the fact that the research only examined two existing brand categories in a specific experimental context. The use of additional experimental paradigms and tools (e.g., reaction times) would be useful in furthering our understanding of brand category structure. It is very likely that brand categories of different sizes and composition may have characteristics that make them unique to some extent. Additionally, different contexts are likely to influence perceptions of graded structure and typicality (Barsalou 1982; Wanke, Bless and Schwarz 1998). Future research should expand the number and type of brand categories and contexts that are investigated, looking for any other important factors that may influence brand category graded structure.

After many years of pursuing brand extension strategies, many companies now have brand categories in their portfolios. It is critical for managers to understand how consumers’ representations of these existing products interact and influence consumer behavior. Future research should continue to investigate brand category phenomena, acknowledging that an array of products often exist under a single brand name.

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