One brand perception? Or many? The heterogeneity of intra-brand knowledge

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Abstract

Purpose – What customers associate with a brand is the result of what they have felt, learnt, seen and heard about the brand. This knowledge impacts the attitudinal and behavioral brand response of customers (and vice versa). This paper aims to identify how customer segments of one brand characterized by different levels of behavioral and attitudinal response intensity differ in terms of content and structure of brand associations..

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reports findings of two single-brand studies, each comparing brand associations of customer groups with different brand response intensity levels: one in a business-to-customer (B2C) setting where knowledge is determined via brand-to-association retrieval, one in a business-to-business (B2B) setting with benefit-to-brand retrieval.

Findings – The findings show that consumer segments with differing behavioral and attitudinal brand response intensity show unique brand knowledge patterns. Consumers with high response intensity elicit more (favorable) brand associations, and elicit the brand more frequently when stimulated with the brand name. In addition, identical brand associations are rated differently favorable depending on the intensity of brand response.

Practical implications – To learn about the strength of a brand, organizations may complement frequently used comparisons with competing brands by investigating what distinguishes brand knowledge of various customer segments that differ with respect to their relationship with the focal brand. This allows targeting various segments more specifically.

Originality/value – This paper adds to our understanding of brand strength by comparing multiple intra-brand segments and by understanding how their brand knowledge differs depending on their attitudinal and behavioral brand response. Such a perspective may provide more useful insights to fostering brand response than studying inter-brand differences.

Keywords Brand image, Perception, Brand awareness

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

What consumers know about a brand will influence their reaction when confronted with brand-related stimuli (e.g. a branded product, a brand user, a category). Managing brand knowledge hence becomes a crucial task for brand managers (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 2003). Although brand knowledge is an important topic in the branding literature, there is little evidence how brand knowledge and consumer response are related (Del Rio *et al.*, 2001). This paper aims to contribute to fill this gap by investigating how different levels of brand response intensity relate to consumer brand knowledge.

To study the link between brand knowledge and brand response we apply Keller's (1993) framework of customer-based brand equity who conceptualizes brand equity as the impact of brand knowledge – consumers' cognitive representations of a brand (Peter and Olson, 2001) – on reactions towards the brand (i.e. brand response). Brand equity is customer-based: equity is present when the customer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory (Kamakura and Russell, 1991). This conceptualization implies that brand equity is a multifaceted construct consisting of both brand

knowledge characteristics (i.e. content and properties of brand knowledge) and customer brand response defined in terms of attitudes and behaviors. While brand knowledge characteristics refer to brand perception, customer response "refers to the customer's processing of those perceptions to form subsequent comparative evaluations, preferences, behavioral intentions, or behavior" (Hartman and Spiro, 2005, p. 1116).

Research on brand strength typically attempts to explain differences between brands. Strong brands are sometimes identified by behavioral measures like market share or behavioral loyalty (Tellis, 1988), by attitudinal measures like trust or satisfaction (Oliver, 1999), or by cognitive measures like the uniqueness of brand associations (Keller, 1993). These approaches are useful for defining the success of brands and sometimes uncover the relationship with some other, externally valid criteria like share price (Fornell *et al.*, 2006). In contrast, we aim to understand consumer brand equity for one brand, that is, study brand strength within a brand. Hence we follow Krishnan's (1996) advise who suggested that equity for a single brand might vary between segments and studying this variation would add to the understanding of a brand's strength.

For this purpose we first discuss the link between consumer brand response and brand knowledge and why differences in brand knowledge by more or less intensively responsive consumer groups might exist. The study forwards hypotheses on how consumer brand response intensity relates to content and structure of brand knowledge. The authors test hypotheses in the context of two studies – one in a business-to-customer (B2C) setting, the other one in a business-to-business (B2B) setting. The former study looks at associations

elicited by the brand, the latter at brands elicited by relevant consumer benefits. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and implications for brand management and future research.

2. Brand strength: the brand knowledge-response link

Consumer brand knowledge has been conceptualized in various ways. We apply Keller's (1993) approach that focuses on certain qualities of associations (e.g. strength, uniqueness, favorability) the consumer links with the brand. This associative network in turn affects the relationship between the consumer and the brand (Aaker, 1996; Brown and Dacin, 1997). To complicate things, the brand-to-association link can work in either direction, by looking at what the brand elicits and looking at what elicits the brand in consumers' minds. The first perspective would use a question like "What comes to mind when you think of Lotus?" whereas the second would use "Which car do you associate with high fuel efficiency?". Both what the brand elicits and what elicits the brand affect a brand's position in consumers' minds and brand choice (Barnard and Ehrenberg, 1990; Fazio *et al.*, 1989; Krishnan, 1996).

Response intensity is a function of both attitude and behavior towards a brand. We follow Agarwal and Malhotra's (2005) definition of brand attitude as consumers' overall evaluative judgment of a brand based on brand beliefs. Such beliefs concern product-related attributes, like functional and experiential benefits (Zeithaml, 1988), as well as beliefs about non-product-related attributes and symbolic benefits (Rossiter and Percy, 1987). Because specification and measurement of all relevant attributes and benefits is difficult, brand researchers often use some general evaluation of the brand – for instance, satisfaction, trustworthiness or commitment – to capture brand attitude (e.g. Oliver, 1999).

Brand behavior can include current and intended future purchase behavior, the way consumers use the brand and word of mouth (Kozinets, 2001). To simplify our framework we limit the behavioral dimension to actual purchasing of the brand. Frequent consumers therefore experience a more intense relationship than occasional or non-buyers. Strong brands elicit associations that result in positive customer response (Keller, 1993). To understand the strength of brands, branding research traditionally investigates the link from knowledge to response (both attitudinal and behavioral) and between the two response dimensions, i.e. attitude and behavior (see Figure 1).

The right side of Figure 1, the relationship between attitude and behavior towards a brand has been thoroughly investigated (e.g. Andrade, 2005; Baldinger and Rubinson, 1996; Beatty and Kahle, 1988; Berger and Mitchell, 1989; Krishnan, 1996; O'Cass and Grace, 2004). Attitude guides behavior and biases human action congruently: positive attitude leads to favorable behavior (e.g. more regular purchases); negative attitude fosters unfavorable behavioral outcomes (Andrade, 2005; Beatty and Kahle, 1988; Fazio *et al.*, 1989). Similar findings exist for attitudinal concepts such as satisfaction, commitment or trust. All of them are noted for evoking behavioral outcomes, for instance, choice (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). However, the relationship between attitude and behavior is not a one-way causal connection, but a reciprocal process during which attitude and behavior continuously impact each other (Beatty and Kahle, 1988; Franzen, 1994).

Krishnan (1996) was the first to theoretically extend Keller's (1993) work and to empirically test the left side of Figure 1, the knowledge-response link established in Keller's brand equity definition. He concludes that a large number of brand associations, their valence and their uniqueness positively impact response. A number of similar studies (e.g. by Agarwal and Rao, 1996; Del Rio *et al.*, 2001; Hutton, 1997; Park and Srinivasan, 1994; Spears *et al.*, 2006) empirically test certain aspects of the brand knowledge – brand response link in an inter-brand setting. Their results confirm that what consumers know about a brand has an effect on their response, for example attitude, choice, preference, willingness-to-pay, behavioral intention or actual behavior.

We believe that additional insights into the brand knowledge-response relationship (and hence, the formation of brand strength) are possible by taking an intra-brand instead of an inter-brand perspective. In an inter-brand setting respondents depict their knowledge and evaluate a set of brands, which are typically chosen because they have a reputation as "strong" or "weak". Then the degree of knowledge and the evaluation aggregated across respondents show that the "strong" brand is evaluated more positively and consumers know more about it. To provide a different perspective on the relationship between knowledge and response, we follow Krishnan's (1996) advise to study brand strength for different segments of one brand. Studying how one brand attains strength with some parts of the market and not others may overcome the major drawback typical for an inter-brand setting: Instead of comparing brand A with brand B (which might inherently differ given for example their positioning or financial success), we recommend to compare the perception of one brand by different market segments. To this end, one could cluster customers by their degree of knowledge and then evaluate the respective response intensity

Figure 1 The link between brand knowledge and response
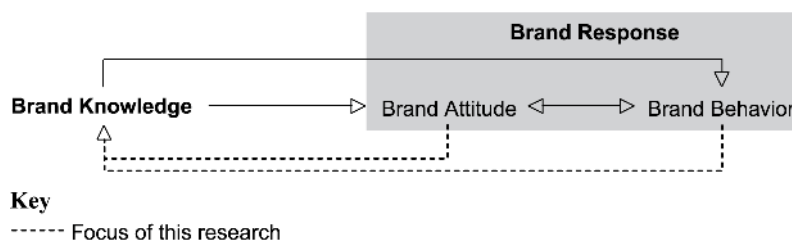
or one could cluster customers by their degree of brand response and then evaluate the respective knowledge. Following the logic of best practice (Rockart and Bullen, 1981) we choose customers with a different intensity of brand response and then search for brand knowledge differences to understand the sources of variation in response.

3. Brand response segments

We segment customers according to their levels of attitudinal and behavioral brand response. This results in a two-dimensional segment solution based on attitudinal response intensity (ARI) and behavioral response intensity (BRI) towards a brand. Each dimension spans a continuum from low to moderate to high response intensity. By combining the intensity consumers experience on both dimensions shows the consumer's overall response intensity *vis-à-vis* the brand.

The following response types result from combining high and low scores on each of the two dimensions (see Figure 2 for an overview): LowARI/LowBRI consumers (A) do not purchase the brand and their overall evaluation of the brand is negative; HighARI/HighBRI consumers (D) demonstrate a strong positive attitude towards the brand and are frequent buyers – their brand response is a very positive and intense one; LowARI/HighBRI consumers (B) and HighARI/LowBRI consumers (C) score high on one of the two dimension and low on the other: high scores on only the behavioral dimension (segment B) could be the result of a forced relationship, for example if no other brand is available to fulfill a certain need. One would expect consumers to try to avoid such a combination of attitudinal and behavioral response intensity. High scores on the attitudinal dimension only – not resulting in an actual purchase of the brand (segment C) – may occur when a brand is "out of reach" (e.g. in the case of a luxury brand or budget constraints).

Similar approaches to cluster consumers and stakeholders have been proposed by Kozinets (1999) and Koll *et al.* (2007). For example, users of online communities show different levels of involvement with other community members and interest in the topic of the community. Members of the high involvement and high interest group represent community insiders whereas low/low members are

Figure 2 Brand response-intensity segments

community tourists (Kozinets, 1999). Koll *et al.* (2007) also discriminate between an attitudinal dimension (attitude towards the brand) and a behavioral dimension (activity level with regard to the brand) to establish a classification of brand interest groups. They name the resulting groups brand devotees (positive attitude and high activity level), brand followers (positive attitude and low activity level), brand criticals (negative attitude and low activity level), and brand offenders (negative attitude and high activity level).

The next section introduces our hypotheses on the relationship between brand knowledge and response intensity. With respect to knowledge, we distinguish between number, favorability (of each association elicited by each respondent), and content of brand associations, three facets frequently used in empirical work on brand knowledge.

To assess how much a consumer knows about a brand researchers often focus on the number of associations the brand elicits (Krishnan, 1996; Keller, 1993). Brand-specific knowledge impacts both behavioral and affective loyalty as it creates switching costs to less well-known alternatives (Ratchford, 2001) and an incentive to get to know a brand even better. We propose a positive relationship between brand-response intensity and the number of associations the brand elicits:

H1a. The higher a segment's ARI the more associations the brand will elicit.
H1b. The higher a segment's BRI the more associations the brand will elicit.

Focusing on the number of associations only may be misleading, as some of these associations might be negative. However, the favorability of brand associations is related to brand preference and choice (Punj and Hillyer, 2004). Consumers with intense positive brand response – be it affective or behavioral – should therefore elicit more favorable associations than consumers with less intense response. We propose this relationship for the totality of the associations of each intensity segment, but the same may hold for the evaluation of a specific association:

H2a. The higher a segment's ARI the more positive associations the brand elicits.
H2b. The higher a segment's BRI the more positive associations the brand elicits.

If brand associations are relevant in explaining response (Keller, 1993), one can expect groups with different intensity levels to elicit different associations for a brand. While one reason for differential consumer response may lie in different favorability levels of the same associations, we expect that there will be qualitative differences in the most salient associations depending on the consumer-brand response intensity. In terms of specific content, and without stating a formal hypothesis, we expect consumers with intense brand response to retrieve associations that are more in line with the brand's identity – that is, how the organization wants the brand to be perceived by stakeholders – because these consumers are more interested in and typically have more contact and experiences with the brand, including company-initiated brand communication (Brown *et al.*, 2006; Koll *et al.*, 2007). If one objective of brand management is to communicate signals that reinforce the brand's desired identity, then consumers who perceive a strong fit between
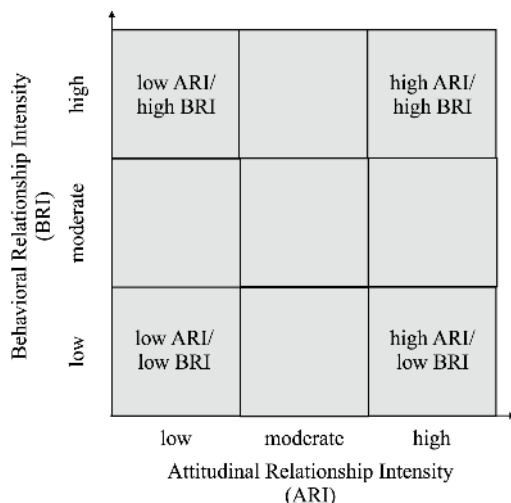
their expectations and these signals should aspire more intense relationships (Kapferer, 2004).

For the association-to-brand link used in Study 2, we expect that groups with more intense brand response will more often retrieve the brand from memory when exposed to choice-relevant stimuli (e.g. consumer benefits, usage situations). One might expect that customers with intense brand response perceive it as a solution to a variety of needs whereas consumers with less intense response have a hard time memorizing the brand when confronted with such cues (Thelen and Woodside, 1997):

H3a. The higher a segment's ARI the more often they elicit the brand when a choice-relevant cue is presented.

H3b. The higher a segment's BRI the more often they elicit the brand when a choice-relevant cue is presented.

4. Method

Tests of hypotheses involved data collected in two studies. Both apply the free elicitation technique (Elliott, 1994), but one study uses the brand as the cue for retrieving associations, the other focuses on which cues evoke the brand.

Study 1: brand-to-association retrieval

Data originate from an online survey in 11 countries (four in Asia, six in Europe, and the USA). The samples (between 290 and 300 valid responses per country) come from online consumer panels of one of the largest market research agencies in the world and are representative of the countries' populations with respect to age, income and awareness of the brand. The awareness criterion has no impact on the age and income distribution, but females account for some two-thirds of respondents given their higher propensity to be interested in the focal brand (the brand's product focus is on fashion, home decor and jewelry). Respondents' brand associations were collected applying the Unique Corporate Association Valence approach (Spears *et al.*, 2006). After reading the brand name respondents had to note down words or short phrases that came to their minds. After submitting a maximum of eight answers (a pre-test had shown that less than 1 percent of respondents would submit more than seven associations), they had to rate each of their associations on a five point scale from very positive (5) to very negative (1). One of the authors and two graduate business students – who had been trained in qualitative and quantitative data analysis and had performed similar coding-tasks before – jointly engaged in inductively developing a codebook based on the associations elicited by 50 consumers per country. This preliminary codebook served as a foundation for coding all consumer associations and was continuously enriched with further codes if new associations arose during the coding process. The inter-coder agreement was 90 percent, the research team jointly discussed and assigned codes to controversial associations.

Following Garbarino and Johnson (1999) we use the constructs of satisfaction, affective commitment and trust to establish ARI. To be able to include responses from non-buyers we operationalize satisfaction via "likelihood-to-recommend" as suggested by Reichheld (2003). The other two measures also use single item statements (all three measured on five point Likert scales). One factor accounts for 72 percent of the variance and all three items load strongly on this factor (factor loadings above 0.80 respectively). Cronbach's alpha is 0.80. The average of these three items is used as the indicator of a respondent's ARI. To evaluate BRI, we measure reported brand purchasing. The scale ranges from never, once, twice, three to five times, to more than five times.

We had to eliminate 396 questionnaires because respondents did not provide an answer to at least one of the three ARI measures, or past purchase behavior. In total 2,870 respondents were included in the analysis (see Figure 3).

For each dimension three groups of customers were formed. Figure 2 shows the respective cut-offs and number of respondents falling into each of the nine groups when relating attitudinal and behavioral response intensity. The interdependency between respective membership in the low, moderate and high attitude and behavioral groups is supported by the chi-square value (Chi^2 = 768.65; df = 4; $p < 0.001$). It is interesting to see that very few respondents manage to show high BRI but low ARI. We suppose that such a stance may be a difficult mindset to maintain in the long run. We also find that groups characterized by higher response intensity have relatively more female members (in line with the brand's targeting strategy).

Study 2: benefit-to-brand retrieval

We will present method and results of this study in a limited format since the main purpose is to illustrate the strength of the association-to-brand link of different customer groups. Respondents in study 2 are randomly drawn from a database of a large Austrian corporation supplying lighting equipment covering both actual and potential customers. By telephone, a response rate of 26 percent resulted in a sample of 585 respondents. The study asked to elicit the brand name of the lighting company that first comes to mind when confronted with one of 22 relevant benefits (order of cues was randomized across respondents). This part of the questionnaire was presented before respondents became aware of the sponsor of the study. The cues are key factors driving choice in the industry (e.g. delivery speed, know-how, showrooms) and were identified through a qualitative pilot study. The study uses attitudinal loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) as an indicator of ARI, and reported share of wallet (percentage of total category purchasing sourced from the sponsor company) as the corresponding BRI measure.

5. Results

Study 1: brand-to-association retrieval

Figure 4 shows the average number of associations elicited from respondents in each of the nine groups. The three lines respectively represent the levels of ARI and show the number of associations in combination with different levels of BRI. The average for the total sample is 3.04 elicited associations. The number of associations increases with higher ARI and BRI (no interaction effect). Comparing the weak intensity with the strong intensity groups for each dimension we find that the average number of associations increases from 2.63 to 3.48 for the attitudinal dimension, and from 2.55 to 3.72 for the behavioral dimension. Therefore *H1a* and *H1b* are supported.

All three BRI groups differ with significance levels below 0.01. The weak and moderate ARI groups do not differ whereas the moderate and strong group do ($p < 0.01$). When

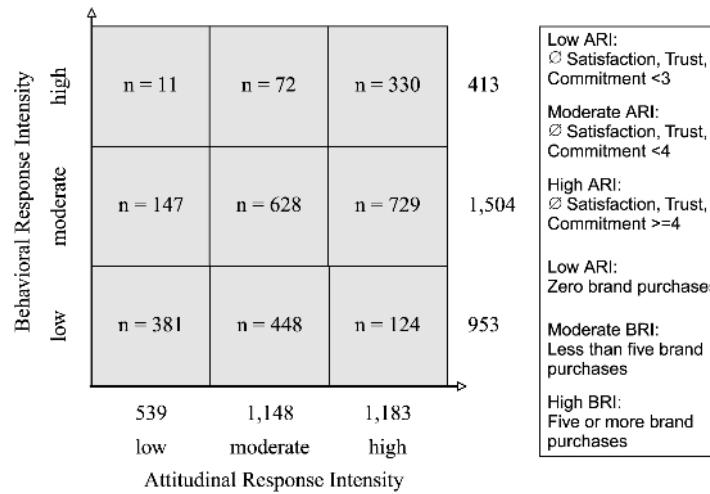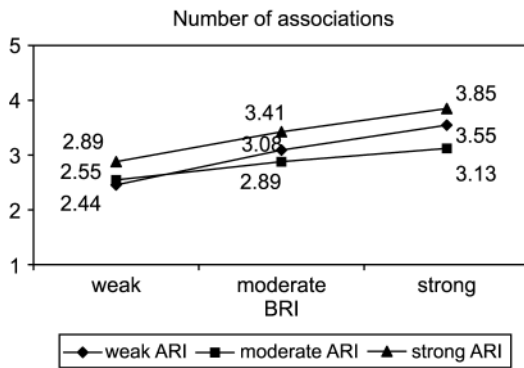**Figure 3** Distribution of brand response-intensity segments


Figure 4 Number of associations

Note: The *y*-axis shows the absolute number of associations elicited

combined with moderate and strong BRI, the weak ARI group even outperforms the moderate ARI group, but sample sizes for these groups are low.

Figure 5 shows the average favorability of all associations elicited from respondents in each of the nine groups. The

Figure 5 Favorability of associations
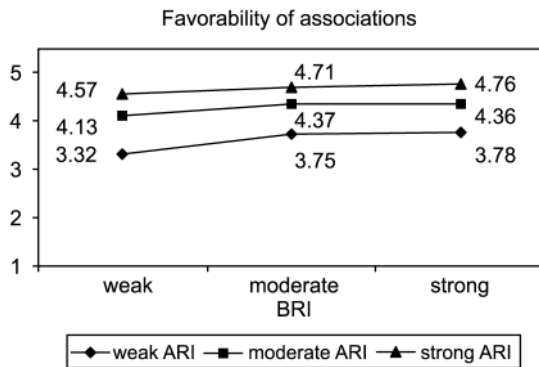
Note: The *y*-axis shows the average evaluation of these associations by the respective group

average for the total sample is 4.36 (scale goes from 1 to 5) indicating that people who know this particular brand evaluate their brand-related thoughts rather positive. Indeed, only 3 percent of all associations are rated "very negative", and slightly over 60 percent "very positive". Again, we find that an increase in response intensity increases the favorability of associations (no interaction effect between ARI and BRI). The increase from moderate to high BRI is negligible but it is substantial from low (non-buyers) to moderate BRI intensity ($p < 0.001$). Comparing the low intensity with the high intensity groups average favorability of associations increases from 3.63 to 4.48 for the attitudinal dimension and from 3.89 to 4.68 for the behavioral dimension. Therefore *H2a* and *H2b* are supported.

Is this difference due to a difference in the elicited associations or are the same associations rated differently? If one group frequently retrieved associations like "poor service" and another associations like "gorgeous design" then favorability differences could be expected. To examine this question, we take a closer look at two associations that dominate the content of each group. We calculated the average evaluation of these associations for low and high ARI and BRI respectively. The top association, the most prominent product category of the company, receives an evaluation score of 4.7 from the high ARI group and 4.6 from the high BRI group. The scores for the low relationship groups are significantly smaller, with a score of 3.7 for the low ARI and a score of 4.1 from the low BRI group. The second most frequent association, the material applied in all products of the company, is evaluated by both the high ARI and the high BRI group with a score of 4.8, but only receives a score of 3.9 from the low ARI and a score of 4.2 from the low BRI group. So favorability differences are not only due to different associations, but also different ratings of the same associations.

Table I provides the top ten associations for low and high ARI as well as BRI. The exact statements are disguised on the sponsor's request by more generic terms respectively. These ten associations represent between 56 percent and 60 percent of all associations mentioned by the group members respectively. The top two associations play a dominant role within each group, and are elicited by between 37 percent

Table I Top ten associations for low and high ARI/BRI

Strong BRI	Weak BRI	Strong ARI	Weak ARI
Product category 1	Product category 1	Product category 1	Product category 1
Material 1	Material 1	Material 1	Material 1
Product attribute 1	Cost of product	Product attribute 1	Cost of product
Product category 2	Product attribute 1	Product category 2	Product attribute 1
Product attribute 2	Product category 2	Product attribute 2	Product category 2
Quality assessment	Material 2	Brand personality 1	Material 2
Brand personality 1	Brand personality 2	Quality assessment	Material 3
Product category 3	Product category 3	Product category 3	Material 4
Product category 4	Material 3	Brand personality 2	Brand personality 2
Cost of product	Product attribute 2	Brand personality 3	Family member
56%[a]	60%	58%	58%

Notes: [a] Percentage of group's associations covered by top ten associations; Brand associations in italics appear in both groups respectively

and 50 percent of all group members. The third most frequent association in each group falls behind the second most mentioned one by a margin of around 20 percent. When comparing the responses for the low and high group related from a behavioral perspective, then seven out of the top ten associations overlap. The overlap is smaller when comparing the low and high group in terms of attitude: Only five associations are among both top tens. While the consistency between groups is high for the five most frequent associations (the top four associations are in the top five for each group), the next most frequent associations are less consistent. One can also see that the inconsistent associations cover different aspects of the brand (attribute, personality, material) in each group. These differences lead to tentative support that ARI and BRI also affect content of associations. Also, the top ten associations of the high ARI and BRI groups show higher consistency with the intended brand image of the focal brand than the top ten associations of the low ARI and BRI groups.

Study 2: benefit-to-brand retrieval
We assigned respondents to one of four groups based on their levels of ARI (attitudinal loyalty) and BRI (share of wallet) towards the focal brand. For each group we then compared the percentage of respondents that retrieve the focal brand when confronted with a specific benefit and whether the focal brand is the brand most often retrieved.

For the HighARI/HighBRI group 21 of the 22 cues evoke the focal brand more often than any other brand. The one exception ("Perceived fairness") is the most affective cue, which may also explain why for this cue the HighARI/LowBRI group evokes the brand more than the LowARI/HighBRI group. The average retrieval rates for the focal brand (across all 22 cues) are 54 percent for the HighARI/HighBRI group, 35 percent for the LowARI/HighBRI group, 22 percent (HighARI/LowBRI) and 5 percent (LowARI/Low BRI).

These findings suggest that strong behavioral ties between a brand and a consumer facilitate the association-to-brand-retrieval more than strong attitudinal ties. Still, the substantial differences in association-to-brand retrieval for both types of relationship intensity lend support to *H3a* and *H3b*.

6. Discussion

A majority of studies on brand management and research aims to uncover differences in brand investments and brand outcomes between brands. Our objective is to investigate differences in brand knowledge and possible interrelationships with other brand-related phenomena (i.e. brand attitude and purchasing) among consumers of one brand. Our results support that consumer segments with different brand relationship-intensity considerably differ with regard to their brand knowledge structures. In study 1, we compare the number, favorability, and content of brand associations between consumers with high-intensity relationships and low-intensity relationships with the brand. Both dimensions of the relationship have a strong and positive effect on the number of associations the brand evokes and their favorability. However, the number of associations is more affected by changes in BRI than ARI whereas ARI affects the favorability of associations more than BRI. Study 2 confirms this result: Heavy brand users retrieve the association-to-brand link significantly more than weak brand users, whereas the difference between high and low ARI consumers is smaller.

In terms of content we find that the dominant brand associations relate to both ARI and BRI. Specifically, when BRI is high, consumers retrieve more experiential associations like product categories or quality evaluations than low BRI consumers. The top ten associations of high ARI consumers contain more positive product attributes and personality facets and also a positive quality evaluation compared to low ARI consumers. Both low BRI and ARI consumers elicit materials that appear similar, but do not match the material used in the brand's products. This response may serve as a signal for superficial brand knowledge resulting from weak relationship intensity.

Brands mean different things to different consumers. While brand management may strive to communicate a specific and consistent image to the market, consumers may develop different perceptions of the brand, also depending on their relationship-intensity with the brand. Brand management and research may be well advised to acknowledge the relationship between knowledge, attitude and behavior. This view leads to several relevant implications: Brand research should reconsider treating brand perception as an aggregate phenomenon, where different brands can be ranked

according to certain criteria. Rather, differences in brand knowledge (and their underlying reasons) between consumers of one brand deserve more attention. Since each of these groups perceives the brand differently, it may have a different set of expectations towards the brand and compare it to a different competitive set. Just like marketing suggests to segment consumers for more effective measures, segment-specific brand perceptions should impact the branding strategies of organizations. It seems unlikely that high and low ARI/BRI groups can be addressed effectively by the same branding strategies.

7. Limitations and future research

We compare consumer brand perception by clustering individuals based on a small subset of response intensity indicators. Future research should look at the effect of other intensity indicators, for example brand attachment (Thomson and Johnson, 2006), or could take into account other types of (intended) brand behavior, for example amount spent on the brand, willingness to pay for the brand or brand community membership and participation. With regard to the measurement of brand knowledge, free elicitation technique is not suitable if an organization wants an explicit response to whether a certain association is elicited by the brand or is interested in more complex brand maps stored in consumer memory (Roedder *et al.*, 2006).

We did not explicitly compare each group's brand knowledge with the desired organizational brand identity. However, the top associations in each ARI and BRI group relate closely to desired brand elements when ARI and BRI are high. If an organization succeeds in transmitting desired identity elements, one would assume that consumers whose expectations more closely match these elements seek closer relationships with the brand. At the same time, having a close relationship may result in more efficient transmission of relevant signals from an organization to its consumers. We are convinced that research investigating how relationship management processes and different states of a relationship affect the consistency between intended and perceived brand meaning will provide valuable insights for brand building and nurturing.

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