Brand–Slogan Matching in a Cluttered Environment

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ABSTRACT   *Slogans are generally considered to be useful in building brand equity. In today's cluttered environment, however, consumers often match slogans with brands other than the actual sponsoring brand. Still, research on slogans has mainly focused on slogan effects when the brand is given (for example, in controlled experiments). By using real slogans and brands, this study increases our understanding of how slogans work in the presence of several competing slogans and brands. It is found that mismatching of slogans and brands can be explained by the different memory processes used by consumers. The cued retrieval process generally leads to the correct brand being identified, whereas the constructive memory process is sensitive to memory distortions. However, constructive memory allows for a larger influence of the slogan on the brand than does cued retrieval. The study adds to research on slogans and on source identification. Suggestions on how to use slogans in a cluttered environment, such as creating annoying and irritating slogans or using variations of slogans, are given.*

Introduction

Slogans are generally considered to be useful in building brand equity as they facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a strong brand identity and provide continuity throughout advertising campaigns (cf. Celsi and Olson, 1988; Keller, 2003; Reece *et al.*, 1994). In a study by Mathur and Mathur (1995), the announcement of a new slogan was found to increase the market value of firms with an amount that, on average, corresponded to a $6–8 million increase in annual profits. This finding indirectly points out the value attached to slogans by marketers and investors alike. Direct support for the value of slogans comes from experimental studies in which slogans have been found to influence product beliefs (Ennis and Zanna, 1993) and brand evaluations (Boush, 1993; Pryor and Brodie, 1998).

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However, in these experimental studies the brand has been given. For slogans to have the same effect outside a controlled environment, consumers must accurately match the slogan with the sponsoring brand (Pham and Johar, 1997; 2001). Can one really expect correct brand-slogan matching to happen?

Brands exist in a cluttered environment where they have to compete with other products and brands for consumers' attention. Given the many messages they encounter, consumers often confuse marketing communication efforts by different sponsors (cf. Brengman *et al.,* 2001; Johar and Pham, 1999; Kent and Kellaris, 2001). In the case of slogans, such competitive interference seems to be recurrent. Several researchers report that consumers frequently are unable to match a slogan with its sponsoring brand (e.g., Dahlén and Rosengren, 2005; Reece *et al.,* 1994). In one study, as much as 39% matched a leading brand's slogan with other brands (cited in Pham and Johar, 1997). Mismatching means that the positive effects found in experimental studies might not be realized. Furthermore, when mismatching occurs, a different brand within the same product category is often identified as the sponsor (Reece *et al.,* 1994), suggesting that competitive interference might result in the slogan benefiting a competing brand (cf. Dahlén and Rosengren, 2005). Still, marketers invest substantial sums in their slogans (Mathur and Mathur, 1995) and count on them to build brand identity and enhance brand presence (Keller, 2003; Reece *et al.,* 1994). In the light of brand–slogan mismatching such investments seems questionable. Given the cluttered media environment and the intense competition facing most brands, a better understanding of why mismatching occurs and what the effects might be should be important for marketers.

Traditionally, brand–slogan matching has been thought of in terms of cued retrieval. The slogan is considered a retrieval cue that activates the brand in the mind of the consumers. Brand–slogan matching can, however, be based on three different memory processes: cued retrieval, constructive memory, or pure guessing (Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 1997). Building on the source identification framework by Pham and Johar (1997), we suggest that sensitivity to competitive interference and the potential value of a slogan will vary depending on how brand–slogan matching is made. In an empirical study of beer brands and their slogans, we investigate brand–slogan matching accuracy, the interrelationships between brand and slogan evaluations, and sensitivity to competitive interference. We end the article with suggestions on how to use slogans in the presence of competitive interference.

The Influence of Slogans on their Brands

Slogans are expected to affect how consumers perceive a brand, both in its own right and in relation to its competition. More specifically, a slogan can influence a brand by:

1. Creating brand awareness by linking the brand to a product category (Keller, 2003; Keller, 1993).
2. Shaping brand evaluations by priming specific brand associations (Boush, 1993; Ennis and Zanna, 1993; Pryor and Brodie, 1998).
3. Shaping brand evaluations by transfer of likeability (cf. Brown and Stayman 1992; Haley and Baldinger, 1991; Muehling and McCann, 1993).

4.   Reinforcing brand awareness and evaluations by serving as a memory aid (Keller, 1993; Mathur and Mathur, 1995; Reece *et al.,* 1994).

A slogan can fulfil one or more of these functions. The most powerful slogans are those that contribute to the brand in multiple ways (Keller, 2003). The slogan tells the consumer what the brand is about and, potentially, it will influence what consumers think about the brand and how they evaluate it (functions 1–3). Linguistic devices such as word play and rhyme can be used to enhance memorability for the slogan. Moreover, the fact that slogans can be used over time and over different advertising campaigns further contribute to their memorability. The slogan as such thus becomes a carrier of brand equity (function 4). For instance, Carlsberg's 'Probably the best beer [lager] in the world' clearly connects the brand with the beer category (1). 'The best' primes the association of number one (2) in a likeable way ('probably') that should be beneficial to the brand (3). When exposed to the slogan, consumers' perceptions about Carlsberg are likely to be influenced. 'Probably the best beer [lager] in the world' becomes a carrier of the essence of the Carlsberg brand (4).

A prerequisite for slogans to fulfil any of these functions is, however, that the brand and the slogan are accurately linked together by the consumers (Pham and Johar, 1997, 2001). If, for instance, consumers who are exposed to 'Probably the best beer [lager] in the world' do not match it with Carlsberg, the slogan will not affect their perceptions about the Carlsberg brand. Carlsberg will thus not benefit from its slogan investment. Furthermore, if consumers match the slogan with another brand, the investments made by Carlsberg might be transferred to that brand instead. If, lets say, Heineken, is identified as the sponsor, the perceptions evoked by the slogan will be projected on Heineken instead of Carlsberg (Dahlén and Rosengren, 2005; Pham and Johar, 2001). The consumer will attribute the associations of 'the best' and the likeability of the slogan to Heineken. Although being mistakenly matched with the slogan could be beneficial for Heineken, it must not be. Associations that are beneficial to Carlsberg might not be as positive for Heineken. The associations might even make consumers uncertain of what Heineken actually stands for (Brengman *et al.,* 2001). If this is the case, both brands will suffer from consumers' inability to make an accurate brand–slogan match.

Brand–slogan matching is thus important from both the sponsoring and the confused brand's point of view. Awareness of how consumers' match a slogan with a brand should help marketers understand when mismatching is likely to occur and how to create slogans that reduce the risks of such mismatching.

Competitive Interference and Brand Identification

Competitive interference is a continuously growing problem for marketers. As the volume of brands and brand messages increases, it is becoming more and more difficult for marketers to gain enough consumer attention to build memory for their brands and communication efforts. According to Kumar (2000), consumers can be expected to recall less than 25% of the advertising they are exposed to on an average day. Clutter has also been shown to make consumers less able to match marketing communication efforts and brands; even if consumers remember the message they

cannot always tell which brand stands behind it. Brand identification problems have been found for diverse efforts such as advertising (e.g., Burke and Srull, 1988; Kent and Kellaris, 2001), sponsorships (e.g. Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 2001), and slogans (e.g. Law, 2002; Reece *et al.,* 1994).

Previous research has shown that consumers use one of three memory processes when matching brands and marketing communications: (1) cued retrieval; (2) memory construction; or (3) pure guessing (Pham and Johar, 1997). Cued retrieval is based on semantic memory for the brand-message link. Although cued retrieval is the default option, it requires a clear memory trace for the brand-message link. In the presence of several competing brands, consumers are often unable to encode marketing communications enough for such a link to be formed (Law, 2002). Clutter decreases the chances of cued retrieval being used for brand identification. Instead, consumers can try to either reconstruct a link in their mind or guess the sponsoring brand. Given that consumers are somewhat motivated to make an accurate match, constructive memory is the most likely process (Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 1997). To identify a sponsoring brand, consumers either refresh memory traces from previous exposures or try to infer who the potential sponsor could be by comparing the message to their knowledge of potential brands (Pham and Johar, 1997).

Which matching process will be used thus depends on consumers' memory for a specific piece of communication (see Figure 1). The memory can be characterized in terms of level of familiarity and confidence. Consumers can either be confident in their familiarity (i.e. have a clear memory trace) or they can be less confident in their familiarity (i.e. attribute it to a general sense of familiarity). Consumers are able to distinguish between these two types of familiarity (Law, 2002; 1998) and this assertion will determine which matching process will be used. For instance, in the case of slogans, matching due to cued retrieval is based on a strong sense of
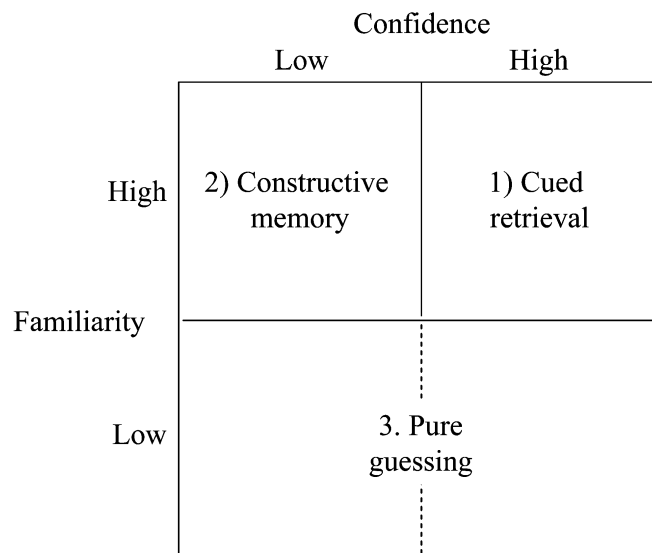

Figure 1. Brand–slogan matching processes

familiarity; consumers are confident that they know the slogan (1). When the sense of familiarity is less confidently held, consumers will try to reconstruct their previous memory for the slogan in order to match it with a brand (2). If the slogan is not at all familiar, the only way to match it with a brand would be through guessing (3).

Accuracy of Brand–Slogan Matching

The frequent mismatching of slogans to brands could be explained by the memory process used. Consumers are generally quite familiar with slogans and good at recognizing them (e.g. Dotson and Hyatt, 2000; Moore and Stephens, 1975). This is true regardless of age and whether or not consumers are actually part of the target group (Dotson and Hyatt, 2000). Due to high levels of familiarity, brand–slogan matching based on guessing is less likely to take place (cf. Johar and Pham, 1999; 1997). Brand–slogan matching should thus be based on either cued retrieval or constructive memory.

The competitive interference found in studies of brand–slogan matching (e.g. Keiser, 1975; Reece *et al.,* 1994) should mainly be due to matching based on constructive memory processes. Cued retrieval is generally rather effortless and involves few memory errors (Law, 2002; Pham and Johar, 1997). As the brand–slogan link is clearly remembered, mismatching is unlikely to take place. Although the high levels of recognition and familiarity might be interpreted as support for brand–slogan matching based on cued retrieval, this is not necessarily the case. Memory for a brand and its slogan has been found to be somewhat independent (e.g. Keiser, 1975; Moore and Stephens, 1975); a consumer might be able to remember a brand and its slogan without being able to match the two together. The constructive processes used by consumers to come up with a match in the absence of a clearly remembered brand–slogan link, are sensitive to memory distortions (Law, 2002; Pham and Johar, 1997). The information provided in the slogan might not always lead to the correct brand being identified. Overall, cued retrieval should thus be more accurate than constructive memory.

> H1: Brand–slogan matching based on cued retrieval is more accurate than brand–slogan matching based on constructive memory.

Triggers of Brand–Slogan Matching

The two matching processes rely on different information in order to establish a brand–slogan match. The relative influence of the brand and the slogan will differ (cf. Leigh, 1992), which, in turn, should influence the potential role of the slogan as a builder of brand equity as well as what makes an accurate match more likely.

Consumers are more likely to pay attention and process information related to brands that they like (Rice and Bennett, 1998). This means that slogans for well-liked brands are more likely to have gone through enough processing for cued retrieval to be possible. The brand prompts the consumers to pay attention to its marketing communication. As well-liked brands are likely to be central nodes in their own

associative networks (Kent and Allen, 1994; Kumar and Krishnan, 2004), we would expect the information to be processed top-down starting with the brand (Leigh, 1992). The established brand schema should thus influence how the consumers perceive the slogan. This means that consumers would evaluate the slogan based on their evaluations of the brand.

Constructive memory uses the slogan to guide its matching efforts. The slogan is perceived as familiar; either due to actual exposure or to contextual effects (Pieters *et al.,* 2002). This familiarity makes consumers motivated to try to remember where they might have seen the slogan before or what brand would be the most likely to use it (Pham and Johar, 1997). The information is processed bottom-up, starting from the advertising stimulus (Leigh, 1992). The slogan as such is the most important cue to making a brand–slogan match. What consumers think about the slogan should influence which brand they will match it with. Consumers should thus evaluate the brand based on their evaluations of the slogan.

The two matching processes imply differences in the mutual influence between the brand and the slogan. When cued retrieval is used, the brand schema will guide processing of the slogan. The opposite is expected when retrieval is based on constructive memory. Thus, we hypothesize:

> H2a: When matching is based on cued retrieval, brand evaluation is more likely to affect slogan evaluation.

> H2b: When matching is based on memory construction, slogan evaluation is more likely to affect brand evaluation.

Given the central role of the brand in cued retrieval (H2a) and the slogan in memory construction (H2b), the brand and the slogan should have different impact on matching accuracy as well. That is, the relative importance of the brand and the slogan should influence the circumstances under which an accurate brand–slogan match is most likely to occur.

For cued retrieval, matching accuracy should be guided by what consumers think about the brand. The more consumers like the brand, the more likely they are to encode information regarding it (Rice and Bennett, 1998), and the more encoding, the more accurate the brand–slogan match. As the slogan is processed based on the brand schema, however, consumers' evaluations of the slogan as such should be less important.

How consumers evaluate a brand is less likely to affect matching accuracy for constructive memory. As consumers are generally better at remembering an inferred meaning of a claim rather than the exact phrase (Harris *et al.,* 1989), repeated advertising of slogans often result in generalization of slogan meaning. As consumers are generally more knowledgeable of common rather than distinct properties of brands in a category, the generalized slogan is more likely to be connected to the product category than to any specific brand (Kent and Kellaris, 2001). The slogan will cue the product category and the activation reaching each brand will be low, thus increasing the risk for retrieval error (Unnava *et al.,* 2003). Furthermore, the absence of a clear memory for previous exposures, often leads to familiarity being misattributed to positive affect (Holden and Vanhuele, 1999;

Nordhielm, 2002), making such slogans well-liked. In the absence of a clear memory for the brand–slogan match, a more liked slogan should be linked to the product category making it harder for consumers to match it with the sponsoring brand.

The different influence of the brand and the slogan for the two matching processes should thus be reflected in the triggers of matching accuracy. In the case of cued retrieval, a well-liked brand will lead to processing of the brand–slogan link and make accuracy higher. For constructive memory, the generalized familiarity with the slogan is interpreted as liking. However, as the generalized slogan is more closely linked to the category than to any brand, the more liked the slogan the less accurate the match. Thus, we hypothesize:

> H3a: When matching is based on cued retrieval, brand liking is higher for correct matches than incorrect matches.

> H3b: When matching is based on memory construction, slogan liking is lower for correct matches than incorrect matches.

Sensitivity of Brand Slogan Matching

As suggested in H1 the frequent mismatching of slogans to brands is dependent on which matching process consumers use. Memory cues (e.g. Keller, 1991a; b) and varied advertising executions (e.g. Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991; Unnava and Sirdeshmukh, 1994) are generally suggested as strategies to overcome the negative effects of competitive interference. However, the usefulness of the two strategies should vary depending on which brand–slogan matching process is used. The rationale for using memory cues is that they directly activate the brand. The use of memory cues is thus contingent on matching based on cued retrieval (cf. Pham and Johar, 1997). When consumers have no clear link between the memory cue and the brand, as is often the case for slogans (Law, 2002; Reece *et al.,* 1994), memory cues should be of less use. Varied advertising executions, on the other hand, aims to enrich the associative network of the consumers. Although it means that the link between a specific execution and the brand might become weaker, it enhances the general familiarity with the brand. Such variations should facilitate constructive memory processes (cf. Pham and Johar, 1997).

Although brand–slogan matching based on cued retrieval is brand-driven whereas brand–slogan matching based on memory construction is slogan-driven (H2–H3), cued retrieval should be more sensitive to variations in slogan formulations. If the memory trace and the memory cue do not exactly match, it will lead to confusion and reduce the accuracy of brand–slogan matching. For memory construction, the more generalized familiarity with the slogan means that no such discrimination can be made. Variations might even enrich the amount of cues available when constructing the brand slogan link, thereby increasing its accuracy. Thus, we hypothesize:

> H4a: When brand–slogan matching is based on cued retrieval, matching accuracy will be sensitive to variations in the slogan.

H4b: When matching is based on memory construction, matching accuracy will be improved by variations in the slogan.

Method

A method similar to Reece *et al.* (1994) was used. Respondents were exposed to a number of slogans and asked to evaluate each slogan and to match it with a brand. The study thus used the natural variance that the respondents *bring to* the ad exposure setting (Muehling *et al.,* 1991). This is in line with the recommendations of several advertising researchers to use a more ecologically valid method, instead of creating artificial responses through manipulations (cf. Celsi and Olson, 1988; Greenwald and Leavitt, 1984; Muehling *et al.,* 1991).

Beer was chosen as the product category for the study. Beer has been an attractive product category for research during the years (e.g. Allison and Uhl, 1964; Orth *et al.,* 2004). It is a heavily advertised product category with many competing brands. Furthermore, the differences between products are small and the reliance on communicative platforms is great.

The Slogans

Sixteen slogans were tested in the study. To ensure that all slogans were heavily advertised and familiar to the respondents, real slogans among the top 16 brands of beer were chosen as stimuli. The brands were selected based on syndicated sales figures (Market Monitor). All but two (Carlsberg and Tuborg) of the brands were domestic.

In order to create a situation where memory of the brand–slogan link must be constructed, half of the slogans were modified somewhat. When modifying the slogans, the general spirit of the slogan was kept but the phrasing was varied. For instance, the original slogan of one of the brands: 'The bright moments of life' was modified into 'Life is bright'.[1] This practice is similar to that used of cognitive psychologists when studying encoding variability (cf. Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991). The distinction between actual and modified slogans was used to test hypotheses 4a and b.

Procedure

Two hundred and eight-nine respondents participated in the study (age: 19–27 years, 65% male). They were recruited by intercept at two large college campuses. Respondents were handed a questionnaire with a cover story stating that the researchers were investigating consumers' knowledge of slogans. As an incentive to participate, a lottery was arranged with gift certificates valued at approximately €10 serving as a prize. Respondents were allowed to answer the questions at theirown pace. Test leaders were available for questions during the answering process. When finished, respondents handed back the questionnaires to the test leaders.

The slogans were listed consecutively with immediate ratings of each slogan. The respondents evaluated each slogan on measures of attitude toward the slogan,

familiarity, and confidence in their familiarity. They then matched the slogan with a brand in an open-ended question. Each respondent rated eight slogans (4 actual and 4 modified), yielding 928 matched slogan responses.

The order of slogans was rotated. Measures of brand attitudes and a number of filler questions followed the slogans. In order to test hypothesis 2, brand attitude was measured first and the slogans at the end of the questionnaire for 98 of the respondents. This way, the authors could compare the correlations between brand and slogan evaluations when (1) evaluation of the brand preceded the slogan; and (2) evaluation of the slogan preceded the brand. The rotated order of evaluations facilitates a test of causality (Kenny, 1975).

To distinguish between cued retrieval and constructive memory processes, measures of slogan familiarity and confidence (see below) were used. The slogan responses were split in half (high and low) based on slogan familiarity and confidence (cf. Figure 1). To avoid matching based on pure guessing; only highly familiar slogan responses were used in the analysis. We thus ended up with two groups of slogan matches: cued retrieval (high familiarity, high confidence, $n=448$) and memory construction (high familiarity, low confidence, $n=246$).

Measures

Attitude toward the slogan was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favourable/unfavourable. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's alpha=0.94). The measure was taken from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989).

Slogan familiarity was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of two items. The items used were, familiar/unfamiliar, never seen or heard/often seen or heard. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items ($r=0.705^2$, $P<0.01$). The measure was taken from Pieters *et al.* (2002). The respondents were also asked to rate how *confident* they were in their familiarity on a scale adapted from Berger and Mitchell (1989): not at all certain/very certain and completely confident/not at all confident. An index was produced in the same way as for familiarity ($r=0.963$, $P<0.01$).

Brand–slogan matching was measured with an open-ended question where respondents were asked to write down the brand they believed the slogan was advertising. To reduce the risk of response editing limiting the amount of answers based on constructive memory processes (cf. Johar and Pham, 1999), respondents were asked write down the first brand that came to their mind and not be too worried about the accuracy of their responses. Correct matches were coded 1 and incorrect 0.

Brand attitude was measured with a three-item semantic differential scale taken from Loken and Ward (1990) and Simonin and Ruth (1998). The items were good/bad, negative/positive, satisfactory/unsatisfactory. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's alpha=0.90).

Results

Hypothesis 1, that brand–slogan matching based on cued retrieval is more accurate than brand–slogan matching based on constructive memory, was tested by

comparing the accuracy rates for matching based on each memory process. Overall, matching based on cued retrieval was significantly (*Chi2*=30.16, *P*<0.01) more accurate (73%) than matching based on constructive memory (52%). The results thus support H1. Consumers are more accurate when using cued retrieval than when using constructive memory to match a slogan with its sponsoring brand.

Hypotheses 2a and b, whether brand evaluations are more likely to influence slogan evaluations or the other way around, were tested based on Kenny (1975). The respondents were divided into two groups; group 1 consisted of respondent who rated the brands before they rated the slogans and group 2 of respondents who rated the slogans before the brands. Using Fisher's r-to-z transformation, slogan attitude x brand attitude correlations for the two groups were compared. A stronger correlation in group 1 suggests a casual influence from brand evaluations to slogans, and a stronger correlation in group 2 from slogan evaluations to brands.

When cued retrieval was used (H2a), brand attitude x slogan attitude correlations were significantly higher (*P*<0.05) in group 1 (*r*=0.43) compared to group 2 (*r*=0.21). This indicates a direction of influence from the brand to the slogan and supports H2a. When cued retrieval is used, brand evaluations are more likely to affect slogan evaluations than the other way around. The opposite result was found for matching based on memory construction (H2b). The brand attitude × slogan attitude correlation was 0.23 in group 2, and non-significant in group 1 (Table 1). This indicates a direction of causal influence from the slogan to the brand and supports H2b. Slogan evaluations are used in forming brand evaluations when brand–slogan matching is based on constructive memory.

In order to test what drives accurate matching for cued retrieval (H3a) and memory reconstruction (H3b), respectively, brand attitudes and slogan attitudes between correctly and incorrectly matched slogans were compared (see Table 2). To avoid confusion with the results found in H2a–b, respondents who used cued retrieval and who had not been asked about brand attitudes before their matching of the slogans were used to test H3a. Subsequently, only those who had answered brand attitudes before matching were used to test H3b.

When cued retrieval was used brand attitudes were significantly higher (*P*<0.05) for correctly identified brands (M=4.54) than for incorrectly identified brands (M=3.96). For slogan attitudes, however, there was no significant difference. The results support H3a. When cued retrieval is used, accuracy is greater for better-liked brands. When constructive memory was used, there were no significant differences in terms of brand attitudes. Slogan attitudes were, however,

Table 1. Attitude toward the brand × attitude toward the slogan correlations and brand–slogan evaluation order

Cued retrieval		Constructive memory	
Brand precedes slogan	Slogan precedes brand	Brand precedes slogan	Slogan precedes brand
0.429**	0.211**	n.s.	0.226*

Correlation significant *P*<0.05 **P*<0.01

Table 2. Brand and slogan evaluations and matching accuracy

	Correct	Incorrect	
Cued retrieval			
Brand attitudes	4.54	3.96	$t=2.31$, $P=0.022$
Slogan attitudes	5.33	5.11	n.s.
Constructive memory			
Brand attitudes	4.09	3.92	n.s.
Slogan attitudes	4.10	4.85	$t=2.48$, $P=0.015$

significantly higher ($P<0.05$) for incorrectly (M=4.85) than correctly matched slogans (M=4.10). The results thus support H2b. When the brand–slogan match is based on a constructive memory process, the more liked the slogan the less accurate the match.

Hypotheses 4a–b concerned the difference in accuracy for actual and modified slogans for the two matching processes (see Table 3). For cued retrieval, accuracy of actual slogans (80%) was significantly higher ($P<0.01$) than for slogan variations (61%). The accuracy of brand–slogan matching through cued retrieval is thus sensitive to differences in memory cues, as suggested by H4a. As hypothesized (H4b), the same reduction in accuracy was not found when constructive memory was used. The accuracy for actual slogans (35%) was lower ($P<0.01$) than for modified slogans (80%), supporting H4b. Variations have a positive effect on matching accuracy when constructive memory is used to match a slogan with a brand.

Discussion and Managerial Implications

Slogans are generally assumed useful in building brand equity, but few empirical investigations have actually tested this assumption. The present study adds to slogan research by investigating the effects of slogans on brands in a cluttered environment. Previous studies of slogans have mainly focused on slogan effects *or* on brand–slogan matching *per se*. By combining these two aspects, the current study

Table 3. Sensitivity of matching accuracy

	Correct	Incorrect	
Cued retrieval			
Overall	73%	27%	
Actual	80%	20%	$\chi^2=18.05$, $P<0.01$ $n=448$
Modified	61%	39%	
Constructive memory			
Overall	52%	48%	
Actual	35%	65%	$\chi^2=13.97$, $P<0.01$ $n=246$
Modified	60%	40%	

sheds light on the underlying reasons for competitive interference and its consequences for slogans as a marketing communications tool.

Two Processes

The current study shows that mismatching of slogans and brands can be understood in terms of the different memory processes consumers use. The cued retrieval process generally leads to the correct brand being identified, whereas the constructive memory process is sensitive to memory distortions. But, paradoxically, constructive memory allows for a larger influence of the slogan on the brand than does cued retrieval.

When matching is based on cued retrieval, the brand is central. The brand attracts attention, makes the slogan liked, and reduces the risk for competitive interference. 'Brand gravity' is at hand. However, the accuracy of brand–slogan matching is sensitive to slogan variations; consistent use of a single slogan over time seems to be a requirement. Cued retrieval means that brands will influence slogans rather than the other way around (cf. Dahlén and Rosengren, 2005). Of the suggested functions of slogans listed in this article, only the fourth – that of brand equity reinforcement – seems to be at hand. When allowing for real world variations, slogans do not quite fulfil their brand building promise. As correct brand–slogan matching rests mainly on brand-initiated processing, the slogan will have little if any effect on brand perceptions. The risks of causing interference might thus overshadow the benefits.

In the absence of a clearly remembered brand–slogan link, constructive memory will be used. The slogan becomes a central element of the matching process. Slogan liking is transferred to the brand, but the more liked the slogan is, the more sensitive it will be to competitive interference. 'Slogan gravity' draws several brands to the slogan, resulting in reduced accuracy of brand–slogan matching. Using variations of the slogan, however, could be a way to overcome such interference. If overcome, the slogan will have the ability to influence brand equity (functions one, two, and three).

It thus seems that the cluttered environment of today's brands has constrained the role of slogans as a brand building tool. Slogan mismatching due to constructive processes is likely to occur in highly competitive categories with a high reliance on communicative platforms. Furthermore, it should be more common for unfamiliar brands and communications targeted towards new audiences. Cued retrieval can be expected when there are few competitors in a category, the brand is well known, and when the target audience consists of current buyers or experts. Constructive memory when there are many competitors in the category, the brand is new or unfamiliar, and when the target audience consists of new buyers or novices.

The End of the Slogan as we Know it?

The conditions under which constructive memory processes are expected are the same as the conditions under which competitive interference of ad claims have been found to be a major problem (e.g. Kent and Allen, 1994; Kent and Kellaris, 2001) and for which slogans have been suggested to be the most useful. Rather than clarifying the differences between brands slogan repetitions seems to make them

more similar. Practices such as building brand awareness by connecting the brand with a category in a slogan would increase this tendency even more.

One way to overcome competitive interference would be to create annoying, dim, or irritating slogans. Using slogans that consumers do not like, gives marketers two advantages. First, as slogan gravity tends to draw brands to slogans that are liked, disliked slogans would reverse this effect and thus increase brand–slogan matching accuracy. Second, an annoying slogan should to stand out from competing slogans hence making it less prone to generalization. By explicitly testing for slogan likeability, and choosing the less liked alternatives, the negative effects of slogan generalization could be avoided. Although this might seem counterintuitive, the fact that competitive interference is mainly a problem in mature and highly competitive categories suggest otherwise. In such markets, brand salience rather than brand differentiation has been found to be important (cf. Ehrenberg *et al.,* 1997). The key is to be noticed, not to be liked. The recommendation is thus in line with theorizing showing that unexpected and disliked advertising can be beneficial for mature brands as it increases consumers' interest in the brand (e.g., Dahlén *et al.,* 2005; Machleit *et al.,* 1993).

Another way to overcome competitive interference would be to change the role of the slogan in marketing communications. Keller (2003) suggests that brands develop brand mantras to ensure organizational understanding of the brand position. Similarly, slogans might be more useful for guiding marketing communication efforts than as a communicative tool directed at consumers. To reduce the competitive interference several variations of the slogan could be developed.

The When and Whys of Slogan Usage

For marketers not willing to give up on slogans, finding ways to ensure sufficient processing of the brand–slogan link is important. Although familiar brands have a clear advantage when it comes to creating strong brand–slogan links, carefully considered media planning could help ensure processing that is less brand-related. Placing advertisements with slogans in unexpected media vehicles leads to increased processing and improved memory for ad-related information (cf. Törn *et al.,* 2006). In addition, by avoiding the thematic overlap between the slogan and media the contextual richness of the slogan memory trace should be reduced, thereby decreasing the risk of slogan generalization.

Media planning can also be used to reduce the potential for constructive memory to err. The current practice of repeating slogans verbally increases slogan generalization tendencies, as they are heavily dependent on consumer recall. By placing slogans in visual media only, the risk for competitive interference can be reduced, as brand–slogan matching then will be based on recognition rather than recall. Such matching will leave less room for constructive processes (cf. Kent and Machleit, 1990). Furthermore, timing of media can be used. Constructive memory has been found to influence perceptions of actual experiences (e.g., Braun, 1999; Braun-LaTour and LaTour, 2005). To avoid such mistaken attributions, placing ads and slogans near to the purchase becomes an important way to reduce the risk of competitive interference (Dahlén and Nordfält, 2004).

Limitations and Further Research

The results presented in this study are limited by the fact that a student sample and slogans from only one category (beer) were used. The study was a first effort to understand the frequent mismatching slogans to brands and of what it means for slogans' functions as brand equity builders. To increase the ecological validity of the study, a correlational design and real slogans were chosen. Beer was seen as an appropriate category for two reasons. First, it is mainly targeted to a younger audience thus making the choice of a student sample less problematic. Second, the reliance of communicative platforms and the number of competing brands in the category makes it an interesting point of departure for research on slogans in a cluttered environment.

Although our findings are consistent with previous studies of source identification (e.g., Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 1997; 2001) we cannot completely rule out other causes for the effects found. The current study does, however, add a new dimension to these studies, as most of them have used a strict experimental design and novel stimuli. The additions made in this study should be further tested, nevertheless. Preferably in an experimental setting where alternative explanations can be controlled for and actual processes be closely monitored. Of special interest are the results regarding different effects of communications for different matching processes (cf. H2) and the applicability of different strategies to increase matching accuracy (cf. H4).

The findings align with the growing interest in constructive memory processes in consumer research (cf. Braun, 1999; Braun-LaTour and LaTour, 2005). By allowing for a more complex view of memory processes, such studies have found that memory for actual experiences of a product can be changed by marketing communications. This study shows that the same holds for incorrectly matched slogans and similar results could be expected regarding other types of marketing communications as well. The validity of this expectation, however, must be tested in future studies.

Notes on Contributors

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Endnotes

1.   Translation into English by the authors, in the questionnaire all slogans were in their original language.

2. We report the correlation coefficient rather than Cronbach's alpha because our measure only consists of two items (cf. Verhoef, 2003, footnote 2).

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