

Wine labels with animals: Why they work

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Traditional brand research argues that logos should be highly relevant to the product they represent in order to be successful. However, marketers have recently begun using unusual visual identifiers that have little, if anything, to do with the product.

For example, market research firm ACNielsen reports that nearly one in five of the table-wine brands introduced in the last three years features an animal on the label. A forthcoming study in the April 2008 issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research* reveals why this tactic is works.

“To our knowledge, this is the first experimental demonstration of the beneficial effects of unique visual identifiers that are not meaningfully related to the nature of the product,” write Aparna A. Labroo (University of Chicago), Ravi Dhar (Yale University), and Norbert Schwarz (University of Michigan).

Building on psychological research about processing fluency, the researchers find that consumers have an easier time processing images when they are already “primed” – that is, if they have already thought about the image earlier in an unrelated context or if they already associate the logo with something in their personal lives.

In one experiment, participants first had to do a word jumble, either searching for words related to dogs or words related to cats. They then participated in an ostensibly unrelated study and were asked to rate a series of products, including batteries and dog shampoo. Those who had done the word jumble relating to dogs rated the dog shampoo higher, on

average, than those who had done the cat-related jumble.

The influence of priming, the researchers found, was most pronounced when exposure to the product before evaluation was limited to 16 milliseconds, a period of time shown in psychological experiments to be pre-cognitive. When more time was added to allow for cognitive elaboration, the results were less pronounced.

“Whereas common branding wisdom suggests that identifiers should be strongly associated with the product category, our findings suggest that it may be beneficial to choose visual identifiers that consumers strongly associate with themselves,” write Labroo, Dhar, and Schwarz.

The researchers also point out another important advantage non sequitur logos have over identifiers that are meaningfully related to the product (e.g. a picture of a winery or a bunch of grapes on a wine label). They are not shared by competitors – at least not yet.

Source: University of Chicago

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