

New study reveals best words for brand slogans

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A new study from Bayes Business School (formerly Cass), the University of Missouri and the University of Arizona has uncovered the word properties that make slogans effective, as the researchers found

that the attributes that make a slogan easier to process lead to it being more likable but less memorable, and vice versa.

The work has been published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Previous research has recommended that slogans should be creative or capture the soul of the brand, but the authors found that people preferred slogans that are shorter, omit the brand name, and use words that are linguistically frequent and abstract. In contrast, slogans are less liked, but better remembered, if they are long, include the brand name, and feature unusual and concrete words.

The paper, co-authored by Professor Zachary Estes, Professor of Marketing at Bayes, sheds light for the first time on the trade-offs that brands face when crafting a new slogan. It also offers marketers practical advice on choosing appropriate words, as well as guidance on how to write slogans that are either likable or memorable in line with their strategic goals.

Words matter

To explore the relationship between the length and composition of a slogan and how well liked it might be, the researchers carried out a large multi-method study with 820 brand slogans and a variety of experiments to uncover the word properties that make slogans more effective. They asked around 1,000 students and online workers to tell them how much they liked, or disliked, a subset of real brand slogans. Later, they also gave them a surprise recognition test to see which slogans they remembered seeing earlier.

Following on from this experiment, the researchers identified five linguistic properties that had opposing effects on whether a slogan was liked and remembered: length, brand name, word frequency, perceptual

distinctiveness, and abstractness.

Slogans that were longer and included the brand name (Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there vs. Like a neighbor) were more frequently remembered but liked less. Conversely, slogans that included words that are more frequently used (bad breath vs. halitosis) and abstract (disease vs. halitosis) were better liked but less well remembered.

This is because consumers fixate less often and for less time on slogan words that are frequently used and more abstract. As a result, when consumers come across fluent slogans, they are more likely to like and click on the ads but remember them less accurately.

Snag the sensation

Using these findings, the researchers then tried to improve existing brand slogans by making disliked ones more fluent, and forgettable slogans less fluent. In one experiment with 243 students, they found that the slogans they had made more fluent (e.g., changing Listerine's slogan from "Stops halitosis" to "Kills bad breath") became better liked but also worse remembered. Conversely, slogans that they made less fluent (e.g., altering Toyota's slogan from "Get the feeling" to "Snag the sensation") became better remembered but less liked.

Another experiment using eye-tracking technology revealed that these changes occurred because participants look longer and more often at disfluent words (e.g., sensation) compared to fluent words (e.g., feeling). The researchers also saw a 28% increase in the click-through rate on a Facebook ad when they improved the fluency of a slogan, as the rate increased from 1.3% to 1.7%, reducing the cost-per-click.

As a result, the authors suggest that brands that need to gain [recognition](#) may consider using words that are difficult to process, i.e., rare and

concrete words, while established brands may want to use words that are easy to process, i.e., those that are common and abstract.

Semantic selection

Professor Zachary Estes, Professor of Marketing in the Faculty of Management at Bayes Business School (formerly Cass), said, "Brands spend a lot of time and money creating and communicating slogans that consumers will like and remember. Our research identifies specific properties of words that can make a slogan better liked or better remembered, but importantly, the properties that make a slogan more likable also make it less memorable, and vice versa.

"To be memorable, slogans should be relatively long, include the [brand name](#), and use rare and concrete words. For instance, BMW could make its slogan easier to remember by changing it from 'The ultimate driving machine' to 'BMW is the peak driving machine,' but that would also make it harder to like. In fact, our research can be viewed as the ultimate slogan machine, and we hope that it will help marketers choose the best words for their [brand](#)."

More information: Brady T Hodges et al, Intel Inside: The Linguistic Properties of Effective Slogans, *Journal of Consumer Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/jcr/ucad034](https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucad034)

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