Investigating Consumers' Responses to Prefixed Brand Names:
The Effects of Feature Perceptibility and Familiarity on Categorization Judgment

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ABSTRACT

Every day consumers encounter prefixed brand names (e.g., iTunes, iBook, iPod). This paper examines how consumers respond to these prefixed brand names from a categorization perspective. Psychologists have suggested that consumers' categorization judgments are primarily determined by feature similarity and the diagnosticity of these features. The current research extends this weighted similarity theory by proposing that consumers' estimations of feature similarity and diagnosticity are not fixed, but dynamic. The results of the first two studies establish (1) that more perceptual category features are processed earlier and that these initial judgments may bias consumers' perception of less perceptual features; and (2) that consumers tend to assign higher (lower) diagnosticity (i.e., weight) to features they are familiar (unfamiliar) with. The result of the third experiment further demonstrates that the more a prefixed brand name e.g., ThinkShot is classified to a master brand's category, e.g., IBM, the more likely the consumers' brand knowledge (e.g., evaluation criteria, price, affect) that is associated with that master brand will be transferred to the prefixed brand. Implications for categorization research, brand leveraging and trademark infringement are discussed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION .................................................................................. i

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ....................................................................... iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................................ iv

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................. vi

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................ vii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................ 1

1.1 Research Topic and Its Background ........................................... 1

1.2 Research Motivation .................................................................. 2

1.3 Research Scope and Theoretical Framework ............................. 4

1.4 Thesis Organization ................................................................. 7

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ...................................................... 8

2.1 Category Representation and Feature Comparison .................. 8

2.1.1 The Classical View ........................................................... 9

2.1.2 Prototype (Probabilistic) View ........................................... 10

2.1.3 Exemplar View and Family Resemblance Theory ................ 11

2.1.4 A Mixed Model ............................................................... 12

2.1.5 Causal Status Perspective ................................................. 13

2.2 Critiques and Research Gaps ................................................... 14

2.2.1 The Orthogonal Assumption ........................................... 14

2.2.2 The Fixed Nature of Feature Diagnosticity ...................... 15

2.2.3 Assumptions Pertaining to Memorial Process ................. 15

2.2.4 Summary ........................................................................... 16

CHAPTER 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES .......... 17

3.1 The Perceptibility-Familiarity Model ......................................... 17

3.1.1 The Sequential Assumption ............................................. 18

3.1.2 The Perceptibility of Category Features ............................ 19

3.1.3 The Interaction between Two Category Features: Primacy Effect 20

3.1.3.1 Primacy effect and its theoretical accounts .................. 20

3.1.3.2 Primacy effect in categorization tasks ....................... 22

3.1.4 The Diagnosticity Estimation ............................................ 22

3.2 Hypotheses .............................................................................. 24

3.2.1 The Main Effects of Prefix Uniqueness and Product Similarity 24

3.2.1.1 The property of prefix ............................................. 24

3.2.1.2 Product similarity .................................................... 25

3.2.2 The Interplay between Prefix and Product Similarity .......... 26

3.2.3 Consumer Factor: The Role of Product Familiarity ............ 27

CHAPTER 4 EXPERIMENTS .............................................................. 30

4.1 An Overview ............................................................................. 30

4.1.1 A Briefing on the Three Studies ...................................... 30