What makes a brand interesting? Why care?

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite the common understanding of what interestingness is, few people can explain what makes something interesting. The purpose of this paper is to explore the theoretical foundation of interestingness and test if it has merit in the branding context. It aims to help practitioners understand how to make a brand interesting and what outcomes to expect from it.

Design/methodology/approach – Three preliminary studies (Studies 1, 2 and 3) provide proof of concept. Study 4 tests the antecedences and outcomes of brand interestingness (BI) across 66 brands by accounting for individual and brand variations. Study 5 examines the moderating effects of brand use and brand familiarity on BI and its outcomes.

Findings – A broad literature review reveals that interestingness is an emotion and is, therefore, an affective state. The findings from two exploratory studies show that customers naturally associate interestingness with specific brands and interesting brands are associated with novelty. Study 3 demonstrates that from all affective states arising from the evaluation of a brand (i.e. easiness, pleasantness, interestingness, challenge and difficulty), BI has the highest effect on purchase intention (PI). Study 4 demonstrates that the antecedents of BI are the novelty associated with the symbolic and functional aspects of a brand, and also the ability to cope with those novelty components. Two positive outcomes of BI are PI and word of mouth (WOM). Study 5 demonstrates that brand familiarity and brand use moderate the effect of BI on purchase intent and WOM. The research concludes with an operational definition of the BI concept and future research suggestions.

Originality/value – The research introduces the interesting concept in the brand context. Based on a broad literature review and several studies, it identifies the antecedents and outcomes of BI. It helps practitioners understand how they can increase the interestingness of brands and what outcomes to expect.

Keywords Brand experience, Brand, Novelty, Word of mouth, Interestingness, Purchase intent

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Rarely does a day go by without us thinking or proclaiming about something: "This is interesting!" Interesting is a reaction that applies to anything: movies, art, people, social or personal situations, news, products, etc. It is characterized by curiosity, increased attention and feeling a need to get closer to what is perceived as interesting (Silvia, 2008). Despite its pervasive nature, however, interestingness is an elusive concept (Schraw and Lehman, 2001) because most people cannot explain what they call interesting or what makes something interesting.

To this end, interestingness has not been explored in marketing as a standalone concept. It is theorized that interestingness, especially in the branding context, can have important managerial implications. For example, if a brand is perceived as interesting, it will draw a customer's attention automatically because of the intrinsic curiosity inspired by the brand; and conversely, if a brand is perceived as boring it may be ignored. The study introduces the concept of brand interestingness (BI) and explores its theoretical foundation, antecedents and outcomes. It also investigates select moderators of the BI and outcomes relationships. The results from this research provide managers with a better understanding of what BI is, how it can be encouraged and what can be expected from it.

Theoretical foundation

Marketing literature

The research on interestingness in marketing is limited, and the concept has never been examined as the central focus of inquiry. Perhaps the best-known model incorporating the interesting construct is the attention, interest, desire and action (AIDA) model or hierarchy of effects model in advertising. This model dates to over 100 years (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999) and illuminates how advertising affects purchase decisions as consumers pass through a series of stages called the hierarchy of effects. The model stipulates that for an advertisement to be effective, consumers must pass through a sequence of steps to include AIDA. A modified version of this model has also been applied to the product adoption process. Rodgers (1962) suggests that new products are adopted via consumer awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. This hierarchical process is tied to and predicts consumption behavior (Barry and Howard, 1990).

Most research incorporating the interesting concept has been in the area of promotion and advertising. Like the hierarchy of effects research, some of these works have found a connection between interestingness and purchase intent and other behaviors. For instance, Stapel (1994) found that ad

interestingness is a better predictor of purchase intent than ad likability. Ad interestingness was found to be the most important predictor of ad viewing time (Olney *et al.*, 1991). The interestingness of TV commercials impacts the attitude toward the commercials (Alwitt, 2000). Similarly, ad interestingness is the most important predictor of ad attitude (Lee *et al.*, 2005), and a significant predictor of purchase intention (PI). Interestingness is also a significant factor in ad recall (Mehta and Purvis, 2006).

The interesting concept appears in other non-advertising-related research streams as part of larger models or constructs. For example, the personal involvement inventory (Zaichkowsky, 1985, 1994) and brand experience (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) include interestingness as items in multiple-item measures.

Psychology literature

The review of the marketing literature reveals that interestingness has not been researched as a core focus of inquiry and there is no clear understanding of what constitutes interestingness. Other theoretical domains provide a better answer in that direction. In the field of psychology, recent research on the topic views interest as an emotion (Silvia 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2008; Silvia and Kashdan, 2009). In contrast to the behavioral tradition, which viewed interestingness as an objective property, the contemporary view of emotions is based on the appraisal of stimuli (Lazarus, 1991) and suggests that interestingness is a cognitive evaluation of a context. The appraisal structure of interest initially was formulated by Smith and Ellsworth (1985), who associated interest with pleasantness and a high level of attention. Interest also was positively associated with other emotions (e.g. surprise, challenge, hope), and is predicted by the appraisals of pleasantness, attention and importance (Ellsworth and Smith, 1988).

Continuing the appraisal approach, Silvia (2005a, 2005b) proposed and confirmed empirically a two-component structure of interest. The first condition of interest is *novelty*. It is rooted in the view that one of the first appraisal objectives is a "novelty check" (Scherer, 2001, p. 95). If a stimulus is perceived as novel, then the outcome can be a feeling of uncertainty and disrupted processing of the stimuli. The second condition is *coping potential*, or whether a person perceives they can understand the novelty. The two-component appraisal structure of interest does not include pleasantness, associated with interest in previous studies, because it was found that unpleasant things can also be interesting (Turner and Silvia, 2006).

The scheme theory

The scheme theory (Eckblad, 1981) further illuminates the concept of interestingness, although it does not focus on the nature of interest *per se*. Instead, it outlines a continuum in which interestingness is formed. Briefly, the scheme theory suggests that assimilating the environment results in a range of affective responses, which are a function of assimilative resistance. Assimilative resistance refers to the difficulty of assimilation; it represents the discrepancy between the cognitive maps of a person and the situational landscape being assimilated. As assimilative resistance increases from low to high, the subjective experiences progress through several affective states: *easiness*, *pleasantness*, *interestingness*, *challenge* and *difficulty*, which gradually change and peak at different resistance levels. When resistance is low, it is easy to assimilate the environment, and when resistance is high it is difficult to assimilate the environment (Guttman, 1955; Kroonenberg and Snyder, 1989; Vitterso, 2004). The unique insight here is that a moderate level of assimilative resistance results in a perception of interestingness.
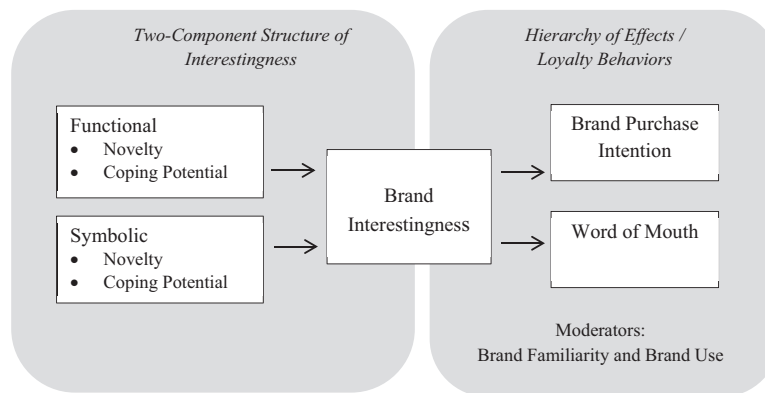
It can be concluded that the assimilative resistance in the scheme theory corresponds to the *coping potential* discussed by Silvia (2005a, 2005b), and the environment to be assimilated corresponds to the *novelty* component of interestingness (Silvia, 2005a, 2005b). Therefore, although not directly related, the scheme theory shares a common core with the appraisal representation of interest. The scheme theory never intended to investigate interest as a stand-alone phenomenon but viewed it in a context with other affective responses. It discusses a mechanism of origin of interestingness in relation to other affective responses.

Theoretical model development

Functional and symbolic novelty and coping potentials

Silvia (2005a, 2005b) views novelty and coping potential as necessary pre-conditions for interestingness to occur. It is hypothesized that novelty and coping potential also are the key antecedents to BI. This hypothesis, however, is extended by suggesting that there might be more than one source of novelty along with a corresponding coping potential in a brand. A brand is a collection of multiple associations (Keller, 1993; Keller *et al.*, 2003), which suggests that people process and assimilate multiple dimensions of a brand. A brand can be processed from the perspective of its overall image, how it satisfies different needs, how it performs its main functions, etc. To demonstrate, two sources of novelty in a brand are considered, *functional* and *symbolic*, which correspond to utilitarian and hedonic aspects of products. This view is consistent with the functional/utilitarian and symbolic/expressive/experiential motivation approaches suggested by Park *et al.* (1986), Bhat and Reddy (1998), Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) and more recently Noseworthy and Trudel (2011). These scholars assert that functional benefits include specific product features leading to a practical solution to a consumption problem. Symbolic product benefits are delivered by product features that enhance self-image and social identity (Bhat and Reddy, 1998). Both, functional and symbolic brand aspects are thought to exhibit varying coping potentials. The relationships are portrayed graphically on the left in Figure 1. Thus, with respect to brand novelty and coping potential, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1a. The greater the functional novelty, the greater the brand interestingness.

H1b. The greater the functional coping potential, the greater the brand interestingness.

H2a. The greater the symbolic novelty, the greater the brand interestingness.

Figure 1 Conceptual model of the component structure of brand interestingness and the hierarchy of effects

H2b. The greater the symbolic coping potential, the greater the brand interestingness.

Outcomes of brand interestingness: purchase intention and word of mouth

The hierarchy of effects theory suggests that interest results in some form of behavioral manifestation. Prominent behavioral customer responses include PI or purchase behavior and positive word of mouth (WOM)-spreading activities. These behaviors are also often associated with customer loyalty. Customer loyalty involves a strong commitment to a product or service (Oliver, 1999) and translates into repurchase and favorable WOM (Kumar *et al.*, 2013). These behaviors are part of loyalty as they signal "a motivation to maintain a relationship with the focal firm" and, therefore, are commonly used to measure the presence of loyalty (Gupta and Zeithaml, 2006, p. 721).

If a person finds a brand interesting, it is logical to feel attracted to it and to be inclined to purchase it. This view is also supported by the scheme theory. With respect to BI and PI and WOM, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3a. Brand interestingness positively affects purchase intent.

H3b. Brand interestingness positively affects word of mouth.

Brand experience as a moderator of the brand interestingness – purchase intent and word of mouth relationships

A set of apparently countervailing theories suggest that brand experience may be a moderator of the brand interestingness – purchase intent and positive WOM relationships. As aforementioned, the theory of interestingness suggests that BI encourages purchase behavior and positive WOM. This brand interestingness is fueled by the new, the novel and the innovative (i.e. the characteristics that make brands interesting). In contrast, the theory of customer loyalty focuses on repeatedly buying the same brand. It suggests that people buy the familiar, the previously used and the old. To this end, Oliver (1999, p. 34) defines loyalty as:

[...] a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or

same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior.

Oliver (1999) further states that despite product improvements, refinements and innovations, the consumer:

[...] must believe that an object firm's products continue to offer the best choice alternative. Moreover, he or she must do this while naively shunning communications from competitive firms and other innovators that argue that the loyalist's consumable is no longer the most efficient, lowest priced, of the highest quality, and so forth (p. 35).

The existence of these two countervailing theories gives rise to speculations about potential moderating effects: Could the relationships between interestingness and PI and between interestingness and positive WOM be affected by the level of brand experience? Brand experience is conceptualized as the degree of familiarity with a brand and degree of prior usage of a brand. To empirically test the moderating effects of brand familiarity and prior use, the following hypotheses are developed:

H4a. The strength of the relationship between interestingness and purchase intention is significantly moderated by brand familiarity.

H4b. The strength of the relationship between interestingness and purchase intention is significantly moderated by prior brand use.

H5a. The strength of the relationship between interestingness and word of mouth is significantly moderated by brand familiarity.

H5b. The strength of the relationship between interestingness and word of mouth is significantly moderated by prior brand use.

Preliminary studies: proof of concept

To assess how the "interesting" concept pertains to a brand, three preliminary studies were conducted as proof of concept.

Preliminary study 1: Do people associate brands with interestingness?

This study is based on the free elicitation of descriptive attributes associated with brands/products/services, which is

thought to identify the most salient attributes. The goal was to test whether the interesting concept was evoked in people's minds *without* any prompting. In total, 26 participants were presented with 6 new products/services and brands and 11 more established brands. The selection of new brands includes Zipcar and CouchSurfing and the selection of established brands includes Shopko and AT&T. Participants were asked to write down their thoughts related to the products and brands. This yielded 26 × 17 statements: 156 statements for the new brands and 286 statements for the established brands. The data were analyzed by simply counting the number of participants that mentioned interesting, interested or another derivative of the term for each product. Two independent coders performed this task.

The findings reveal that of the 156 statements for the 6 new brands, 14 per cent (22 responses) explicitly contained the word "interesting" or a close derivative. This corresponds to 3.6 mentioning of "interesting" per brand. The range by brand is 0-23 per cent with only one of the new brands receiving no explicit mention of interesting. In contrast, the findings for the 286 statements for the established eleven brands reveal only 1.4 per cent (4 responses) mentioning of interesting. This corresponds to 0.36 mentioning of interesting per brand and the range for the established brands is between 0 and 3.8 per cent. The findings of this preliminary small-scale study confirmed the relevance of the interesting concept in the evaluation of products and brands.

Preliminary study 2: Are interesting brands perceived as novel?

This study was conducted to explore the reverse association, or whether brands perceived as interesting elicit novelty-related attributes. One group of 137 individuals was asked to name brand they find interesting, and to elaborate on what makes the brand interesting. The second group of 137 individuals was asked to do the same but for boring brands. The responses to the open-ended elaboration questions were evaluated for novelty (i.e. new, novel, innovative, unique or different) -related attributes by two independent coders.

For the interesting brands, 34 per cent of the participants explicitly mentioned novelty attributes. Many participants mentioned specific features that may be perceived as novel without explicitly stating it. A sample statement for CoverGirl make up reads: *they are always trying to come up with a new better product*. In contrast, for the boring brand, only 0.7 per cent of the participants mentioned novelty attributes – many mentioned same old. A sample statement for Morton reads: *they have sold the exact same product for many years*. In sum, the

results from this exploratory study reveal that interesting brands evoke thoughts of novelty, which is deemed as a proof of concept.

Preliminary study 3: comparison of brand interestingness to other affective states

According to the scheme theory, an evaluation of a stimulus results in a continuum of possible affective states (i.e. easiness, pleasantness, interestingness, challenge and difficulty). When customers evaluate a brand in their mind, the scheme theory suggests that the affective states can arise depending on how difficult the stimulus is. To evaluate the importance of BI based on the scheme theory, it was tested how BI together with the other affective states concurrently predict PI. Therefore, the following research question was tested:

RQ1. In comparison to the other affective states from the scheme theory, what is the relative effect of BI on purchase intention?

The data for addressing the research question were collected from a convenience sample of students enrolled at a midsize university in the USA The study examined the research question for four different brands familiar to the respondents (i.e. HP, Apple, Nike and Adidas), and every respondent answered the same set of questions for all brands. Purchase intent was measured with two questions:

Q1. How likely are you to purchase a/an [. . .] product?

Q2. I consider purchasing a/an [. . .] product?

which were averaged for the analysis. The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = 0.91$. The affective responses were measured via single-item scales (e.g. *[Brand] is pleasant*, *[Brand] is interesting*, etc.), which is consistent with the previous studies investigating the topic (Kroonenberg and Snyder, 1989; Vitterso, 2004). All questions used a Likert format scale from 1 to 7, with answers ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* and *very unlikely* to *very likely*. The descriptive statistics for Study 3 are presented in Table I.

Results

For all brands, purchase intent was regressed on the five affective responses as suggested by the scheme theory. The results, presented in Table II, reveal that brand interestingness is a significant predictor of purchase intent for three of the four brands: Apple ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.05$); Nike ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.05$); and Adidas ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, the results reveal that for these three brands, interestingness is the only

Table I Descriptive statistics (Study 3)

	HP (*n* = 49)		Apple (*n* = 49)		Nike (*n* = 49)		Adidas (*n* = 49)	
Variables	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Easy	5.18	1.29	5.51	1.26	5.86	1.02	5.43	1.10
Pleasant	4.63	1.50	5.96	1.10	5.76	1.18	5.33	1.03
Interesting	4.49	1.53	6.28	0.95	5.55	1.37	4.76	1.41
Challenging	3.10	1.26	4.17	1.66	2.94	1.51	2.90	1.25
Difficult	2.81	1.18	3.31	1.64	2.40	1.20	2.44	1.03
Purchase intent	4.38	1.99	6.07	1.01	5.98	1.51	4.62	1.70

Table II Effect of affective responses on purchase intent (Study 3)

Affective responses	HP ($n = 49$)	Apple ($n = 49$)	Nike ($n = 49$)	Adidas ($n = 49$)	Combined sample[a] ($n = 196$)
Easiness	0.22	−0.11	0.05	0.12	0.06
Pleasantness	0.55*	0.28	0.26	0.01	0.40*
Interestingness	0.10	0.34*	0.60*	0.63*	0.58*
Challenge	0.08	0.01	0.09	0.24	0.13
Difficulty	−0.14	−0.17	−0.00	0.02	−0.05
R^2	0.58	0.18	0.58	0.41	0.61

Notes: *Significant at $p < 0.05$; [a]the four brands and all respondents were controlled for by including them as random effects

significant predictor of purchase intent. Pleasantness is the only significant predictor of purchase intent for HP. Also, the results for all brands were combined, where the brands and the respondents were included as random effects (Table II). The results from a general linear model indicate that when the effects of brands and respondents are removed, BI has the highest effect on PI followed by the effect of pleasantness. In sum, the results from Study 3 demonstrate that from the affective responses that arise from evaluating a brand, BI has the strongest effect on PI. This result is considered as a strong support for the managerial implication of BI, and also provides initial support for *H3a*.

Main studies

The preliminary studies established that interestingness is associated with brands; interesting brands are novel and among other affective states based on the evaluation of a brand, BI has the strongest effect on PI. The main studies advance BI further by testing the formal hypotheses in the theoretical development section. Study 4 tests *H1,H2 and H3* and Study 5 tests *H4 and H5*.

Study 4

To test the framework in Figure 1, it is important to recognize that interest and appraisals vary within subjects (Silvia, 2005b; Silvia and Kashdan, 2009). The insights from the exploratory Study 1 and 2 also revealed substantial variability in BI across different brands. Therefore, the effects of brands and subjects need to be controlled for when testing the hypotheses. To achieve this, the data collection process included multiple evaluations from respondents for multiple brands. Such a repeated measure research design leads to trade-offs between measurement accuracy and breadth of information. Measuring all concepts with multiple-item measures plus collecting multiple responses from each respondent would have been difficult in this setting because of the high time demands on the respondents. Given the objective of this study, it was deemed reasonable to first understand the operation of BI in a broader context and, hence, single-item measures were used to assess the various constructs. This approach also allowed for the inclusion of additional control variables such as brand familiarity and need for the brand. Overall, the use of single-item measures is permissible when space is limited or there are too many questions (Wanous *et al.*, 1997). Recently, the use of single items has increased (Petrescu, 2013), especially when the measured constructs have concrete meaning and respondents can understand them clearly (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007; Rossiter, 2002). In other disciplines, single-item measures have been shown to substitute

well even for more abstract multiple-item measures for constructs such as social identification (Postmes *et al.*, 2013); the need to belong (Nichols and Webster, 2013); burnout (Dolan *et al.*, 2015); academic performance, self-esteem and socioeconomic status (Leung and Xu, 2013); life satisfaction (Cheung and Lucas, 2014); job satisfaction (Wanous *et al.*, 1997); depression (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2006) and quality of life (Boer *et al.*, 2004), to name a few.

The data were collected from a convenience sample of students enrolled at a mid-size US university. In total, 52 students participated and evaluated a total of 66 well-known brands. This resulted in a total number of $n = 1872$ observations. Each respondent answered the same set of questions for all brands. Purchase intent was measured by asking the participant *how likely are you to purchase/use this brand if you need similar products/services?* The item was measured with a Likert format scale from 1 = *very unlikely* to 7 = *very likely*. WOM was measured by asking *would you recommend this brand to a friend?* The item was measured with a Likert format scale from 1 to 10. Brand interestingness was measured with a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from 1 = *boring* to 7 = *interesting*.

The functional novelty measure consists of an item concerning functional product features. It reads: *compared to other comparative brands, this brand offers innovative products/services*. The symbolic novelty measure consists of an item related to innovative brand image and reads: *compared to other comparative brands, this brand projects an innovative image*. The functional coping potential was operationalized as the difficulty of obtaining and using the brand. The item reads: *compared to other comparative brands, I can easily acquire the brand's product/services*. The symbolic coping potential was operationalized as the difficulty of understanding the brand and reads: *I understand the overall meaning the brand projects*. The assumption is that the more difficult something is perceived to be, the lower the coping potential of the respondent. The same approach was suggested by Silvia (2005a, 2005b), who manipulated the difficulty of the tasks in his experiments to achieve different levels of coping potential. These items were measured with a Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Two control variables were also included: the need for the product and familiarity with the brand.

Results

The hypotheses were tested using two general linear mixed models, where the brands and respondents were random effects and the independent variables were covariates. The first two hypotheses involve testing the antecedent factors of interesting as suggested by the psychology literature. The results are presented in Table III.

Table III Regression analysis for the two-component structure of brand interestingness (Study 4)

Independent variables	Brand interestingness
Intercept	1.77**
Symbolic novelty	0.25**
Symbolic coping potential	0.11**
Functional novelty	0.13**
Functional coping potential	0.05*
Control variables	
Need	0.07
Familiarity	0.08
Respondents[a]	–
Brands[a]	–
R^2	0.59

Notes: *Significant at $p < 0.05$, **significant at $p < 0.01$; [a]included in the regression model as random effects

H1a and *H1b* are confirmed. The greater the functional novelty ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$), the greater the brand interestingness and the greater the functional coping potential ($\beta = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$), the greater the brand interestingness. *H2a* and *H2b* are also confirmed. The greater the symbolic novelty ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$), the greater the brand interestingness and the greater the symbolic coping potential ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$), the greater the brand interestingness. In conclusion, the results confirm the two-component structure approach of BI adapted from Silvia (2005a, 2005b).

As suggested by the hierarchy of effects model, *H3a* and *H3b* are confirmed. Brand interestingness positively affects purchase intent ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), and brand interestingness positively affects WOM ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$). The findings are presented in Table IV. The control variables are also presented in the table. The results indicate that after controlling for the effects of brands, respondents, familiarity and need, BI has a strong effect on both PI and WOM.

Study 5

This study elaborates on the outcomes of BI (i.e. PI and WOM). It replicates *H3* and tests the moderation *H4* and *H5*. In contrast to Study 4, the main variables use multiple-item measures.

Table IV Regression analysis for hierarchy of effects model (Study 4)

Independent variables	Purchase intentions	Word of mouth
Intercept	0.13	−0.17
Brand interestingness	0.42**	0.69**
Control variables		
Need	0.30**	0.36**
Familiarity	0.19**	0.28**
Respondents[a]	–	–
Brands[a]	–	–
R^2	0.64	0.66

Notes: *Significant at $p < 0.05$, **significant at $p < 0.001$; [a]included in the regression model as random effects

Method

The data for this study were collected from a convenience sample of 209 undergraduate students enrolled at a US university. Each participant evaluated two brands of a popular consumer electronics product resulting in 418 observations. The two brands were selected because respondents in a prior study rated Brand A as significantly more interesting than Brand B. The present study confirmed these prior findings with a mean brand interestingness score for Brand A of 4.69 compared to Brand B of 3.29 ($p < 0.001$), on a 5-point scale. Such a difference provided a wide range of BI levels.

The main variables, BI, PI and WOM, were measured using multiple-item measures, and brand familiarity and brand usage were measured with single-item measures. The scales for PI and WOM were adapted from Zeithaml *et al.* (1996). The 3-item brand interestingness scale was developed for this study. All items were measured using a Likert-type scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*.

The dimensionality, convergent and discriminant validity of the measures were assessed via a confirmatory factor analysis. The initial evaluation was based on the whole data set and demonstrated a good fit. Because the data were based on two different brands, the measurement invariance between them was also examined following Hair *et al.* (2006). The two-group analysis revealed that two items, one from BI and one from PI, did not load equally for both brands, and therefore, these items were removed. This allowed for achieving metric invariance. The final fit of the measurement model for the whole data set indicated a good fit ($\chi^2_{261} = 50.07$, root mean square error of approximation = 0.07, normed fit index = 0.99, non-normed fit index = 0.99, comparative fit index = 0.99, standardized root mean square residual = 0.02). The Cronbach's coefficients revealed very good scale reliabilities with an alpha score above 0.90 (Nunnally, 1978). All factor loadings were significant (t-values > 2.00) suggesting convergence of the indicators with the appropriate underlying factors (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The average variance extracted (AVE) by each underlying construct was above 0.50, and none of the shared variances (Φ^2) between pairs of constructs was larger than the AVE by each construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), demonstrating discriminant validity (Table V).

Results

H4 and *H5* were tested using the Hayes (2013) method for moderator analysis. The findings are presented in Table VI. The results reveal significant moderating effects of brand familiarity. Confirming *H4a*, the strength of the relationship between interestingness and PI is significantly moderated by brand familiarity ($t = 2.84$, $p < 0.01$). Confirming *H5a*, the strength of the relationship between interestingness and positive WOM is significantly moderated by brand familiarity ($t = 3.22$, $p < 0.01$). The results also reveal significant moderating effects of prior brand use. Confirming *H4b*, the strength of the relationship between interestingness and PI is significantly moderated by prior brand use ($t = 3.01$, $p < 0.01$). Further, confirming *H5b*, the strength of the relationship between interestingness and WOM is significantly moderated by prior brand use ($t = 2.79$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, a consumer's prior experience with a brand plays a significant role in

Table V Measurement properties of the constructs (Study 5)

Items	Standardized loadings (*t*-values)
Brand interestingness (AVE = 0.83 | Φ^2 = 0.66-0.67)	
1. This brand is interesting to me	0.90 (23.38)
2. I am curious about this brand's products	0.91 (23.87)
3. I am intrigued by the brand's products	0.91 (23.70)
Purchase intentions (AVE = 0.94 | Φ^2 = 0.66-0.84)	
4. I will buy this brand in the future	0.95 (25.53)
5. I will continue to buy the brand's products	0.98 (26.81)
Word of mouth (AVE = 0.88 | Φ^2 = 0.67-0.84)	
6. I say positive things about them to other people	0.92 (23.89)
7. I recommend them to someone who seeks my advice	0.96 (25.83)
8. I would recommend the brand to others	0.94 (24.78)

Notes: Confirmatory factor analysis fit statistics: χ^2_{261} = 50.07, RMSEA = 0.07, NFI = 0.99, NNFI = 0.99, CFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.02

Table VI Tests of moderating effects on purchase intentions and word of mouth (Study 5)

Variables	Moderators	
	Familiarity	Prior use
Repurchase intent (dependent variable)		
Intercept	3.91**	3.93**
Brand interestingness	0.77**	0.78**
Moderator	0.37**	0.39**
Brand interestingness *moderator	0.08**	0.07**
R^2	0.65	0.68
Word of mouth (dependent variable)		
Intercept	3.71**	3.74**
Brand interestingness	0.69**	0.75**
Moderator	0.34**	0.27**
Brand interestingness*moderator	0.08**	0.06**
R^2	0.66	0.66

Notes: Moderator = familiarity, prior use; **significant at $p < 0.01$

Figure 2 Moderation effects (Study 5)

determining the strength of the relationship between brand interestingness and its two outcomes: PI and positive WOM.

To investigate the specific nature of the moderating effects, the significant interactions were followed up with post hoc probing. As per Hayes (2013) recommendation, the sample was split using the Johnson–Neyman technique. Here, the respondents were grouped into 10th (very low familiarity), 25th (low familiarity), 50th (moderate familiarity) and 75th (high familiarity) percentiles based on their respective values on the familiarity variable. Similarly, the respondents were grouped into 10th (very low prior use), 25th (low prior use), 50th (moderate prior use) and 75th (high prior use) percentiles based on their respective values on the prior use variable. The relationship between brand interestingness and purchase intent and between brand interestingness and positive WOM were closer inspected and analyzed by segment. The findings for familiarity and prior use as moderators of the relationship between BI and purchase intent are shown in Figure 2.

The results reveal that as a person's familiarity with a brand increases, the strength of the relationship between brand interestingness and PI also increases. People most familiar with

the brand show the strongest relationship. For instance, at a high level of brand interestingness, the mean purchase intent for the very low brand familiarity segment is 3.70 whereas the mean purchase intent for the high familiarity segment is 5.60.

Similarly, as a person's prior use of a brand increases, the strength of the relationship between BI and PI also increases. At a high level of brand interestingness, the mean purchase intent for the very low prior brand use segment is 3.65 whereas the mean purchase intent for the high prior brand use segment is 5.59. In sum, the more experience an individual has with a brand, the stronger the relationship between brand interestingness and PI.

A similar post hoc analysis was performed for familiarity and prior use as moderators of the relationship between BI and WOM (Figure 2). Identical to the findings for purchase intent

as the outcome variable, the results show that as a person's familiarity with the brand and prior use of the brand increases, the strength of the relationship between brand interestingness and WOM also increases. People with the highest prior use pattern show the strongest relationship. For example, at a high level of BI, the mean WOM rating for the very low brand familiarity segment is 3.48, whereas the mean WOM rating for the high familiarity segment is 5.24. Similarly, at a high level of brand interestingness, the mean WOM rating for the very low prior brand use segment is 3.79, whereas the mean purchase intent for the high prior use brand segment is 5.19. Thus, further confirming, the more experience an individual has with a brand, the stronger the relationship between brand interestingness and positive WOM.

Discussion

Several key findings emerged from this investigation into BI. The preliminary studies demonstrated that customers associate brands with interestingness (Study 1), and interesting brands are perceived as novel (Study 2). According to the scheme theory, when evaluating a brand there are several possible affective responses depending on the difficulty of the evaluation (i.e. easiness, pleasantness, interestingness, challenge and difficulty). Study 3 provided evidence that from all these affective responses, interestingness is the strongest driver of PI.

Study 4 demonstrated the validity of the two-component structure of BI: that is, novelty and coping potential (i.e. the difficulty of evaluation) are the drivers of BI. Novelty can be associated with functional and symbolic aspects of a brand, and the latter has stronger effects on BI than the former. This implies that brands must be perceived as novel before a consumer considers them to be interesting, and that novelty associated with the symbolism of a brand has a stronger potential to make a brand interesting. As an affective response, brand interestingness translates into purchase intent and WOM. The antecedents and outcomes of BI in Study 4 hold across different brands and respondents.

Finally, the findings from Study 5 provide evidence for the moderating effects of brand experience. Prior brand experience, in the form of brand familiarity and prior use, affects the strength of the relationships between brand interestingness and purchase intent and between brand interestingness and positive WOM. A consumer with a higher degree of experience with a brand exhibits a stronger connection compared to a consumer with a lower level of brand experience. While the findings substantiate that interestingness has a strong connection to brand purchase and WOM, the effects are influenced by brand familiarity and prior use. In an apparent battle between the new and the familiar, the effects of newness on purchase behavior are, paradoxically, enhanced by the old and familiar. Consumers strike a balance between new and old; they approach the innovative and novel while also seeking the familiar.

Theoretical and managerial implication

Based on the presented insights and results, the final objective of this study is the provision of a definition of the BI:

> Brand Interestingness is the power of intrinsically attracting and holding a consumer's attention. This power is evoked by a brand's perceived functional and symbolic novelty along with the consumer's perceived capability to assimilate the brand's novelty elements.

The most important managerial implication is that to keep a brand interesting it needs to provide continued novelty. However, the results also suggest that to make a brand interesting, customers should be able to assimilate the novelty. This serves as evidence why too much novelty can have a detrimental effect on brands. As Keller *et al.* (2002) suggest, brands need to have their points of parity with which customers are familiar, otherwise they may not understand the brands' frame of references. Therefore, too much novelty may be challenging, and some desirable features of the brand should be understandable by the target audience with moderate difficulty, rather than making it too easy or too difficult for the customers. Thus, brand novelty is not sufficient; it must be accompanied by moderate assimilation capability. Brands offering radical innovations may be difficult to understand and, therefore, at potential disadvantage.

Another result worth discussing is the stronger effects of the symbolic novelty and coping potential when compared with the effects of functional novelty and coping potential. It seems that the symbolic elements are more important drivers of interestingness. This is good news for practitioners because it indicates that interestingness can be affected by perceptions of experiential benefits and not necessarily by brand functions alone. A brand may change its image, promotion strategy, public relations message, etc. to encourage interestingness. This confirms the importance of branding and why practitioners should pay attention to it.

The finding that BI has a strong effect on PI has implications for using this construct to forecast the likely success of a new brand or new brand attributes. The traditional theory of reasoned action suggests that attitude toward a brand precedes PI, but in the absence of a formed attitude rooted in past purchase behavior, an affective emotion such as interestingness could be used to evaluate the potential of a new brand and product. Companies can encourage brand interestingness by being innovative and consistently making product improvements. Paradoxically, as shown in Study 5, this relationship is then further enhanced by the old and familiar. Apparently, newness encourages purchase behavior and oldness accelerates this connection, as indicated by the significant moderating effects. It then follows that innovations from existing companies (i.e. good probability of high levels of brand experience) will have an advantage over those from new firms (i.e. good probability of low brand experience) in the marketplace.

Limitations and future research

This research has several limitations, which offer opportunities for future research. Future research should address the optimal level of coping potential needed for interestingness to occur. Anecdotal evidence from various fields of study may offer early insights. For example, in visual aesthetics, interestingness is the highest when the complexity of an image is moderate (Berlyne *et al.*, 1968). Similarly, in the area of motivational research, early research has established that a person's motivation peaks when the subjective probability for success is about 50 per cent (Meyer and Hallermann, 1977), and when the perceived

probability for success is higher or lower (i.e. easier or difficult, respectively), then the motivation drops. Taken together and applied to BI, those findings suggest that a moderate level of coping potential will result in higher interest.

Further research is needed to identify which sources of novelty and coping potential are the most important in a brand. Novelty may be based on brand image, functionality, relevance, shapes, sounds, etc. Difficulty may be based on understanding functionality, price, cognitive effort to make a choice, etc. One way of increasing BI could be achieved by clearly communicating desirable benefits but making it moderately difficult for customers to acquire the brand.

Finally, BI and other marketing constructs are likely intertwined. For instance, product involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985, 1994) is likely related but not identical. There are some contrasts between the two concepts. In studies, involvement usually is manipulated by increasing importance, whereas BI is defined as a function of novelty and coping potential. Logically, it is possible to be involved with a brand without perceiving it as interesting (e.g. selecting a bank to find a mortgage). However, it also is possible to be involved with and also be interested in a brand. Future research should determine the common and different boundaries of the two constructs as well as other brand-related theories such as brand personality.

In conclusion, BI appears to be a promising concept in marketing. The benefit of BI is the natural impulse for cognitive and motor drive toward the brand. This gravitational force could be used creatively by marketers in various ways. It offers new academic insights and research avenues.

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