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THE INFLUENCE OF THE BRAND NAME ON PERCEPTION
OF A FOOD PRODUCT

by

Edward A. Krizan

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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1965

LIFE

Edward A. Krimm was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 31, 1921.

After graduation from the Murray F. Tuley High School in Chicago, he was called into military service where he served in the Army Air Forces from March, 1943 to May, 1946 when he was honorably discharged.

The writer attended De Paul University, Chicago, from January, 1948 until August, 1949, when he transferred to Loyola University, Chicago, where he received the degree Bachelor of Science in June, 1951. He began graduate studies at Loyola University in the Summer of 1951 and continued under a teaching fellowship from September, 1951 to August, 1953. In September, 1953, he entered the employment of Gould, Gleiss & Benn, Inc., Chicago, as Research Field Director. In 1955 the writer became a partner in the firm of Advisors in Management, Chicago, where he remained until June, 1957, at which time he joined the Research Division of the Chicago Tribune as a Research Supervisor. In January of 1962 he left the Chicago Tribune to become Assistant Director of Marketing Research for Wilson & Co., Inc., Chicago.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"An indictment habitually leveled at the American society is that we are a people in emotional thrall to a set of synthetic symbols cleverly manipulated by a communications elite (Whyte, 1952). Increasing production efficiency leads to increasing standardization which leads to increasing sameness between products; and the greater the similarity, the smaller part does reason play in the choice between one brand and another. David Ogilvy, president of a large advertising agency, has said (Brown, 1963): "There really isn't any significant difference between the various brands of whiskey or the various cigarettes or the various brands of beer. They are all about the same. And so are the cake mixes and the detergents and the automobiles." Many advertisers are willing to admit that their work consists largely in the creation of imaginary differences between products which are, for all practical purposes, the same. Yet consumers make few purchases without specifying a brand name and many purchasers exhibit an unswerving loyalty to a particular brand of product. They are influenced not only by the sense impressions of the product, but by the values symbolized by the brand name.

CHAPTER II

PURPOSE

The purpose of the experiment which is the subject of this paper is to investigate the influence of the brand name upon perception of a food product. The principal hypotheses to be tested are:

1. Subjects cannot distinguish between major brands of bacon on visual or taste characteristics when their brand names are unknown.
2. When brand names are known to subjects, their perceptions of the products will be influenced in such a way as to make the more popular, more heavily advertised of two brands of bacon look and taste better.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Bruner and Postman (1948) state that "one's perception is influenced by wanting something, hoping for something, expecting something." Something must take place in the temporal course of the perception process which modifies the pattern of stimulation to bring it into line with our expectancies even before we are consciously aware that the stimulus is or is not relevant to our needs or expectations. Part of the process by which the stimulus world is organized through intentions and expectancies takes place before the person is ever exposed to a stimulus. It is the process which William James (1890) called preperception and the Wurzburg School labeled *Einstellung*. James' *Principles of Psychology* cites many examples of the influence of socialized expectancies upon perception. Functionalists like Donald Purdy (1935) have pointed to the role of response adjustment in determining preperception and the organization of perception. Organismic theorists introduced the concept of need or adjustment as central to perception. McDougall (1908) subordinated perception and cognition to striving. Krech and Kruchfield (1948) divide the determinants of perception into two major categories, structural and functional. By structural factors are meant those factors deriving solely from the nature of the physical stimuli and the neural effects they evoke in the nervous system of the individual. The functional factors of perceptual organization, on the other hand, are those

which derive primarily from the needs, moods, past experience and memory of the individual. Hastorf and Knutson (1949) state that "perception can be considered to be an active purposive process developed through past experience, with a major unconscious selective aspect."

In a study of value and need as organizing factors in perception, Bruner and Goodman (1947) conducted an experiment in which 30 ten-year-old children were given the task of adjusting a circular patch of light so as to equate it in size to that of various objects. They were first asked to estimate in this manner, from memory, the size of coins from a penny to a half dollar. The experiment was repeated with the coins present. A control group performed the task with cardboard disks identical in size to the coins used in the experimental group. In the presence of the objects, the results showed that the coins, which are socially valued, are judged larger in size than the gray disks, and the greater the value of the coin, the greater the degree of overestimation of size. When the children were divided into a rich and poor group, the effect was greater for the poor group. The difference in the relative value of the coins for the two groups is regarded as the explanation of this finding. The results when the estimates were made from memory were less clear. Carter and Schooler (1949) repeated the experiment of Bruner and Goodman and found that poor children consistently overestimated the size of coins to a significantly greater degree than did rich children when their judgments were made from memory. When the physical object was present as a standard of reference, no significant difference was found between the two groups.

Bruner and Postman (1948) studied the effect of positive, neutral and negative symbols on perception. Subjects were required to adjust a circular patch of light until it was subjectively equal to that of a given disc. Discs contained positive (dollar sign), neutral (a square with diagonals), and negative (swastika) signs. Significant differences in apparent size were found. "Dollar discs were judged largest, swastika discs next in size, and neutral discs smallest." The conclusion drawn from this experiment was that "value, whether positive or negative, leads to perceptual accentuation."

Zillig (1928) was able to determine the extent to which social attitudes may influence what one sees. In a survey of friendship within a classroom she discovered that certain children were almost universally liked and others disliked to the same degree. In the experiment, she took an equal number of pupils from these two extreme groups, and had them perform calisthenic exercises before the class. She had previously instructed the "liked" children to make mistakes and had trained the "disliked" children to follow her instructions exactly. At the end of the experiment, she asked the class to indicate which group had done the exercises correctly. The majority of votes went to the popular group. Zillig believes that the children actually "saw" the differences as they reported them.

The experiments cited above agree in their conclusions that perception of an object is a "compromise between what the organism is given to see — excitation induced by the stimulus — and what the organism is set to see or wants to see, or even, what the organism wants to avoid seeing." (Bruner and Postman, 1948). The basic assumption underlying the present experiment

is that advertising imbues a product brand with wish-fulfilling or need-fulfilling qualities which provide the consumer with a set of social or personal expectancies which modifies stimulation from the class of products to which this brand belongs in such a way that only the advertised brand will be brought into line with this set of expectancies. This is accomplished by the content of advertising and by its volume. E. A. Filene has written:

Poor values can be sold by large persistent advertising. It is simply a matter of psychology — the hammering into people's heads of a certain idea until finally they accept it. If the sacrifice to accept it is not so big as to make a constant reinvestigation necessary, they will submit to the suggestion that a certain thing at a certain price is the best on the market. (Brown, 1963).

CHAPTER IV

PROCEDURE

Bacon is a food which is in common use in the United States. It is a natural product which varies in size and leanness according to the weight of the hog from which it comes. Bacon side weighing between ten and fourteen pounds are used for first-line sliced bacon by most meat packers. Since the animals are obtained through bidding on the open market, no one company has an advantage over the others in the raw material used. Variations in the end product are limited to the amount of fat which is trimmed from the bacon sides and the length of time they are smoked. The trimming may affect the appearance of the product. The smoking time may affect its taste. Slicing of the bacon sides is fairly standardized in the industry and similar cartons are used by the major meat packers. The art work and brand name on the package are, of course, different for the different companies.

Two brands of bacon were used in this experiment. Both were first line products which retail for the same price. Brand A is very heavily advertised and sells approximately 25% of all the bacon sold in the market. Brand B is moderately advertised and sells approximately 8% of all the bacon sold in the market. Advertising for brand A stresses taste. Advertising for brand B stresses leanness. Both imply their brand is best.

The specific hypotheses tested in this experiment were:

1. That subjects cannot distinguish between brand A and brand B on visual and taste characteristics when brand names are not known.
2. When brand names are known to subjects, perceptions will be more favorable to brand A, the more popular and more heavily advertised brand, than to brand B.

Subjects for the experiment consisted of two hundred families selected by the following method of sampling: Twenty census tracts were selected from a listing of all tracts by using a random start and selecting every Nth tract. In the same way, five city blocks were selected from each of the twenty tracts. Then, two dwelling units were chosen by the same systematic sampling procedure from each of the city blocks. One family from each of the dwelling units was chosen as test subjects. Families were contacted by the field staff of an independent interviewing firm. A family who did not qualify as subjects or refused to participate in the experiment was replaced by another family from the same block.

For Phase I of the experiment, two hundred packages of brand A and brand B bacons in the one-pound size were purchased at a random selection of supermarkets on a Wednesday. These were removed from their original cartons and repackaged in bland white cartons. A three-digit random number was assigned to each package and numbers assigned to brand A and brand B were recorded for future identification. The product was then refrigerated.

On Thursday and Friday the product was placed in the test homes. To qualify for inclusion in the experiment, the female head of the family must have served bacon to her family at least once in the past month and must agree to carefully follow instructions in preparing and serving the test products.

The housewife was given one package each of brand A and brand B bacons in plain white cartons identified only by three-digit random numbers. She was also given two pressure-sensitive labels bearing the random numbers corresponding to the numbers on the bacon packages. Twelve paper plates were provided, six bearing one of the three-digit numbers and six bearing the other. Instructions were given verbally as follows:

The products you have been given are wholesome products made by reputable companies. We would like you to try these two packages of bacon this coming week-end — either Saturday or Sunday — and give us your opinion as to which tastes better. In order not to mix the tastes of the two bacons, you must prepare them according to the following directions.

Take two skillets. Into one of the cold skillets place enough bacon to give each member of your family one strip. Then place the label with the same number as the package on the skillet handle to identify the bacon in the skillet. Now, take the other skillet and from the other package put enough bacon into it to give each family member one strip. Then place the label with the same number on this package on the handle of the skillet. Cook the bacon in the two skillets at the same time on separate burners on your range. When the bacon is cooked the way you like it, empty the contents of one skillet by placing one strip into each paper plate bearing the same number as the skillet. Then empty the contents of the other skillet by putting one strip of bacon into each of the paper plates bearing the same number as on the skillet.

Now place one of each of the two plates in front of every member of the family. Put the plate with the number that is first on the questionnaire to the left of each person and the other plate to the right. Cut slices of white bread into quarters and give each family member a quarter. Have everyone taste the strip of bacon on the left.

Let them eat as much of it as they like. Then eat some of the white bread. And then, taste the other strip of bacon. On the questionnaire have them check the number of the bacon which tastes better to them. Do the same yourself. Be sure that everyone works independently without discussion or conferring with others.

A typewritten copy of the instructions was left with the housewife to be read by her at the time the experiment was to be conducted.

When the product was placed in the test households, the housewife was asked to judge the two bacons on their appearance and leanness, and to check on a questionnaire the number of the sample which in her judgment had a better appearance and the number of the sample which she thought leaner. This questionnaire was retained by the interviewer so that it would not bias results of the taste-test.

Self-administered questionnaires for each member of the family were left with the housewife. The forced-choice question required the subject to check the number of the product which in his or her judgment had the better taste. These numbers were alternated so that Family 1 had the number representing brand A first and the number representing brand B second, Family 2 would have the number representing brand B first and that representing brand A second, and so on throughout the sample. The order of the numbers on the questionnaires dictated the order in which the families tasted the bacon. An "open-end" question was included to obtain the subjects' reasons for their choices.

Phase II was conducted the following week with the same families.

The test procedure in this phase was identical to that in Phase I except that the two brands of bacon were presented in their original cartons with their brands identified.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Phase I

Of the 200 housewives who were given the test product, 168 cooperated in conducting the experiment with their families.

When housewives were presented with the raw bacons without brand identification, their judgments of the two products on their visual aspects, appearance and leanness, favor brand B, the bacon which was moderately advertised with a copy theme stressing leanness and whose share of the total bacon market was approximately 8%. Chi-square indicates that judgments of brand B as better than brand A in appearance is statistically significant at the .001 level. Housewives' judgments of brand B as leaner than brand A were also significant ($p = .01$).

TABLE 1

JUDGMENTS OF APPEARANCE AND LEANNESS OF TWO UNBRANDED BACONS

	Brand A	Brand B	χ^2	p
Better appearance	42	126	42.00	.001
Leaner	66	102	7.72	.01

The results above indicate that housewives can discriminate between brand A and brand B bacons on the basis of their appearance and leanness when these bacons are presented without brand identifications. The results also suggest that the claim made for brand B in its advertising, that it is a lean bacon, has some basis in fact, at least in comparison with brand A.

Other members of the family participated in the taste-test of the two bacons. A total of 455 family members tasted the unidentified products and selected the one which in their judgment was better in taste. The results show no significant difference in judgment of the taste of the two bacons.

TABLE 2

JUDGMENTS OF TASTE OF TWO UNBRANDED BACONS BY ALL FAMILY MEMBERS

	Brand A	Brand B	χ^2	p
Better taste	223	232	.178	.70

Sex of the subjects did not appear to influence judgment of the taste of the two products. Neither male nor female heads of households show any decided preference for the taste of either bacon when brand names were not known.

TABLE 3

JUDGMENTS OF TASTE OF TWO UNBRANDED BACONS
BY MALE AND FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS

	Brand A	Brand B	χ^2	p
Judged better by male head	60	68	.50	.50
Judged better by female head	77	91	1.16	.30

Judgments of older children, between 10 and 19 years of age, show no significant difference between their choices on taste. However, children under ten years of age showed a significant preference for the taste of brand A.

TABLE 4

JUDGMENTS OF TASTE OF TWO UNBRANDED BACONS BY CHILDREN

	Brand A	Brand B	χ^2	p
Children 10 to 19	34	43	1.05	.30
Children under 10	52	30	5.90	.02

The results of the blind taste-test show that subjects cannot discriminate between brands A and B on the basis of taste. This holds true for male and female, for adults and older children. Children under ten, however, appear to be able to discriminate between the two brands and judge brand A better in taste.

The hypothesis that no perceptible difference exists between the two brands of bacon when presented without brand identification is upheld for taste, except in the case of children under ten years of age, but rejected for appearance and leanness.

Phase II

Four families who participated in the first phase of the experiment did not complete the second phase. A total of 164 families consisting of 435 persons were served the two bacons with their brand names identified.

When housewives observed the two products in their raw state, identified as to brand, they judged brand B to be better in appearance. This is the less popular brand which receives only a moderate amount of advertising. Judgments of the bacons on their leanness, however, showed no significant difference between the two brands.

TABLE 5

JUDGMENTS OF APPEARANCE AND LEANNESS OF TWO BACONS
WITH BRANDS IDENTIFIED

	Brand A	Brand B	χ^2	p
Better appearance	48	116	29.20	.001
Leaner	74	90	1.92	.20

The taste-test in which name brands were identified was conducted with a total of 435 subjects. Results show judgments to significantly favor brand A over brand B as being better in taste.

TABLE 6

JUDGMENTS OF TASTE OF TWO BACONS WITH BRANDS IDENTIFIED
BY ALL FAMILY MEMBERS

	Brand A	Brand B	χ^2	p
Better taste	290	145	48.40	.001

Both male and female heads of the households judged the taste of brand A better than that of brand B by significant margins.

TABLE 7

JUDGMENTS OF TASTE OF TWO BACONS WITH BRANDS IDENTIFIED
BY MALE AND FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS

	Brand A	Brand B	χ^2	p
Judged better by male heads	82	40	14.40	.001
Judged better by female heads	104	60	11.40	.001

Judgments of children of all ages favor brand A as better in taste than brand B. These findings are highly significant statistically.

TABLE 8
JUDGMENTS OF TASTE OF TWO BACONS WITH BRANDS IDENTIFIED
BY CHILDREN

	Brand A	Brand B	χ^2	p
Children 10 to 19	49	20	12.20	.001
Children under 10	55	25	11.20	.001

The results of the taste-test in which brand names of the products were known to subjects shows judgments overwhelmingly in favor of brand A as being better in taste than brand B. This holds true regardless of the age or sex of subjects.

The hypothesis which predicted that when brand names are known to subjects, their perceptions will be more favorable to brand A, the more popular, more heavily advertised brand, is upheld for taste but rejected for appearance and leanness.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The results on visual perception of the two bacon products show that subjects were able to reliably discriminate between the two brands on the basis of appearance and leanness when their brand names were not known. Brand B, less popular and advertised considerably less than brand A, was perceived as better in appearance and leaner than brand A. Brand B was also seen as superior in appearance to brand A when brand names were known to subjects. However, knowledge of the brand names appears to have caused sufficient shift in perception of leanness in the direction of brand A, the more popular and heavily advertised brand, as to make judgments unreliable, whereas in the previous phase of the experiment they reliably favored brand B.

The results on taste perception of the two bacons are much more conclusive than the results on visual perception. They show that the presence of brand names results in a definite bias in favor of the brand, brand A, which enjoys greater social favor than the other brand and commands ubiquity in the media of advertising, but enjoys no real taste advantage as was shown in the test of the products without brand identification.

The reasons given by subjects for judging one brand better in taste than the other reflect the shift in perception which occurred when

the products were identified by brand name. In Phase I, when brand names were not known, the general response, "tastes better", was very frequent and the reasons cited did not favor either brand. In Phase II, however, when brands were known to subjects, responses became more specific and overwhelmingly favored brand A.

TABLE 9

REASONS FOR JUDGING ONE BRAND BETTER IN TASTE
THAN THE OTHER BRAND

Reasons	Phase I		Phase II	
	Brand A	Brand B	Brand A	Brand B
Tastes better	99	108	30	20
More flavor	87	84	119	49
Not salty	11	14	70	28
Smokier flavor	17	11	63	14
Meatier	7	5	35	3
Total	221	222	318	114

Only among children under ten years of age is there no change in taste perception from Phase I to Phase II of the experiment. In both, the blind presentation and the identified presentation of the products, they judged brand A better in taste than brand B. It is possible that children of this age have a lower threshold for some particular gustatory stimulus present in brand A than older subjects and are responding to this sensation under both experimental conditions and are really not influenced by the brand symbol. The data of this study do not explain this phenomenon.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this experiment was to investigate the influence of the brand name upon perception of a food product. It was hypothesized that subjects would be unable to discriminate between two bacons on the basis of their taste or visual characteristics when brands were unknown to them, but that when the products were labeled with their brand names, the more popular, more heavily advertised of the two brands would be more favorably perceived.

Subjects for the experiment were 168 families selected by means of a random area sample. In the first phase of the experiment, each family was given two one-pound packages of bacon in plain cartons, without brand identification. Housewives were instructed in the preparation of the bacon samples and in the manner in which the experiment was to be conducted with their families. Housewives judged the two raw samples on appearance and leanness. Every family member was served a cooked strip of each of the two bacons which were tasted and judged. Subjects recorded their judgments on self-administered questionnaires and gave their reasons in an "open-end" question. Tasting of the two products was alternated by family to offset bias due to the sequence of presentation.

One week later, the second phase of the experiment was conducted with the same families. The same procedure was followed as the previous

week, but this time the bacons were identified by brand name. One was a very popular, heavily advertised brand. The other brand was only moderately advertised and sold about one-third as much bacon as the other brand.

The results of the two phases were analyzed separately and compared. Chi-square was applied to test statistical significance of the findings. The hypothesis that no perceptible differences exist between the two brands when brands are not known is upheld for taste, except for children under ten years of age, but rejected for appearance and leanness.

The hypothesis that subjects will perceive the popular, heavily advertised brand more favorably when brand names are known to them is upheld for taste but rejected for appearance and leanness. The reasons given by subjects for judging one brand better in taste than the other reflect a distortion of percepts in the direction predicted, i.e., perceptions of taste are influenced in such a way that the socially more prominent brand is thought to taste better.

The results of this experiment suggest that the brand name represents a value which influences product perception. However, perception is not totally distorted so that every aspect of the valued product becomes enhanced by its brand name. Subjects appear to be quite objective about the visual aspects of the product. They are most influenced in their perception of the product's taste. Taste may be more easily influenced by

subjective factors than vision. On the other hand, visual aspects may be less important than taste in judging a food product, hence the greater influence of brand name on perceptions of taste.

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APPENDIX

Illustrated below are the questionnaire forms use in Phase I of the experiment. The questionnaires for Phase II were identical to these, with the exception that the brand names of the two bacons were sustituted for the random numbers used in the first phase. The numbers used to identify the bacons were alternated on the questionnaires as were also the brand names.

The Product Placement Questionnaire was answered by the housewife. All family members answered the Product Taste Questionnaire.

Product Placement Questionnaire

1. Do you ever serve bacon to your family?

Yes

No (Discontinue interview.)

2. When was the last time you served bacon? _____ weeks ago.

What brand was it? _____

(If bacon not served within the past month, discontinue interview.)

"We would like you to have these two packages of bacon made by reputable companies and to serve some of each to your family this coming week end, either Saturday or Sunday, and to give us your opinions about them. Would you like to cooperate in this test?"

(If the housewife agrees to participate, give her the two packages of bacon and read her the instructions for preparation, making sure they are understood. Leave a copy of the instructions with her.)

Product Placement Questionnaire -- Continued

(Open the flaps on the two bacon packages and ask the housewife the following questions.)

3. In your judgment, which of these two bacons has the better appearance?

Bacon #123

Bacon #321

4. Which, in your judgment is the leaner bacon?

Bacon #123

Bacon #321

Name: _____

Address: _____

Occupation of Head of Household _____

Highest Grade in School Completed by Head of Household _____

Number of Children _____

Product Taste Questionnaire

TO BE COMPLETED BY ALL MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE TASTE TEST.

After tasting both pieces of bacon, answer the following questions:

1. Which bacon tastes better?

Check one:

Bacon #123

Bacon #321

2. What is it about the bacon you checked above that makes it taste better?

3. What is your age? _____ years.

4. Are you: Male or Female

FAMILY # _____

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Edward A. Krimm has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Psychology.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 31, 1965
Date

Edmund P. Marx
Signature of Adviser