Reseaching brand images: The nature and activation of brand representations in memory

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Research on brand representations

Brand owners and managers have an interest in, but, moreover, a need for information about the way their brand is represented consumers’ memory. On the one hand this information can provide revelation about and understanding into one’s brand. On the other hand, it serves a more underlying, action-oriented question focusing on managing the brand’s image. Information on the consumer’s brand representation may help brand management strategy and communication efforts. The previous chapters have shown what elements comprise a brand representation, and how this representation (theoretically) is stored in memory. As brand managers need to gain insight in the consumer’s mind, an appeal to research is made. Mostly referred to as brand image research, market research has partly specialized in pinning down the content of consumer memory on brands (Biel 1992; Gordon 1991).

Numerous methods have been developed over the years, each one using, as a basis, a specific definition of what constitutes a brand image. Firstly, in this chapter, the present practice of brand image research is sketched out, primarily to provide a view on the assumptions incorporated in methods applied in everyday life. Then, two influential factors in consumer research are elucidated: the amount and nature of cues provided by the method, and the context in which the consumer as respondent is questioned.

3.1 Present practice

Market research is the discipline typically engaged in revealing the content of consumers’ minds. For this purpose, numerous methods have been developed. In general, two major (and classic) streams of research methods can be distinguished: qualitative and quantitative methods. Gordon and Langmaid (1988) describe in general terms qualitative research as follows: (1) involves small samples of consumers which are not necessarily representative for larger populations; (2) employs a wide variety of techniques to collect data; (3) relies on the interpretation of the findings; (4) and allows access to the ways in which consumers express themselves. They stress that qualitative research is centrally concerned with understanding things rather than measuring them. Basically there are three qualitative methodologies: group interviews (discussions), individual interviews (or depth interviews) and observations (Gordon and Langmaid 1988; Van Tilburg and Tuitert 1995). Variants and combinations based on these methodologies create the qualitative tools for market research. Qualitative research relies on the words and voices of the people being studied (see on this topic also Ericsson and Simon 1980;
In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research methods essentially capture information in figures. Figures are obtained from, for example, standardized questionnaires and experiments, and typically answer questions like how much, how often or how many.

With respect to The Netherlands, different authors (e.g. Bouwman 1999; Scholl et al 1994; Van Tilburg and Tuitert 1995; Verhallen 1998) have gathered both qualitative and quantitative brand image research techniques. Bouwman (1999) found well over 70 techniques applied in practice, and classified them based on their application purpose, being either global brand image measurements or specific brand image component measurements. This distinction can also be regarded as the distinction between decompositional and compositional measurements. In decompositional methods, judgments are made with respect to the brands rather than to specific attributes. In compositional methods, respondents rate the brands on a set of a priori specified attributes. Compositional methods face one major theoretical problem, according to Steenkamp, Van Trijp and Ten Berge (1994). Compositional methods assume that by presenting all consumers with the same set of a priori specified attributes (1) all attributes used in the study are relevant to all consumers, (2) no other attributes are relevant to certain groups of consumers, and (3) consumers attach the same meaning to an attribute.

With respect to global brand image measurements, qualitative measurements incorporate both individual and group interviews, either or not combined with facilitating techniques like projective ~, associative ~ and/or enabling techniques. These latter techniques aim to allow a deeper exploration of a person's feelings about a situation, product, or type of activity. Although labeled differently, these three kinds of facilitating techniques are closely related and the distinction between them is not always clear. Typically in these techniques, respondents react to provided material, embedded in tasks like sorting photos, adding text to cartoons, completing sentences, et cetera. In projective techniques respondents project their associations on pre-selected mediums, which are basically metaphors or analogies. Projection refers to the tendency to imbue objects or events with characteristics or meanings that are derived from our subconscious desires, wishes, or feelings. Examples (without going into much detail) are the 'balloon drawing procedure', 'sentence completion technique', and 'psycho-drawings'. In associative techniques respondents are asked to pronounce their own thoughts in reaction to a certain stimulus. Examples are 'free association', 'aided association', and 'word association'. Enabling techniques focus primarily on awareness, and help respondents to become more aware of their environment. One example is the deprivation experiment, in which a person involved in habitual usage of a specific product is encouraged to stop this behavior, and to record subsequent experiences (Robson and Foster 1989). Enabling techniques are based on the idea that people experience things in their day-to-day lives which are often relevant to market research, although people are not cognizant that these perceptions are taking place (Gordon and Langmaid 1988; Robson and Foster 1989; Sykes and Brandon 1990; Van Tilburg and Tuitert 1995). Quantitative techniques are also applied in global brand image measurements. A distinction is made between explicit and implicit.
methods. In explicit methods, like Brand Fitness, Transactional analyses and Brand Works, respondents explicitly score brands on several brand attributes, which have been selected a priori by the researcher. This in contrast with implicit methods, in which respondents spontaneously provide the attributes on which brands are rated, or no explicit attributes are provided at all. Examples are Zaltman’s Metaphor Elicitation Technique (Zaltman 1997), Direct Perceptual Measurement (Johnson and Horne 1990) and Multi Dimensional Scaling (Bouwman 1999; Van Herk et al 1995).

Specific brand image component measurements are mainly quantitative. Their focus is diverse, and is, for example, centered on product features, brand values, brand personality, brand emotions, brand relations, brand attitude and behavior intentions. As other authors have already extensively described methods applied in this segment of research, I will only briefly address a few below:

• Product features are related to brands by techniques like the Repertory Grid and ASSPAT. Generally in these techniques, the consumer/respondent is presented with concrete product features like taste, product appearance, price/quality, et cetera, and the task is to assign these to a specific or to several brands. The relationships between the attributes on which respondents evaluate a product or a brand can be analyzed with so-called positioning techniques, a group of statistical techniques like factor analysis, correspondence analysis, cluster analysis, multi-dimensional scaling and so on (see Van Herk et al 1995).

• The idea of deriving consumers’ values stems from means-end theory, which relates a product to a consumer by positing a hierarchical cognitive structure involving links between attributes of the product, consequences of product use, and values of consumers. In means-end chains, products are seen as means through which consumers obtain value ends. Typical measures for deriving values are the qualitative laddering technique and the quantitative Association Pattern Technique (Gutman 1982; Ter Hofstede et al 1998; Thompson 1997).

• Brand personality is in general measured by using questionnaires in which respondents are asked to relate brands to human personality traits (like for example Jennifer Aaker’s sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (J. L. Aaker 1996, 1997)). Also brand personality can be established using projective techniques like photo sorts wherein a number of portraits need to be attributed to several brands.

• Brand emotions have become increasingly important in the notion of brand image (e.g. see Gordon 1991). It is difficult, however, to adequately measure emotions in relation to brands. Brand emotions are measured using psychophysiological measures like, for example, Galvanic Skin Response measures and voice analyses. But also simple scales are applied, on which respondents indicate the degree of experiencing a certain emotion. Bouwman (1999) indicates three general pitfalls with these measures: 1) the distinction between emotions and feelings is seldom made (and does exist, according to Frijda 1986); 2) lists with assumed basic emotions are often used, although it is not clear whether or not these basic emotions exist at all and if they do, what
Brand relations, or rather the relationship the consumer experiences with a brand, are mainly measured by establishing the type of relation and its strength. Fournier (1994) has identified seven types of brand relations: partner quality, love, intimacy, self-concept connection, nostalgic connection, personal commitment, and passionate attachment. Based on these relation aspects she developed a scale-based measurement instrument called Brand Relationship Quality. Other methods include Me-Map (in which, by means of sorting techniques, types of relations are ascribed to brands), and the conversion model (which establishes the degree of commitment a consumer has with a brand).

Brand attitude is an important measure, and is considered by some to be a definition of brand image (c.f. Poiesz 1989). Brand attitude is primarily measured by applying scales of different nature (like Likert, Guttman, semantic differential, and projective differential scales). Brand attitude is assumed to be expressed in brand preference, and for this reason measures for preference are also developed. Examples are the constant sum method and direct brand ranking.

Related to brand attitude measures are behavior intention measures. Like brand preference measures, behavior intention measures set out to predict future market share of a brand in comparison to competitive brands. Although little fundamental research has shown a causal relation between brand image and actual purchase behavior, it is assumed that the image of a brand does contribute to its likelihood of on inclusion in the consideration set of the consumer (Bouwman 1999). In most cases, direct scale-oriented questions on the intention to purchase a brand in future are presented to respondents.

This brief listing of applied market research approaches used in the measurement of brand image already shows a wide variety of techniques. As indicated in the introduction, the concept of brand image is ambiguous due to different and independently developed definitions, and this is reflected in all the different methods. Because a definition by nature implies generality and validity, each developed measurement technique based on a specific definition possesses an automatic right to exist and as such legitimates itself. Of course this is a general theme in any scientific field in which measurement instruments are developed. One cannot develop a measurement instrument without first defining what it is that is measured.

As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, interest in brand image has rapidly increased over the past decades. Unfortunately, this increasing interest has had the main side effect of leading to a divergence of insights and conceptualizations about the notion of brand image and related topics. At this point in time, conceptual papers are emerging in the literature which try to make sense of the findings obtained in the last decades, in order to create some clearer pictures on general but obfuscated terms like brand image (e.g. Patterson 1999) and brand equity (e.g. Feldwick 1996). The main purpose of these conceptual papers is to set a general frame of reference (although they might also lead to an unwanted contribution to
the exact ambiguity they address by proposing yet another insight/definition by summarizing or combining previous ones).

Regarding brand image measurement, one of the goals of this thesis is to step back from the multitude of definitions and applications, and to come in at a lower level of conceptualization. In the first chapter an overview of possible memory components underlying a brand representation is provided. In the second chapter these components are set in a cognitive-psychological theoretic frame with respect to memory. In line with frame theory, the stored components are conceptualized as attribute-value sets. The definition presented at the end of chapter two (paragraph 2.5.3) states that 'a brand representation is a brand specific collection of product-, brand- and consumer related attributes [...]', (a subset of) which incidentally and/or intentionally becomes active in working memory in a moment-specific configuration, dependent on activation cues, activation context, and personal dispositions'. In frame theory, an attribute '[...] describes an aspect of at least some category members' (Barsalou 1992b). With respect to brands, the association types provided by the IBRA are considered to be the brand representative attributes. As defined in frame theory, attributes can take on different values. For example, in considering the product wine, the brand-related attribute country of origin can take values like 'France', 'Australia' and 'Spain'. The attribute country of origin describes some or all members of the concept of wine brands and, as such, also a specific wine brand. Attributes are not fixed, neither are their respective values. As described in paragraph 2.3.4, attributes and their values are derived from encountering situations, but may also originate from introspective processes of combining existing knowledge. Attributes and their values are not fixed entities, but are dynamic, prone to change in relevance and descriptive value for the concept they represent. As Barsalou indicates, structural invariants and value constraints are principles establishing the relationships between them (which might also underlie inference of attribute values, see Hansen and Zinkhan 1984). Psychological measurement (i.e. brand image research) involves the activation and establishment of these attribute values. This chapter focuses on the factors influencing the activation of attributes, and, by that, resulting brand images.

3.2 Researching brand representations

'Measuring knowledge is difficult, because researchers cannot observe it directly in an idle form but must view it in use, as various cognitive mechanisms process it. The knowledge that researchers observe is always made available by retrieval processes, which constrain researchers' glimpses of it: retrieval processes may not produce all of the underlying knowledge for a particular category; they may retrieve knowledge from another category not being studied; and they may transform retrieved knowledge, such that it is summarized, reconstructed, or altered in some other manner'
(Barsalou 1992a, p. 152).
One of the advertiser's difficulties with the present practice of market research is the multitude of methods available. If an advertiser wants his brand image researched, he needs to turn to a market researcher. But to whom? Whose method is most appropriate? And which criteria should be used to answer this question? The number of methods is symptomatic of the absence of a consensus on what there is to be measured in a consumer's mind. Most conceptualizations of brand image, and therewith their subsequent measurement techniques, hold an (implicit) assumption that certain association types are assumed to be (1) representatives of the brand under study, and thus present in respondents' memory, and (2) relevant to the brand. For illustration, let us suppose a brand researcher defines a brand in terms of its personality. Based on this definition, the researcher will develop measurement methods using personality statements or pictures of faces or such like. When an advertiser wants to gain insight into his brand's image, and contracts the researcher for this task, the researcher will present respondents with his previously developed (and standard applied) methods and present a personality profile of the brand to the advertiser. Although for some brands this procedure might be highly valid and reliable, one may well wonder if an overemphasis of the presence and relevance of brand personality associations produces an artificial result. The method might not even have measured activated personality associations, but merely created them.

Going beyond these assumptions means starting from scratch, without focusing on specific associations in advance, and making explicit allowances for all associations that possibly exist in respondents' memory. We need to know which associations primarily represent the brand in memory (i.e. which associations are present in memory and are at the same time relevant to the brand) and what their nature is. Only then are we able to select measurement methods that are designed to measure the content of the association and obtain valid, unbiased and activated (instead of created) consumer knowledge. Starting from scratch also implies that we have to step back from the diluted concept of brand image. For this reason, the notion of brand representation has already been introduced as the starting point for brand image research.

The definition of brand representation in paragraph 2.5.3 states that a brand representation '[...] becomes active in working memory in a moment-specific configuration, dependent on activation cues, activation context, and personal dispositions'. The manifestation of the memory representation of a brand is thus assumed to be flexible and diverse. This means that there is no static representation that stays equal in all circumstances. The configuration of the subset of product-, brand-, and consumer related attributes that represent the brand is dependent on the way their values are activated by cues, and their relative relevance is determined by context. Therefore it is moment and situation specific. As the manifestation of a brand representation is dependent on cues and context, a measurement result will always reflect a moment and situation specific manifestation, referred to as a conditional brand representation. This is the brand image as it is often referred to in the literature. Any non-theoretical treatise of the measurement of brand image always concerns a conditional manifestation of the brand representa-
tion. It is the picture of a brand as composed by the conditionally retrieved subset of attributes.

In a discussion of Transfer Appropriate Processing theory, Hill, Radtke and King (1997) state that 'encoding and retrieval cues are important in that, together with other aspects of the context and one's goals and purposes, they determine the specific processing that occurs'. The research described in this thesis aims to show that attribute relevance or importance is indeed influenced by the number and nature of cues provided to activate memory content, and also by the context in which the relevance is determined. Cues and context are provided by the measurement method and will therefore affect each respondent who takes part in research to a certain degree.

The representation of a brand is the end product of all occasions and situations in which a specific consumer encountered the brand (see paragraph 2.5.1). It is a personal construct, different for each individual. Apart from different purchase motivations and different situations where brands are encountered, personal aspects like product and brand involvement, brand awareness, prior knowledge, and brand saliency all make brand representations in memory unique for individuals. When combining the brand representations of several respondents in order to obtain one general picture, we need to take into account the fact that there might not be one homogeneous representation of a brand amongst a group of respondents. Brand representation measurements are more likely to result in a set of heterogeneous brand pictures. However, these personal dispositions are only of interest when the aim of the research is to gain insight into what a group of consumers knows with respect to a particular brand. As the present study primarily concerns the differential effect of providing cues and context, personal dispositions are acknowledged as important in research, but not included as independent variables.

3.3 Influential factors in brand representation research

3.3.1 Activation cues
'Respondents do not respond to survey questions on the basis of a single, fixed set of psychological considerations. Rather, they respond on the basis of whatever material happens to come to mind at the moment of answering. Furthermore, the particular material that comes to mind often depends upon the nature of the question and the manner in which it is posed' (Ottati 1997).

In order to establish what comprises consumer knowledge, this knowledge has to be activated in some way. A researcher needs tools to set off thought processes in the consumer's mind. He will need to ask respondents questions, present them with all kinds of tasks, have them react to stimulus materials, et cetera. Automati-
cally there is a direct influence between the activating material and the activation processes inside respondents’ mind. In this thesis, this influence is referred to as the cueing effect (term derived from Eich 1980). Eich (1980) refers to Tulving’s principle of encoding specificity to account for cueing effects. According to Tulving, specific encoding operations performed on what is perceived will determine what is stored and, in turn, what is stored determines which retrieval cues are effective in providing access to what is stored. The assumption here is that retrieval information contained in the cue will match or complement information stored in memory.

Cueing effects are studied on several levels of interest. On a very basic, fundamental level, research by cognitive scientists has shown the effects that provision of cues has on knowledge activation in numerous experiments. In the cognitive literature, research on cueing effects (also known as ‘associative priming’) primarily relates to processes of learning and retrieval. It concerns the differential effects in recall and recognition caused by the presence or absence of cues. Underlying this effect is the notion of associative relations between concepts. Typical experiments involve learning word lists, and study the effect that (subliminally) providing prime words has on the recall of target words. For example, if the target word is ‘lion’, providing a related prime word ‘tiger’ enhances the recall of ‘lion’, as compared to a non-related prime word like ‘lime’ (Zeelenberg 1998). A cue can be a word, a picture, a sentence, or even a specific context (see next paragraph). In fact, as each measurement method intends to establish the memory content of respondents, all elements embedded in the method (tasks, questions, stimulus material et cetera) can be regarded as cues. Indeed, even out of the experimental setting, our everyday memories, our environment/situations, or even personal roles are cues that influence the activation of knowledge (Smith 1988). We can distinguish three types of cues: copy cues, list cues, and invisible cues (Eich 1980). Copy cues are literal replicas of the items or events to be remembered. List cues are target-related units of information, other than copy cues, for instance, related concepts or category names. Invisible cues are those whose presence cannot be directly perceived by the experimenter, or by the retriever. An invisible cue might be, for example, a physiological or psychological state at the time of retrieval that is identical to the retriever’s state at the time of learning.

The implication of cueing effects is that stored knowledge becomes activated which would not or is less likely to be activated in the absence of the cue. In research settings, providing cues thus leads to obtaining more information from respondents. This can be beneficial for the researcher who is interested in what is inside respondents’ mind. But there are also drawbacks, as cues can also bias the content of recall, in three ways. Firstly, cues may facilitate access to information associated with the cue itself (Anderson and Pichert 1978), and secondly may inhibit access to other related memory content, a phenomenon known as the ‘part-list cueing effect’ (Alba and Chattopadhyay 1985; Costley and Brucks 1992; Hastak and Mitra 1996). Thirdly, providing cues may mean that memory content is not actually activated, but merely created by the cue (or the task requirements) embedded in the research method. This effect will be called the ‘creative cueing effect’. In addition to these biases it is important to consider the direction in which
a cue can activate concepts. The associative strength from brand-to-association may be greater than that of association-to-brand. This difference is known as the asymmetric nature of association strength (Farquhar and Herr 1993; Raaijmakers 1984; Romanik and Sharp 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Shiffrin and Raaijmakers 1992). For example, providing the cue ‘Douwe Egberts’ will probably initially activate concepts like ‘coffee’, ‘coziness’, and perhaps ‘tea’. Maybe in a later stage it will activate competitor brand names. However, if ‘coffee’ is provided as a category cue, competitive brand names are more likely to be activated first. Another interesting finding worth mentioning is that a cue is more effective if the concept it activates has only a small set of associations, and is even more effective if these associations are highly interconnected (Nelson et al 1993, 1997).

In the consumer behavior literature, the notion of cueing effects has only sporadically been addressed explicitly, although its implications must be clear to market researchers as they are embedded in their research methods. Whenever specific research on cueing effects is presented, the dependent variables generally concern product or brand attitudes, preference or choice. Independent variables (causing differential effects) may be one of the following: cues on previously presented advertisements (e.g. Keller 1987), cues provided by the environment (Aaker 1999), nature and presentation order of information and information-related cues (Costley and Brucks 1992; Park 1995), task importance, attribute importance and brand name valence (Maheswaran et al 1992), and number of competing brands (Hastak and Mitra 1996). Nedungadi (1990) concludes from his study on brand recall and consumer consideration set formation that: (1) external cues have separate and different effects on brand consideration and brand evaluation; (2) the probability of brand choice is not only a function of brand evaluation, but also of the accessibility of the brand and its subcategory (brand choice probabilities will depend on the brand’s link to any cues used to access brands); (3) cues intending to increase the accessibility of one brand have indirect and positive effects on the choice of favored competitors. These studies show that there is an effect of providing cues on dependent variables like preference and choice. What has not been researched so far is what the causes this actual effect. The question is how does the presentation of cues alter the mental image of a brand in terms of the types of attributes that are activated and comprise this image? The present research will address this issue.

As indicated previously, the attributes underlying a brand representation vary in nature, ranging from plain concrete knowledge on the product and its use, to abstract matters like emotions and personality. In the previous text, and in the remainder of this thesis, these different types of attributes are treated on a similar level. It needs to be acknowledged that this procedure might lead to a threat of over- or underrating importance when evaluating brands, since some of these attributes are more accessible and more easily retrieved from memory. Cues can play an influential role in this matter. When cues aim solely at concrete attributes, there is a low chance that more abstract attributes will also be activated, and vice versa of course. Apart from the level of abstraction of all the different attributes, another important consideration is the general distinction in verbal versus visual
information. It is a generally accepted notion in cognitive science that people store both pictorial and verbal information. Although it is hitherto not exactly clear whether the storage of both pictorial and verbal information in memory is identical or different, the ease of retrieval is assumed to differ. People are assumed to relate memory content of a more abstract nature more easily to pictorial than to verbal stimuli. For this reason a lot of research methods use projective aids to facilitate the activation and expression of respondents' thoughts. This is not to say, however, that verbal cues are generally less applicable than visual cues in brand evaluative situations (Ericsson and Simon 1980). Costley and Brucks (1992) found that when subjects were provided with both verbal and pictorial information for comparison of brands they did not show picture-induced accessibility biases, and selected the information that was most useful for evaluation.

### 3.3.2 Context

'The psychological object, the object to be categorized, is not itself a fixed entity with only one objective correct description. Rather, psychological objects, like the categories in which we place them, depend in a chameleon-like way on the surrounds'


As described in paragraph 2.3.4, concepts are context dependent. The assumption that concepts are not stable and static representations implies that the manifestation of concepts varies according to the situation in which they are encountered or activated. Barsalou (1982) states that concepts contain two types of properties: context-independent and context-dependent properties. Context-independent properties are activated by the word for a concept on all occasions. The activation of these properties is unaffected by contextual relevance. Conversely, context-dependent properties are not activated by the respective word independent of context, but only by relevant contexts in which the word appears. According to Barsalou, context-independent properties form the core meanings of words, whereas context-dependent properties are a source of semantic encoding variability. Context thus plays an important role in the retrieval of information. McNamara and Diwadkar (1996) argue that information retrieval from memory is guided by the functional role that a particular piece of information plays in the context in which it appears. As such, context evokes the activation of functionally relevant information.

Although the notion of brands reaches somewhat further than the meaning of words, it is very likely that the same principle underlies the activation of brand concepts. In research on brand representations, we need to take into account this context dependency. The question then becomes: what is context? Like brand image, context is an ambiguous yet broadly applied term. In general, research on context effects investigates the influence of environmental elements on the recall or perception of a target object. Context information is usually thought of as information that is present in the processing environment, either at encoding or at retrieval, and that is peripheral or incidental to the cognitive task being performed (Murnane and Phelps 1995). In other words, the environmental elements set a frame of reference for an object to be recalled or perceived, or provide implicit
cues. What is considered context or not differs greatly over studies and research disciplines, and definitions can be either narrow or broad. For instance, a narrow context may refer to objects perceived simultaneously with the target object within one field of vision. These kinds of contexts refer for instance to question order, time pressure, task complexity, response mode et cetera (see Schwarz and Sudman 1992), and have been widely studied in the field of psychological methodology. Context may also be as broad as, for example, mood states (Gardner 1985; Hadjimarcou et al 1996; Schwarz 1986) or an environment, like a neighborhood where one has previously lived. Environments provide an evaluator with information, or implicitly lend a certain perspective. Smith (1988, p. 14) refers to this as environmental context influencing memory: ‘environmental context-dependent memory is a class of phenomena in which cognitive processing is affected in subtle, profound, and sometimes important ways by the coincidental background environmental context in which experiences are set’.

Context may also be an explicit provider of a certain perspective that serves as a mediator in retrieval of information processes. For example, Anderson and Pichert (1978) had respondents read a story about two boys playing hooky from school from the perspective of either a burglar or a person interested in the purchase of a house. After recalling the story once, subjects were required to shift perspectives and then recall the story again. It appeared that there was a significant increase in recall of information important to the new perspective but unimportant to the one operative when the passage was read. Also, context effects are researched with respect to the meaning and relevance of concepts. Roth and Shoben (1983) had subjects rate the typicality of beverages like coffee, tea, and milk. In the absence of a biasing context, subjects rated coffee as a typical beverage, tea as less typical, and milk even less. By manipulating the context, the degree of typicality changed: after reading a story about two secretaries gossiping and drinking a beverage during their morning break, respondents rated the typicality as mentioned previously, but, after reading a story about a truck driver starting his day by having a donut and beverage, the typicality order was coffee, milk, and tea.

More relevant to the focus of this thesis, which is the composition of concepts, is how the elements that comprise the concepts (its attributes) are influenced by context, referred to as concept flexibility (Barsalou 1993). The encoding context in which a word is processed determines its conceptualization. People incorporate different features into a concept depending on the encoding context. For example, when respondents receive the word ‘piano’ in a ‘music’ context, cues relevant to the musical properties of pianos function as optimal cues for retrieval, whereas when respondents receive this word in a ‘moving house’ context, cues relevant to the weight of pianos function as optimal cues (Barclay et al 1974, referred to in Barsalou 1993). Or, consider the word ‘newspaper’. Its attribute ‘flammable’ is not likely to be recalled spontaneously, unless in the context of ‘building a fire’ (Barsalou 1993). A special type of concept formation originates from what Barsalou (1983) refers to as ‘ad hoc categories’. Specific contexts create spontaneous categories of concepts. For example, a context of traveling might create a category of ‘things to take on a camping trip’. These ad hoc categories in turn may
influence the evaluation of its members, as shown by Wänke, Bless and Schwarz (1998). They presented respondents with four products: wine, lobster, tv-guides and cigarettes. Some of their respondents were asked to identify products belonging to the category ‘food’ (resulting in the combination of wine and lobster versus cigarettes and tv-guides), and others to the category ‘to be sold within a short time period’ (resulting in the combination of tv-guides and lobster versus cigarettes and wine). Next, the respondents were asked to rate the product wine along several dimensions. Results showed that wine was evaluated more positively when assigned to an ad hoc category with lobster rather than with cigarettes.

Regarding brands and products in particular, the influence of context has been studied in several fields of interest. In most cases the dependent variable concerns product/brand evaluations or brand preference. The independent variables, the factors inducing a differential effect, change the context in which the consumer as respondent makes his evaluation. In most cases, these are different usage situations, but also concern the presentation of competitors and elaboration on personal experience. Table 3.1 provides an overview of some of the literature on context effects related to brands and products. Most previous research on context effects in the field of brand research focuses on the differential effect of situational information on the preference of brands and other consumer behavioral aspects. Few take attribute importance into account (e.g. Huffman 1997; Miller and Ginter 1979). Although all of these studies report differential effects of context on preference or evaluation, no deeper explanation is provided. The present study narrows the gap between context induction and brand preference studies by focusing on ‘what happens’ if a context is provided. Context is seen as a perspective-providing entity that influences the activation of attribute values. Since different values are activated when a particular context is provided compared to those activated when it is not, this results in a differing attribute importance. This, in turn, affects consequent consumer behavior (like brand evaluation, consideration set formation, and brand choice).

Table 3.1: literature on context effects in consumer research.

<table>
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<th>Dependent</th>
<th>Product/Brand</th>
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<td>product typicality</td>
<td>snack food products</td>
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<td>Miller and Ginter, 1979</td>
<td>usage situations</td>
<td>brand preference and attribute importance</td>
<td>fast food restaurants</td>
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<td>usage situations</td>
<td>brand preference</td>
<td>fragrance brands</td>
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<td>usage situations</td>
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<td>Graeff, 1997</td>
<td>usage situations</td>
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<td>brand category typicality</td>
<td>Haagen-Dazs, Heineken, Crest car brands</td>
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In this thesis, context is conceptualized differently from explicit activation cues in that context is assumed to set a general frame of reference, an evaluative perspective, for the evaluation of brands (and as such influences the activation process), whereas cues explicitly aim to activate specific knowledge elements.
3.3.3 Personal dispositions: involvement

The definition of brand representation states that the set of activated attributes and its specific configuration depends, among other factors, on personal dispositions. These relate to intra-personal factors that momentarily influence the reason behind evaluation. Most relevant to briefly consider at this stage is the notion of involvement, a construct that is often mentioned in line with product- or brand evaluations. Involvement is an ill-defined concept and as such operationalized in many ways. Numerous articles have been written either specifically on involvement constructs or on research using involvement as a mediating factor in situations of choice, evaluation, judgment et cetera. Poiesz (1997) ascribes this ambiguity of the term to the fact that involvement is such an everyday word that it seems to need no definition: each individual researcher 'knows' what it means. As a result, a lot of operationalizations have arisen in the literature, and although each one has certain plausibility to it, this has made comparisons difficult. In the literature, involvement has been related to, for example, products, purchase decisions, brands and advertisements. Involvement has to do with the degree to which 'things matter' to a person. It relates to either personal relevance, to an amount of arousal, interest or drive evoked by a particular stimulus, to a person's activation level, or to goal-directed arousal capacity (Ratchford 1987).

From the studies conducted using involvement in a number of operationalizations, it can be concluded that it makes quite a difference at evaluation if consumers have either high or low involvement with products, brands, or advertisements. When brand evaluations are seen as multi-attributive evaluation models, the level of involvement with the brand or product under question is assumed to direct the type of strategy applied to lead to an evaluative result. In choice as well as in judgment situations, when involvement is high people tend to rely on a more 'strict' decision strategy, seek information on numerous attributes but greatly restrict the number of alternatives, and put more emphasis on the negative aspects of the input information. Hence, they tend to use a conjunctive strategy ('considering minimal satisfying attribute levels'). On the other hand, when involvement is low, people tend to rely on disjunctive strategies ('considering maximal attribute levels') and memory-based purchases instead of purchases based on gathering and processing information 'in-store' (Ganzach 1995; Gensch and Javalgi 1987; Leong 1993).

Involvement also plays an important role in the ability to access information from memory. With respect to product judgments, Park and Hastak (1994) state that involved consumers are more motivated to form a relatively accurate judgment compared to uninvolved consumers (involvement defined as personal relevance/ importance of the product under study). They further argue that involved consumers form evaluations that are carefully reasoned and thus accurate and reliable whereas uninvolved consumers form evaluations that are relatively superficial and thus prone to be less accurate and less reliable. They further state that the level of involvement at retrieval influences the intensity of memory search for relevant information. This is because uninvolved consumers are likely to rely on the most accessible inputs regardless of their quality, while more involved consumers
attempt to retrieve more relevant information, even if this requires more cognitive effort. Higher levels of involvement can lead to greater use of both affective and cognitive decision-making heuristics.

In the studies to be described in the next chapters, the level of involvement of individual respondents is not explicitly taken into account as the main focus is on the differential effect of cues and context on obtaining results from measurements. Both cues and context are considered to be measurement characteristics, whereas involvement is a personal construct that can never be embedded in a method. As such, although respondents' level of involvement with the products/brands under study will naturally differ, when it comes to comparing the results of measurement varying over the factors cue and context, only this involvement level difference is considered similar in all conditions and as such of no influence. The notion of involvement is acknowledged as an important factor in brand evaluation, and applied in a practical sense in the choice of products. Products have been chosen which are different in their degree of consumer involvement. For example, in the second study, automobiles are chosen as representatives of high involvement products, and detergents as low involvement products.

3.4 Summarizing

This chapter has set out to provide insight into the nature of and difficulties in the establishment of brand representations. After a brief description of currently applied measurement methods, an argument is made against the assumptions embedded within these methods. The main argument is that these methods assume certain attributes to be part of the representation of a brand, and as such to be stored in memory. The next assumption is that these presumed existing attributes are also of relevance to the brand. Although both assumptions might be perfectly valid for certain brands, they will not hold for all brands, yet standard applied methods might not fully appreciate this. This could lead to the resulting brand image, which is the 'established' brand representation, being based on irrelevant attributes, or artificially created attributes. Before starting to measure what is assumed to represent a brand, ideally we should start from scratch and establish which attributes primarily represent the brand, primarily referring to both those that are actually stored in memory and, at the same time, are of relevance to the brand. The establishment of the actual presence and the relevance of attributes is not fixed but depends on all kinds of factors. Three of these factors are looked at in detail: activation cues, activation context, and involvement. These factors might interfere with the establishment of a brand image. In this thesis, the differential effect of the first two factors is established. By varying these ‘methodological’ factors in the establishment of the image of a specific brand, the aim is to produce different resulting brand images, since, from these results, one could state that any 'measured' brand image is, in fact, a conditional brand representation manifestation. It is a situation-specific manifestation. The consequences of such a finding relate primarily to the current practice of applying standardized measurement methods and, secondly, to the commonly assumed link between research findings and purchase or consumer behavioral variables. These possible implications will,
however, only be discussed hypothetically, they are not a topic of study in themselves.