The Relevance of Irrelevance in Brand Communication

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ABSTRACT

Brand managers strive to achieve an outstanding position in the psyche of the user by differentiating the product and service. In order to do so, brands are now often promoted by communications that focus on a trivial attribute difference. The current study tests both how the use of such an irrelevant attribute affects the perceptions of the consumer and how they rate the brand when the irrelevance of the attribute is previously revealed. The results of a controlled experiment (n = 894) show that the use of irrelevant attributes generally has a positive effect on buying behavior and that this effect is obtained even when the actual irrelevance is previously proven to the consumer. Further, the results are consistent across a variety of outcome variables, including attention, perceived uniqueness, price fairness, attitude toward the brand, and intention to buy the brand. © 2010 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

It has been observed for a fairly long time that firms successfully distinguish brands by means of features that do not fulfill the criterion of having objective relevance. This is the way that La Prairie, for example, differentiates its face treatment product Cellular Radiance Concentrate Pure Gold of the brand series The Swiss Cellular De-Agers from competing brands through the addition of micro-particles of 24-karat gold extracts. The face serum really contains particles of gold (La Prairie, 2008), but the addition of gold has no medically proven effects on its performance, namely to nourish and treat the skin as well as to maintain the moisture of the skin (Öko-Test, 2005.) Another example is Goldwell, which differentiates its shampoo brand Kerasilk through the addition of...
silk proteins (Goldwell, 2008). However, it is not silk proteins that straighten hair and make it shine, but artificial additives like silicon (Öko-Test, 2005).

Features that, after cursory reasoning, appear to make a significant difference but in reality are objectively insignificant for the performance of the product are characterized as irrelevant attributes (Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003; Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994). As a result, an irrelevant attribute concerns either an objectively irrelevant feature that does not provide any physical-chemical-technical utility (pct-utility) or an attribute whose contribution to the product is so trivial or marginal that it must be regarded as irrelevant (Brown & Carpenter, 2000). The term irrelevant, however, does not mean that consumers ascribe no meaning to the irrelevant attribute prior to and after the purchase decision. Rather, the term refers to attributes that are irrelevant regarding the provision of any pct-utility.

Although such features do not seem to offer any provable pct-utility, they are employed by firms in order to highlight the superiority of their products (Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994). Recent research on the effects of brand names has shown that brand names generally elicit expectations as to the product’s attributes on the part of the recipients. Attribute performance is rated more favorably on dimensions congruent with brand name associations (Wänke, Herrmann, & Schaffner, 2007a, 2007b). Irrelevant attributes that are advertised with impressive-sounding slogans apparently prompt the recipient to ascribe a positive effect to them due to this “preprogrammed” thought structure (“gold glitters,” “silk shines”) (Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994). For consumers it is practically impossible to verify the firm’s implicit claims regarding the application of the pct-utility caused by a feature (Hoch & Deighton, 1989). Even after using the product, the consumer cannot tell to which pct-features an existing effect can be attributed. The only way to reveal the irrelevance of a feature is to consult independent sources such as consumer protection organizations, experts, or test reports. As to the legal framework, firms are allowed to use irrelevant attributes in their brand communications as long as they really integrate the advertised substances into the products. It does not matter how consumers explain the performance or quality of a specific product as long as the product comes up to what the consumer expects from its performance or quality (see Appendix D for the legal framework in detail). Even though independent sources make objective information about the product performance available to the consumer (e.g., Consumer Reports), the use of irrelevant attributes as an instrument for brand differentiation is constantly increasing in importance in marketing practice. Apparently, this feature makes the brand appear advantageous to the consumer because a subjectively perceived connection exists between the irrelevant attribute and the product quality. Although this form of brand differentiation is gaining in importance in managerial practice, study approaches are confined to specific research contexts. In the relevant literature, only singularly separated effects of irrelevant attributes on the brand choice behavior of consumers are analyzed with the help of choice experiments (e.g., Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994; Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 1997, 2003; Brown & Carpenter, 2000; Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2002). Appendix A neatly summarizes the key findings of existing research on the effects of irrelevant attributes within the scope of choice experiments. It can be shown that it is the intention of these studies to find out which brands are preferred by consumers within a choice set of several brands that can have an irrelevant attribute. More precisely, prior
research has focused on the consumer’s judgment of brands that use and do not use an irrelevant attribute by asking the consumer to indicate his or her most and least preferred brand. Accordingly, the results of these studies are always confined to consumer-oriented choice situations that vary in relation to the brands presented. Thus, the basic effect—that irrelevant attributes impact product judgments—has been established in prior choice experiments. Although this approach is of great managerial relevance, the findings in the context of choice experiments do not give any information as to why consumers have chosen a particular brand. Thus, previous work so far has not looked at the psychological processes that take place prior to the consumer’s choice or purchase decision, respectively. But it is these psychological processes that finally explain why consumers respond to specific stimuli or not, that is, whether they choose or do not choose specific brands. Generally, psychological processes can, among other things, be characterized by attention, perception, understanding, and attitude formation processes (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007). The current study focuses on this research gap regarding why consumers choose a brand that differentiates itself from competing brands with the use of an irrelevant attribute and provides considerable insight into this research field. In order to examine the effects of irrelevant attributes in a well-differentiated way, the research interest of this study concentrates on the impact of irrelevant attributes on latent constructs that are important prior to the actual buying decision and additionally reflect the consumer’s “psychological core” (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007), namely the constructs of attention toward the brand, perceived uniqueness of the brand, perceived price fairness of the brand, attitude toward the brand, and, finally, intention to buy the brand. Moreover, the effects of irrelevant attributes are comprehensively analyzed both in case of revelation of the irrelevance prior to the rating of the brand and in case of nonrevelation of the irrelevance. To overcome systematic biases that could arise from the use of several brands in the research design, the current study uses only one fictitious brand as an object of investigation. Since the analyzed constructs are direct or indirect sources of consumer-oriented brand value (Aaker, 1996; Chaudhuri, 2002; Farquhar, 1989; Netemeyer et al., 2004), the implications of this study are significant for brand managers.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE EFFECTS OF IRRELEVANT ATTRIBUTES

Within the scope of a choice experiment where subjects have to rate brands in a choice set by indicating their least and most preferred brand, Carpenter, Glazer, and Nakamoto (1994) are able to show for the first time that the use of an irrelevant product-related attribute induces an increased preference for this brand as opposed to the brands without this irrelevant attribute and that irrelevant attributes continue having a positive effect on the preference even if the irrelevance of the attribute is revealed to consumers prior to their choice decision. The insight into the consumers’ preference for a brand with an irrelevant attribute has been supported again in an empirical study by Brown and Carpenter (2000); the insight into the consumers’ preference for a brand with an irrelevant attribute whose irrelevance is previously revealed has also been supported in studies by Broniarczyk and Gershoff (1997, 2003). Furthermore, in a
two-stage choice experiment, Broniarczyk and Gershoff (2003) show that brands with an irrelevant attribute whose irrelevance has previously been revealed to the consumers are still partially preferred to other brands without the irrelevant attribute within the scope of the consumers’ second choice. This preference, however, is dependent on the brand equity.

Further studies conducted in different research contexts help to explain the causes of the positive effects of irrelevant attributes. These studies do not focus on irrelevant attributes per se, but their results can nevertheless be drawn on for the current research. Houston, Sherman, and Baker (1989, 1991), Houston and Sherman (1995), and Dhar and Sherman (1996) show that in the decision process, consumers pay more attention to unique features of an alternative. In addition, the research results of Nowlis and Simonson (1996) as well as Mukherjee and Hoyer (2001) show that the existence of new types of features favorably affects product evaluation. The recognition that new types of information fundamentally receive a higher significance within the context of the perception process has long been well established in perception psychology (Wyer, 1970).

Simonson, Nowlis, and Simonson (1993), on the other hand, provide evidence that irrelevant attributes have a negative effect on brand choice. In their research work, more precisely, they examine the effects irrelevant preference arguments have on the consumer’s choice probability of products. From their results it can be assumed that the consumer interprets an irrelevant attribute as an indicator that the brand is inferior in other areas. Simonson, Carmon, and O’Curry (1994), too, show that the existence of a feature that possesses little or no value to the consumer presents the consumer with a clue that he or she is dealing with a less attractive alternative. The use of such an attribute can lead to the so-called “dilution effect” if the feature is rated negatively. The marginal or complete negative value that the consumer attaches to the attribute negatively distorts the alternative’s overall rating and thus reduces the perceived advantageousness of the brand (Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2002; Simonson, Carmon, & O’Curry, 1994; Tetlock & Boettger, 1989). The dilution effect persists even if the consumers find out about the irrelevance prior to their choice decision (Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2002).

The insights from the research review suggest that consumers use irrelevant attributes to make their decisions and that the existence of these attributes influences the perception and decision behavior. However, the results concerning the direction of the effects evoked by the existence of an irrelevant attribute are rather contradictory. Brown and Carpenter (2000) assume that a given irrelevant attribute, independent from the decision context, can be rated both positively and negatively. In a decision situation, consumers mostly choose the alternative that is founded on easily justifiable, cognitively available arguments (Hsee, 1995; Kunda, 1990; Shafir,Simonson, & Tversky, 1993; Simonson, 1989). Ideally, this process enables consumers to make up well-founded arguments that are based on the existence of the relevant attribute and clearly makes a brand appear to be favorable. If, however, this decision cannot be justified based on relevant features, consumers form arguments based on irrelevant attributes. This heuristic approach is referred to as “instrumental reasoning” and clarifies that consumers also rate an irrelevant attribute independently from the existence of other product attributes (Bastardi & Shafir, 1998; Fischer et al., 1999).

The decision problem and the usefulness of rating the irrelevant attribute are determined by the number of alternatives in the choice set and by the number of alternatives in the choice set with an irrelevant attribute. If in a choice set of homogeneous brands only one is differentiated with an irrelevant attribute,
as in the experimental design of Carpenter, Glazer, and Nakamoto (1994), then a positive rating of the irrelevant attribute is more effective than a negative one because the rating justifies the choice of exactly one brand. If, in contrast, only one brand in the choice set does not have the irrelevant attribute, then a devaluation of the irrelevant attribute seems reasonable in terms of decision simplification or justification.

If subjects are presented with only two brands, as in the experiment of Simonson, Nowlis, and Simonson (1993), both a positive and a negative rating help to solve the decision problem. The search for a reason to prefer a brand will therefore depend on whether the irrelevant attribute evokes positive or negative associations. The experiments conducted by Brown and Carpenter (2000) provide empirical support for these assumptions. The context dependence of the effects of irrelevant attributes, depending on the number of brands that have them, is supported by the studies of Broniarczyk and Gershoff (1997, 2003). Thus, the diverging results of the studies do not contradict each other, but rather merely reveal the instrumental approach of consumers when they justify their decisions.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Attention

Attention is the basic requirement for any perceptual activity. It reduces and directs the array of potential information that comes into contact with the organism. Only those stimuli that create attention—that is, they lead to a temporary increase in the activation of an individual—are selected and gain access to the information processing system (Ratneshwar et al., 1997). Numerous studies confirm the influence of novel (Mukherjee & Hoyer, 2001; Nowlis & Simonson, 1996; Wyer, 1970), salient (Hutchinson & Alba, 1991; Ratneshwar, Mick, & Reitinger, 1990), and unique (Dhar & Nowlis, 1999; Dhar & Sherman, 1996; Houston & Sherman, 1995; Houston, Sherman, & Baker, 1989; Zhou & Nakamoto, 2007) product features on the evaluation and decision process of the consumer. Since features that are perceived through attention have an increased probability of influencing the evaluation process, it can be assumed that the effect of novel, salient, and unique product attributes originates from the attention-triggering nature of these features.

A brand can differentiate itself from competing brands by having an irrelevant attribute. In doing so, the irrelevant attribute can be a feature that is either completely new for the consumer or new in the sense that it has not been used before in conjunction with the product category. If the competing brands in the situation do not exhibit this feature, then the irrelevant attribute is both unique and salient in relation to the context. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1a: The use of an irrelevant attribute in brand communications leads to increased attention of the consumer.

Uniqueness of the Brand

The perceived uniqueness of a brand determines its position within a product category (Sujan & Bettman, 1989). It is defined as “the degree to which customers
feel the brand is different from competing brands—how distinct it is relative to competitors” (Netemeyer et al., 2004, p. 211). Its importance is due to the fact that brands take on an identification and self-portrayal function for the consumer (Aaker, 1997; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The perception of personal uniqueness is extremely important for the concept of self. Research results show that individuals feel the need to differentiate themselves from others (Codol, 1987; Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Rogier, 1997; Vignoles, Chryssochoou, & Breakwell, 2000). Since consumer activities provide an opportunity to express uniqueness, this uniqueness also has an effect on buying behavior (Burns & Warren, 1995; Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Snyder, 1992). Tian, Bearden, and Hunter (2001) argue that consumers’ need for uniqueness, defined as an individual’s pursuit of differentiation through the acquisition and use of consumer goods, mirrors the process of maintaining both self-image and social image. Objects are suited for displaying one’s own self-concept because people consciously or unconsciously consider their possessions as part of themselves. According to Belk (1988), possessions of individuals can be understood as “extended self.” Thus, a consumer strives for products that are suitable for allowing the expression of his or her personal uniqueness (Lynn & Harris, 1997b). The symbolic use of unique brands communicates the unique personality and individuality of the consumer.

The differentiation of a brand from its competitors and the communicative implementation of uniqueness in the form of a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) (Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b) offer the possibility of addressing the need for uniqueness because the judgment of a brand’s uniqueness is often inferred from the differentiating communication message (Netemeyer et al., 2004). An irrelevant attribute concerns a feature that can be communicated and that other brands do not exhibit. Since the attribute dominance of even a single novel product feature can influence the formation of an overall impression, it can be expected that the existence of an irrelevant attribute causes a differentiation effect. Hence:

**H2a:** The use of an irrelevant attribute in brand communications leads to an increase in perceived uniqueness of the brand.

**Price Fairness**

In academic literature, it is always emphasized that a brand’s differentiation from its competition reduces the consumer’s price sensitivity and thereby provides the firm with a “quasi-monopolistic” margin (Chaudhuri, 2002; Maxwell, 2002). As part of price perception, the concept of price fairness describes the subjective feeling of appropriateness and fairness of the pricing of the firm (Campbell, 1999).

The most influential research on the construct of price fairness has been done by Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1986a, 1986b). The authors specify the change of the firm’s profit as a central determinant of the perceived price fairness. According to the Dual Entitlement Concept, the purchase of a product is the result of a reference transaction that is characterized by a reference price (e.g., market prices, nonbinding recommended retail prices, or a price paid in the past) and a referent profit of the firm (Kalapurakal, Dickson, & Urbany, 1991). Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1986a, 1986b) show that cost-related price increases that do not change the profit of a firm are perceived as fair by potential consumers.
The most important explanation of how individuals form judgments about price fairness is provided by the Equity Theory, which focuses on the perceived fairness of social exchange relationships (Homans, 1961). The theory follows the premise that individuals compare their own contributions in an exchange relationship (input) and the result from it (output) to the contributions of input and output of all parties concerned. Fairness then exists if the relationship of input and output between all parties concerned is perceived as equal (Homburg, Koschate, & Hoyer, 2005; Martins & Monroe, 1994). From the consumer’s perspective, the product price in particular indicates the input, whereas the benefit of the product and its social effects indicate the output (Homans, 1961).

What has been said so far about the construct of price fairness shows that the consumer always evaluates a product or service as a subjectively perceived cost–benefit relationship. Since the consumer is usually not in a position to grasp the input and output due to asymmetric information, the difference between a subjectively perceived product value and the price demanded by the firm is very important for his or her fairness judgment (Oliver & Swan, 1989a, 1989b). If the consumer judges the price–benefit relationship to be good, he or she will also attribute price fairness to the brand (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1986b). Netemeyer et al. (2004) show that the perceived relationship between benefit and cost influences both the willingness to pay a price premium and the buying behavior concerning the brand.

If these considerations about price fairness are carried over to the topic of the current study, it is plausible to hypothesize that an irrelevant attribute also positively influences the perception of price fairness. The existence of an irrelevant attribute, as opposed to its nonexistence, suggests higher manufacturing costs to the potential consumer that have not been added into the product price and thus inevitably reduce the firm’s profit. By analogy to the conclusions of the Dual Entitlement Concept, the product price is thus judged as fair. According to the Equity Theory, the additional benefit gained from the use of an irrelevant attribute should also have a positive effect on the equity relationship in the exchange situation in the form of an increased output of the customer and increased input of the firm. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forth:

\[ H_{3a}: \text{The use of an irrelevant attribute in brand communications leads to an increase in perceived price fairness.} \]

**Attitude Toward the Brand and Intention to Buy the Brand**

Attitudes represent a consumer’s general value judgment with respect to a good or service (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) and can be based on both cognitions and emotions (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007). The promotional emphasis of an irrelevant attribute, in the form of a Unique Advertising Proposition (UAP) that is perceived positively by the consumer, can positively influence the attitude toward the brand (Edell & Burke, 1987; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). In the context of the communication message, the irrelevant attribute can be used to evoke positive affective reactions from the consumer by, for example, prompting associations of exclusivity. These associations, in turn, can put the consumer in a positive mood through the connection of subjective experiences and in this way affect his or her attitude formation. On a cognitive level, due to its uniqueness, the existence of an irrelevant attribute allows the consumer to
draw conclusions regarding the utility of the brand. Since the supplier of branded goods induces such conclusions through the communication of an irrelevant attribute, these conclusions are cognitively easily accessible to the consumer (Johar & Simmons, 2000). Broniarczyk and Gershoff (1997, 2003) are able to show empirically that consumers do indeed draw conclusions from irrelevant attributes.

Furthermore, research results suggest that consumers generally assume that marketers devise their communications in such a way as to improve the attitude toward their products (Friestad & Wright, 1994). If this is correct, then the introduction of a new, irrelevant attribute should be interpreted by the consumer as a signal for additional value of the attribute (Mukherjee & Hoyer, 2001). It also seems plausible that irrelevant attributes give consumers a reason to draw on them as an explanation for better performance of the brand and make attributions to that effect. According to Einhorn and Hogarth (1986) and McGill (1989), unusual features in particular influence the consumer’s perception. In this sense, the irrelevant attribute also serves as a heuristic for attitude formation. According to the attitude–behavior hypothesis, attitudes influence the intention to buy (Miniard, Obermiller, & Page, 1983). These considerations lead to the following hypotheses:

**H4a:** The use of an irrelevant attribute in brand communications leads to a more positive consumer attitude toward the brand.

**H5a:** The use of an irrelevant attribute in brand communications leads to a higher intention to buy the brand.

**Effects when Irrelevance Is Previously Revealed**

According to the normative decision theory, if the irrelevance of an attribute were to be disclosed to consumers prior to their evaluation of the brand, they would recognize that the irrelevant attribute provides no benefit and thus they would attach no value to it in their judgment of the brand (Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). Research results indicate that an irrelevant attribute is not ignored when a judgment or decision is made; however, the existence of such an attribute still continues to make the brand seem unique within a huge choice set of brands and therefore differentiates it from other brands. Since in the consumer’s perception the differentiated brand still has a salient effect, it will continue to be favored when compared to other brands. The irrelevant attribute simplifies the decision situation despite its communicated irrelevance (Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994).

This effect can be explained by a multitude of cognitive biases that arise in the evaluation process. Gilovich (1981) shows that confrontation with irrelevant information triggers the formation of associations that do not disappear despite their irrelevance. Consistent with this finding, research results give evidence for the existence of two more effects. The first effect, called the “hind-sight bias,” describes the biased judgment of past events after which information about the outcome is known (Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 1999; Fischhoff, 1975; Hawkins & Hastie, 1990). The second effect, called the “anchor effect,” claims that the specification of an arbitrary number prompts people to orient themselves around this number if a numerical assessment is required (Strack & Mussweiler,
Both examples give evidence of the influence of information that actually should not be considered. If these findings are adapted to the object of investigation in the current study, it can be assumed that in the decision process, the consumer will also take an attribute into consideration that he or she recognizes as irrelevant.

According to the “perseverance effect,” individuals furthermore have a basic tendency to cling to their beliefs and opinions. Previous studies have shown that first impressions remain, even if new information does not confirm them (Asch, 1946; Kelley, 1950). More recent studies look into people's reaction toward the discrediting of original beliefs by reliable sources. The results confirm that individuals cling to their opinions, even if it is clearly proven that the original basis for their opinion is either incorrect or does not exist (Anderson, Lepper, & Ross, 1980; Lepper, Ross, & Lau, 1986; Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard, 1975). The negation of a piece of information thus does not lead to the abandonment of a belief; rather, it leads to the devaluation of the negative information.

Johar and Simmons (2000) demonstrate that the correction of false conclusions concerns a two-level process in which announced, informative, or corrective information is first encoded and then later used. The actual use of the encoded information, however, only takes place at very high processing intensity. Numerous studies (Gilbert, Krull, & Malone, 1990; Gilbert, Tafarodi, & Malone, 1993; Martin, Seta, & Crelia, 1990) have found support for the conclusion that the correction of a judgment concerns a very complex process.

Johar and Simmons (2000) emphasize that conclusions—for example, about the quality of a brand—are drawn intuitively from corresponding cues due to their cognitive availability and that it is not easy to block them. This means that such conclusions are made inevitably and independently of the knowledge at hand about clarifying information. Thus, information that reveals an erroneous conclusion is not used as a heuristic for the judgment of a brand, but rather—if at all—it is used for later revision of false conclusions. Hutchinson and Alba (1991) show that the consumer's analytical abilities are also influenced by the perceived salience of an attribute. If an irrelevant attribute is salient, it gets in the way of the learning process and inhibits the necessary analytical processing of clarifying information (Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 1997; Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994).

Based on these considerations, it can be plausibly reasoned that the exposure of information that reveals the irrelevance of an attribute is indeed recognized by consumers, that is, they recognize that an irrelevant attribute possesses no value. It is to be expected, however, that consumers do not fully integrate this information into their judgment of the brand due to the lack of necessary processing capacity. As a result, it can be assumed that consumers also judge a brand differentiated by an irrelevant attribute more positively when they are previously made aware of the irrelevance of the differentiating attribute. For this reason, by analogy to the considerations about the effect of an irrelevant attribute without clarifying information, for this study the following hypotheses are derived for the selected constructs that analyze the effect of the irrelevant attribute under the condition that the irrelevance is revealed to the consumers prior to their evaluation of the brand:

In brand communications, the use of an irrelevant attribute whose irrelevance is revealed to the consumer prior to their evaluation of the brand leads
H1b: to increased attention of the consumer,

H2b: to an increase in perceived uniqueness of the brand,

H3b: to an increase in perceived price fairness for the brand,

H4b: to a more positive attitude toward the brand, and

H5b: to an increased intention to buy the brand.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

An experimental research design was used to test the hypotheses. The Internet-based experiment simulated the consumer's confrontation with a brand that differentiated itself from other brands by the addition of a fictitious irrelevant attribute. To avoid systematic biases that could arise from potential influences of existing brands, a fictitious shampoo brand was used as the object of investigation. Moreover, only one brand was integrated into the current research design to avoid systematic biases that could be caused by the use of several brands. The choice of shampoo as the product was made not only because of the increasing pervasiveness of the brand differentiation strategy of using an irrelevant attribute in this product category (Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003) but also because of the dominant position that this basic product holds within cosmetics and personal hygiene.

The experimental design was based on three treatments: the experimental group 1 (IA), the experimental group 2 (IA_revealed) and the control group 3 (IA_without). In all treatments, the subjects were presented with a brand that was advertised in the media with a fixed price. The product price was set to €2.39 due to the mean value of shampoo available in a leading commercial chain. To enable the subjects to intuitively gain access to the product category used, the brand that was advertised in the media was presented with a branded shampoo packaging (see Figures 1 and 2).

In experimental groups 1 and 2, the product illustration contained a reference to the fictitious ingredient Kurkumin. While the subjects in the first group received no information about the irrelevant attribute, the subjects in the second group were confronted with an informative text that revealed the irrelevance of the attribute (see Appendix B). The branded shampoo packaging was presented without the irrelevant attribute to the subjects in the control group. With the exception of the integration of the irrelevant attribute, the visual and textual design was identical across all three treatment groups. The ingredient Kurkumin thus constituted the independent variable of the experiment. Due to the chosen research design, which did not focus on preference ratings of several brands, the current study did not ask subjects to simultaneously rate several alternatives.

The course of the experiment took place in three stages (see Figure 3). After a short introductory text and the questionnaire that contained sociodemographic questions, the subjects were randomly assigned to the groups. In the second phase, subjects were first presented with the shampoo packaging of the fictitious brand “Suprema X.” A fictitious brand was chosen to a priori exclude spillover
effects due to the subjects’ past experiences with a brand. The time span of the presentation of the stimulus in the experimental design was fixed to one minute in order to prevent the subjects from experiencing negative responses due to fatigue.

After one minute, the subjects in experimental group 2 received an extract from a test report that revealed the irrelevance of the attribute. In the third phase, the subjects of all groups were transferred to the second questionnaire, which contained questions about the latent constructs (see Appendix C for the survey instrument used in the study).

Five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) were used to measure the model constructs. In a pretest with 31 subjects, the reliability of all measures was verified. Cronbachs $\alpha$, the item-to-total correlation, the empirical correlation matrix, and an exploratory factor analysis taking the
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) criterion into account served as an orientation aid for the evaluation of the reliability and validity of the construct measurement. Table 1 shows that all scales exhibit excellent values, which infers a high precision for the measurements used (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). Discriminant validity was assessed on the basis of the criteria that Fornell and Larcker (1981) propose. The results did not show any violations.

The online experiment was carried out from July 28 to October 28, 2004. Some 894 subjects completed the entire experiment. Of these, 415 (46.4%) of the participants were female and 479 (53.6%) were male. The mean age of the subjects was 29.7 years, with an age range between 18 and 73 years. Randomization led to equivalent group sizes in the three experimental groups ($n_1 = 298; n_2 = 296; n_3 = 300$). A comparison of the three groups showed that these did not significantly differ from each other with respect to the characteristics of gender, age, and highest level
of education reached ($p \geq 0.4$). This was determined by conducting the U-test for comparing nonparametric, independent samples (Hair et al., 2006).

The hypotheses were verified with the help of the MANOVA method (multivariate analysis of variance) to confirm their validity. Subsequently, the post-hoc test was applied. The independent factor “treatment” contained the three factor levels “with irrelevant attribute (IA),” “with irrelevant attribute and revealed irrelevance (IArevealed),” and “without irrelevant attribute (IAwithout).” The constructs “attention,” “perceived uniqueness,” “perceived price fairness,” “attitude toward the brand,” and “intention to buy” represented the dependent variables. All conditions precedent to the implementation of the MANOVA were fulfilled (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 1. Operationalization of the Constructs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
<th>KMO</th>
<th>Variance Explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention toward the brand</td>
<td>Following Laczniak &amp; Muehling (1993)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>0.916</td>
<td>71.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived uniqueness</td>
<td>Netemeyer et al. (2004)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.920</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>75.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived price fairness</td>
<td>Following Bearden, Carlson, &amp; Hardesty (2003)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.955</td>
<td>0.976</td>
<td>67.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the brand</td>
<td>Following Sujan &amp; Bettman (1989); Zinkhan, Locander, &amp; Leigh (1986)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>0.922</td>
<td>75.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to buy</td>
<td>Following Dodds, Monroe, &amp; Grewal (1991)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>0.901</td>
<td>69.41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A manipulation check was executed, which proved that the irrelevant attribute was actually irrelevant for the subjects of the treatment group IA revealed. The results of a $t$-test for mean value differences showed that the subjects in the group with revealed irrelevance recognized this irrelevance and attached a significantly lower importance to this attribute ($t_{H11005} = 5.448; p_{H11349} = 0.001$).

The analyses of the multivariate tests within the scope of the MANOVA showed that the results for Wilks’ lambda ($F_{H11005} = 3.569; p_{H11349} = 0.001$), for Pillai’s trace criterion ($F_{H11005} = 3.547; p_{H11349} = 0.001$), for Hotelling’s $T^2$ ($F_{H11005} = 3.591; p_{H11349} = 0.001$), as well as for Roy’s gcr (greatest characteristic root) criterion ($F_{H11005} = 6.670; p_{H11349} = 0.001$) were highly significant. Thus, the interpretation of the following results can be accepted.

Due to the significant results of the variance analysis, for all dependent variables it can be reasoned that a significant difference exists. From the result of the $F$-test, it can be assumed that the group mean values do not turn out to be equivalent. This does not necessarily mean, however, that all mean values significantly differ from one another. In order to find out between which groups a significant mean value difference exists, a multiple comparison test with the Scheffé test was conducted, which analyzed the separate groups in pairs for possible mean value differences. The results of this post-hoc test between the experimental groups and the control group were all significant across all the outcome variables (see Table 2); hence, all postulated hypotheses about the effect of an irrelevant attribute are supported.

In addition, tests were performed for differences between the groups IA (with irrelevant attribute) and $I_{A_{\text{revealed}}}^{}$, where the irrelevance of the attribute was proven to the consumers. The Scheffé test showed no significant differences between the groups ($p > 0.4$), so it can be assumed that it does not make a difference if the consumers know about the irrelevance of the attribute or not.

### Table 2. Mean Values of the Constructs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>$I_{A}$ Group with Irrelevant Attribute</th>
<th>$I_{A_{\text{revealed}}}$ Group with Irrelevant Attribute and Revelation</th>
<th>$I_{A_{\text{without}}}$ Group Without Irrelevant Attribute</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Level of Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention toward the brand</td>
<td>3.08$^a$</td>
<td>3.10$^a$</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>8.127</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.01^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived uniqueness</td>
<td>2.62$^a$</td>
<td>2.65$^a$</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>15.457</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.01^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived price fairness</td>
<td>4.30$^a$</td>
<td>4.29$^a$</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>4.335</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.05^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the brand</td>
<td>3.67$^a$</td>
<td>3.61$^a$</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>5.643</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.01^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to buy</td>
<td>3.25$^a$</td>
<td>3.15$^a$</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>7.451</td>
<td>$p &lt; 0.01^{**}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Significantly different from control group ($I_{A_{\text{without}}}$), $p < 0.05$.

Theoretical scale range: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

$^a$ Significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

$^{**}$ Significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.
CONCLUSION

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The current study supports the increasing importance of brand differentiation by the use of irrelevant attributes in managerial practice and offers a look into different psychological processes of perception and decision making of consumers that explain the effect of irrelevant attributes. The results of the study thus make a contribution to the explanation of the brand differentiation strategy of incorporating irrelevant attributes that until now has been given little scientific attention, and they provide a basis for a more in-depth scientific study of this topic.

The results of the current study have to be interpreted in consideration of the specific research design: An unknown brand was deliberately used in the experiment to prevent spillover effects of a “strong” brand. Moreover, it was assumed that there was no brand to compare the unknown brand to. The revelation of the irrelevance took place prior to the buying decision.

The analysis of the effect of irrelevant attributes by means of an experimental study revealed that this increases the consumer’s attention and leads to an increase in the perception of uniqueness of the brand. It could further be shown that the irrelevant attribute causes the perception of an increased price fairness of the brand. It has a positive effect on the attitude toward the brand and leads to a significantly higher intention to buy the brand. Moreover, the current study provides evidence that the positive effects of the irrelevant attribute even appear when the irrelevance of the attribute is previously revealed. Despite the knowledge of the irrelevance, the brand differentiated by this attribute is rated more positively. In this respect, yet another decision anomaly can be considered as verified.

For managerial practice, it can be recommended that the targeted use of an irrelevant attribute provides the brand’s firm with an effective instrument for differentiating its own brand from its competitors. Through the corresponding promotional emphasis of an irrelevant attribute, all of the constructs tested in the context of this research paper can be positively influenced. These additionally represent direct or indirect sources of consumer-oriented brand value (Aaker, 1996; Chaudhuri, 2002; Farquhar, 1989; Netemeyer et al., 2004). The addition of an irrelevant attribute consequently serves to increase the consumer-oriented brand value. Furthermore, the perception of the irrelevant attribute as an additional benefit and the assumed influence on the perceived price fairness of the brand expand the branding firm’s price margin. The results imply that the irrelevant attribute can lead to an observed differentiation of the brand from the consumer’s perspective, although in reality no significant difference exists. Finally, and yet importantly, this creates a competitive advantage for a brand that differentiates itself with an irrelevant attribute because the differentiation incurs only comparatively low costs on the part of the firm.

It is, however, uncertain if this competitive advantage can be sustained long-term. With respect to this point, it is of interest that consumers primarily update their original preferences by testing the brand (Carpenter & Nakamoto, 1989). In doing so, due to the confirmatory bias that leads to the confirmation of original beliefs, it can be assumed that the preference and therefore the competitive advantage for the brand will most likely be strengthened rather than eroded (Hoch & Ha, 1986; Hutchinson & Alba, 1991). Not even information about the irrelevance of the attribute eliminates its positive effect. Examples from real life confirm the
enduring success of this brand differentiation strategy (e.g., Kerasilk shampoo, Sunsilk shampoo). Long-term success, however, can only occur if the consumer is satisfied with the brand.

It is to be expected that a successful brand differentiation strategy induces imitations from the competitor side. The reactions of the competitors can reduce the influence of an irrelevant attribute because, for example, the introduction of different irrelevant attributes from competing brands reduces the salience of one's own irrelevant attribute. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that over time potential wear-out effects appear, reducing the influencing potential of irrelevant attributes. A constant re-emphasis of the irrelevant attribute therefore seems to be necessary. For this reason, the positive results of the irrelevant attribute observed in this study cannot be taken for granted for marketing success.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Although this research supports the increasing importance of brand differentiation by the use of irrelevant attributes in managerial practice, the study has some limitations. However, these limitations provide avenues for future research. One limitation of the current study is that only one product category was used. Although this approach was likely to enhance the internal validity of the findings, it limited generalizability. Further research should integrate several product categories when researching the effect of irrelevant attributes.

In the current study only one irrelevant attribute was presented to the consumers. From a strategic perspective, the answer to the question of how consumers react to different irrelevant attributes has a particularly high significance. Moreover, future research studies should include the situation where subjects rate the brand prior to and after the revelation of the irrelevance by means of a longitudinal study. Thus, the importance of the irrelevant attribute may vary in consumers' perception.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to show what impact the revelation of the irrelevance after the rating has on behavioral patterns, as for instance on word-of-mouth. When revealing the irrelevance prior to the rating, constructs should be considered that focus on potential disappointment on the part of the consumer.

Since the positive results for the irrelevant attribute observed in this study cannot be taken for granted for marketing success, there is need for research regarding the long-term effect of irrelevant attributes when including the competition. The long-term success of this brand differentiation strategy, however, can only occur if the consumer is satisfied with the brand. A product weakness related to actually relevant features cannot be compensated with the irrelevant attribute (Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 1997). The effects that the irrelevant attribute has on the consumer’s satisfaction with the brand and the potentially resulting brand loyalty should be, therefore, one further goal of research efforts.

**REFERENCES**


UWG §3 [Acts Against Unfair Competition §3].


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APPENDIX A

Selected Prior Research on Irrelevant Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Research Focus</th>
<th>Characteristics of Empirical Study</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter, Glazer, &amp; Nakamoto [CGN] (1994)</td>
<td>Rating of brands with IA in contrast to brands without IA Rating of brands with IA in contrast to brands without IA when the irrelevance has been revealed prior to the choice decisions</td>
<td>Experiment 1: Product category: down jackets 4 attributes, 2 levels: 8 brands to be evaluated in the context of a choice experiment 2 (presence/absence of IA) ( \times ) 2 (presence/absence of attribute information) between-subjects design ( n = 99 ) (student convenience sample) Experiment 2: Product categories: compact disc players, pasta, down jackets Price as additional attribute 8 out of 16 brands to be rated 3 (low/high/premium price) ( \times ) 2 (presence/absence of IA) between-subjects design ( n = 128 ) (student convenience sample)</td>
<td>Positive rating of a brand with IA (preference rating) Positive rating of a brand with IA (preference rating), even if irrelevance has previously been revealed Generally, higher prices for brands lead to a more positive rating of IA Regardless of the revelation, a brand with IA at a high price is positively valued (preference rating) A brand with IA at a premium price is valued positively only if the irrelevance is not revealed (preference rating) Regardless of the revelation, a brand with IA at a low price is not valued (preference rating)</td>
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**APPENDIX A (Continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Research Focus</th>
<th>Characteristics of Empirical Study</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broniarczyk &amp; Gershoff (1997)</td>
<td>Moderating effects of the attractiveness of the attribute's label and its correspondence with the irrelevance revelation on meaningless differentiation</td>
<td>Experiment 1: 2 (high/low attractiveness) × 2 (high/low correspondence) × 2 (revelation/nonrevelation) between-subjects design</td>
<td>Inferences regarding the value of the unique attribute depend on the attractiveness of its label and its correspondence with the revelation of the irrelevance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Product and attributes like the ones CGN (1994) used</td>
<td>Choice context affects the inferences that consumers draw regarding IA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 240 (student convenience sample)</td>
<td>Strongest effect of brand differentiation strategy with IA when there is no meaningful differentiation between alternative brands</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inferences regarding the value of the unique attribute depend on the attractiveness of its label and its correspondence with the irrelevance revelation on meaningless differentiation</td>
<td>Experiment 2: 2 (inferior/identical choice-context) × 2 (high/low correspondence) between-subjects design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 32 (student convenience sample)</td>
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<td>Brown &amp; Carpenter (2000)</td>
<td>Effects of the choice set size on the rating (positive or negative) of IA</td>
<td>Experiment 1: 4 (down jackets/coffee/CD player/cologne as product categories) × 2 (2 or 3 brands in the choice set) × 2 (with or without IA) repeated-measures design</td>
<td>Positive rating of IA in the choice set condition with 3 brands (preference rating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Product category as within-subject-repeated factor</td>
<td>Negative rating of IA in the choice set condition with 2 brands not significant (preference rating)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Size of the choice set and IA as between-subject design</td>
<td>Confirmation of the effects on preference ratings of brands with IA in the context of the study by CGN (1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 33 (student convenience sample)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Effects of a change in the rating of IA (from negative to positive) depending on the number of brands with IA</td>
<td>Experiment 2: 4 (down jackets/coffee/CD player/cologne as product categories) × 4 (no IA, 1 IA, 2 IA, 3 IA) between-subject design</td>
<td>Consumers are flexible in the rating of IA:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Choice experiment: choice of a brand and written remark why a brand was chosen by a subject</td>
<td>Positive rating in case of 1 IA (when 3 brands can be chosen) for both the promotional and product-related IA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on product-related and promotion-related IA</td>
<td>Negative rating in case of 2 IA (when 3 brands can be chosen) when product-related and promotional IA are considered together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
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<td>Characteristics of Empirical Study</td>
<td>Key Findings</td>
</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Meyvis & Janiszewski (2002) | Effects of irrelevant information on the consumer's conviction whether a product fulfills its performance | $n = 448$ (student convenience sample)                                                                 | The negative effect is significant with promotional IA and not significant with product-related IA.
Obviously irrelevant information has a negative effect on consumers' product ratings.
The addition of irrelevant information to supportive benefit information weakens consumers' beliefs in the product's ability to deliver the benefit.
The dilution effect is independent of the order in which the information is presented and independent of the way of measuring the consumer's belief.
The dilution effect even persists when the irrelevance has been previously revealed to the consumer, when the consumer believes that the information has been randomly selected, and when the irrelevant information made the product description more similar to the desired product.
In the absence of the revelation of the irrelevance of the IA, both high and low equity brands benefit from an IA as opposed to their competitors.
When revealing the irrelevance of the IA prior to the rating, only the low-tier brand benefits from a shared context.
When revealing the irrelevance of the IA prior to the rating a high-tier brand benefits from a shared context. |
| Broniarczyk & Gershoff (2003) | Effect of brand equity on the rating of IA
Effect of a differentiation strategy with IA on brand equity
Examination of the robustness of a shared context for IA rating | Experiment 1:
2 (low/high equity tier brand) $\times$ 2
(prerevelation/nonrevelation) $\times$ 2 (unique/shared decision context) between-subjects design
Product and attributes like the ones CGN (1994) used
Choice experiment: choice of one out of three brands (preference rating) | In the absence of the revelation of the irrelevance of the IA, both high and low equity brands benefit from an IA as opposed to their competitors.
When revealing the irrelevance of the IA prior to the rating, only the low-tier brand benefits from a shared context.
When revealing the irrelevance of the IA prior to the rating a high-tier brand benefits from a shared context. |

(Continued)
Moreover, rating of familiarity, trust, manufacturing expertise, and the likelihood that the subject believes that the manufacturer intends to attract attention improve product performance or take advantage of the consumer with the IA

I = 344 (student convenience sample)

Experiment 1a:
2 (prerevelation/nonrevelation) × 2 (low/high equity tier brand) between-subjects design
Focus on shared context
n = 113

In the absence of the revelation of the irrelevance of the IA, both high and low equity brands benefit from an IA as opposed to their competitors

Revelation of irrelevance prior to the choice task:
A low equity brand increased its choice share when it shared the IA with a high equity brand

Without revelation of the irrelevance:
Both low and high equity brands with IA increased their choice share in contrast to their competitors

Revelation of the irrelevance after the choice task: Re-choice of the brands depends on brand equity. Low equity brands lose choice share; high equity brands retained their share

APPENDIX A (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moreover, rating of familiarity, trust, manufacturing expertise, and the likelihood that the subject believes that the manufacturer intends to attract attention improve product performance or take advantage of the consumer with the IA</td>
<td>is more likely than a low-tier brand to continue benefiting from a unique context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I = 344 (student convenience sample)</td>
<td>In the absence of the revelation of the irrelevance of the IA, both high and low equity brands benefit from an IA as opposed to their competitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experiment 1a: 2 (prerevelation/nonrevelation) × 2 (low/high equity tier brand) between-subjects design</td>
<td>Revelation of irrelevance prior to the choice task: A low equity brand increased its choice share when it shared the IA with a high equity brand</td>
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<td>Focus on shared context</td>
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<td></td>
<td>n = 113</td>
<td>Revelation of the irrelevance after the choice task: Re-choice of the brands depends on brand equity. Low equity brands lose choice share; high equity brands retained their share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experiment 2: 2 (low/high equity tier brand) × 2 (prerevelation/postrevelation) between-subjects design</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 choice scenarios that take place one after another (product category: down jackets, fleece jackets)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Logit model</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 233 (student convenience sample)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IA = Irrelevant attribute.
APPENDIX B:

Text Revealing the Irrelevance of the Attribute (in Text Form)

Original Text

Bitte lesen Sie folgenden Bericht in Ihrer Tageszeitung:

Schönheit von außen

Jeder macht es mindestens einmal wöchentlich: Naßmachen, Einschäumen, Ausspülen. Den wenigsten ist allerdings bewusst, dass Shampoos komplex aufgebaute Produkte sind, die aus bis zu 30 verschiedenen Bestandteilen zusammengemixt werden.


Quelle: Stiftung Warentest

Translation of the Original Text

Please read the following newspaper report:

Beauty the way you can see it

Everybody does it at least once a week: washing their hair. However, only a few people know that a shampoo is a highly complex product which can contain up to 30 different ingredients.

All types of shampoos consist of about 80% water. Part of the remaining 20% is surfactants that clean your hair. Moreover, today shampoos are increasingly enriched with conditioners and restructuring substances (e.g., proteins). All these ingredients are based on the same principle: A thin layer of these ingredients which you cannot remove even by rinsing your hair encloses each individual hair, smoothes the hair surface, and makes it sleek and supple. But these ingredients offer no advantage to hair care; they just work like glue. The structure and the quality of your hair cannot fundamentally be improved. Since human hair is nothing but an accumulation of dead hair fibers, they can neither
be completely repaired nor nourished. And human hair remains the way it grows out of the scalp. Nothing can strengthen the hair from inside—no matter what advertising promises. Vitamins and other agents in the shampoo cannot penetrate into the roots of your hair.

Source: Stiftung Warentest*

* Stiftung Warentest is the leading German consumer protection organization, publishing reviews and comparisons of products and services based on results from its in-house testing laboratory. It is known for its independence and impartiality.
## APPENDIX C

### The Survey Instrument Used in This Study

| Attention toward the brand | When I saw the presentation of the brand, I felt the information . . .  
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Following Laczniak & Muehling (1993) | . . . might be worth remembering.  
| | . . . might be interesting to me.  
| | . . . might be of value to me.  
| | . . . might be worth paying attention.  
| Perceived uniqueness | The brand shown . . .  
| Netemeyer et al. (2004) | . . . is distinct from other brands.  
| | . . . really stands out from other brands.  
| | . . . is different from other brands.  
| | . . . is unique from other brands.  
| Perceived price fairness | Overall, the price for the brand shown seems fair to me.  
| Following Bearden, Carlson, & Hardesty (2003) | The price of the brand seems fair to me.  
| | The price for the brand shown represents a fair price.  
| | The price offered seems fair to consumers.  
| Attitude toward the brand | The brand shown I find . . .  
| Following Sujan & Bettman (1989); Zinkhan, Locander, & Leigh (1986) | . . . good.  
| | . . . pleasant.  
| | . . . positive.  
| | . . . valuable.  
| Intention to buy | The likelihood of purchasing this product is . . .  
| Following Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal (1991) | If I were going to buy this product, I would consider buying this brand at the price shown.  
| | At the price shown, I would consider buying the brand.  
| | My willingness to buy the product is . . .  
|
APPENDIX D

Legal Framework in Germany

The facts of deception are grounded in the Acts Against Unfair Competition (UWG §3). Under this act it is prohibited to give deceptive information about the composition, the origin, and the manufacturing method of individual goods. Advertising claims are said to be deceptive if the ideas a potential consumer has about the significance of any claim are not in line with the objective condition of the goods (Hefermehl & Baumbach, 2001; UWG §3). There are various forms of deception, such as deception through objectively false claims, through obscure and general information, or through disguising and incomplete information (Köhler & Piper, 2002; UWG §3). Irrelevant attributes can be categorized into the group of obscure and general information. In the case of this information, the potential consumer has no clear idea of the meaning of an advertising claim or of a term used in this claim. Advertising with information like this is only deceptive if the potential consumer erroneously takes qualities for granted that are missing from what is commonly expected of the goods offered. An irrelevant attribute makes the consumer believe in a certain qualitative exclusivity of the product. As long as the production of the goods in the broadest sense is in accordance with the assumptions the consumer makes about the performance or quality of the products, a deception can be excluded. The decision of the Federal Supreme Court (BGH) serving as a guideline to lower courts is: If a certain term whose essential characteristics cannot be clearly defined is used in advertising, it depends—as far as the legal framework of competition is concerned—on whether these characteristics in which the potential consumer sees the advantage of a particularly favorable offer are absent. If the term used in the offer is really in accordance with advantages expected by the potential consumer, the general public will not have to be protected by the law by prohibiting the use of this term, only because part of the public sees the cause of the advantages in circumstances which are not in line with reality. It is irrelevant how potential consumers explain the performance or quality of products as long as the product meets the assumptions the consumer makes about the performance or quality of the product.