# 5

# Brand Meaning
## *Definitions and Directions*

> People buy things not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean.
>
> Sidney Levy (1959)

## Defining Brand Meaning

It is brand meaning that mediates between products and consumer motivation, thereby determining consumer behavior. A brand's meaning is determined by how the brand is perceived by the public at a conscious level and how the brand resonates with them at a semi- or subconscious level, as shown in Figure 5.1. The term refers to the semantic and symbolic features of a brand, the sum of the fundamental conscious and unconscious elements that compose the consumer's mental representation of the brand. Brand meaning both defines and is defined by the territory where the meaning derived from brand associations corresponds with consumer needs and aspirations. It is where the concrete qualities of the product meet the abstract qualities of the brand. Charles Revlon once famously said, "In the factory we make cosmetics. In the store we sell hope." Cosmetics and hope—Revlon means both.

Like the concept of meaning itself, the overall meaning of a brand, or a brand's meaning structure, is multidimensional. It is therefore important to decode and deconstruct these multilevel brand meanings to ascertain the ways the brand holds relevance for and connects with consumers and how it could do so more potently. Accepting the premise that consumers endow products and brands with meanings

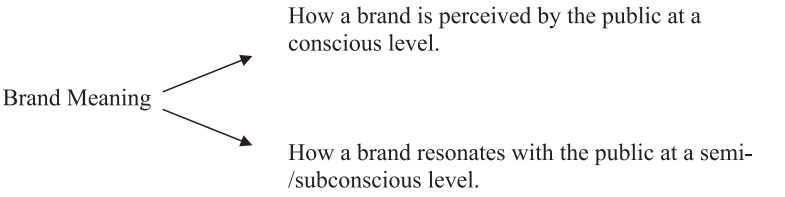


**Figure 5.1** Facets of brand meaning.

over and above their overt functional value, one important distinction is that between the manifest, salient and conscious aspects of brands and their latent, symbolic and largely unconscious properties. Ostensibly, we conceive of things in practical physical terms and seek functional benefits, but underlying this there is a more profound significance composed of deeper meanings and instinctive ways of defining and shaping ourselves and the world around us. These different concepts and interpretations motivate the choices we make as consumers and the attitudes we form toward brands, as Figure 5.2.illustrates.

## *The Neuro-Psychological Context of Brand Meaning*

There are two important observations with regard to Figure 5.2. The first is that, although practical–rational considerations and emotional–symbolic factors are separated, this is only for ease of

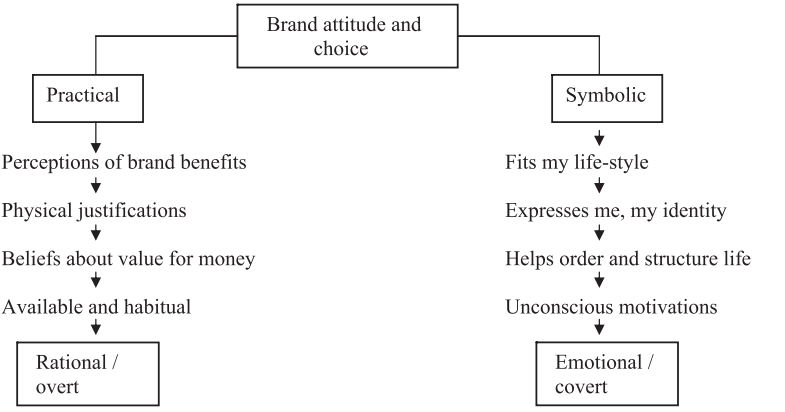


**Figure 5.2** Practical and symbolic attitudes to buying brands.

understanding of the diagram. Brand decisions are never wholly rational. In fact, no decision is ever wholly rational. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1996) calls into question psychology's traditional separation of reason from emotion. He states flatly, "Reason without emotion is neurologically impossible." To substantiate his arguments he draws on medical case studies and research into the evolution of the brain itself. In accordance with the triune brain model developed in the 1970s by neuroscientist Paul McLean (1990) the brain is actually a three-in-one brain, consisting of three layers, each corresponding to a different evolutionary stage. The layers evolved cumulatively, each on top of the previous, like an archeological site. The three brain systems, though connected, have distinctive functions and "personalities." Broadly, they are responsible for instinct (reptilian brain), emotion (mammalian brain or limbic system) and reason (new brain or neo cortex).

The important conclusion that Damasio (1994) draws from this evolutionary heritage is that, although the largest, most recent level of our brain, the neo-cortex, is where we perform our rational thinking, this part of the brain is still connected to the older parts. So even when we believe we are making a purely rational decision, we are making that decision via an area that interfaces with our senses, emotions, instincts and intuitions.

Related to this description of brain structure is the second observation regarding Figure 5.2. The elements listed on the left of the diagram have to do with cognitive rational processing. Those on the right side of the diagram are concerned with largely noncognitive responses. Note that noncognitive responses include, but are not limited to, emotional responses. The term *noncognitive* covers feelings, sensations, intuitions and instincts, for example. Moreover, we are not aware of most of our emotional reactions, the majority of which occur in the unconscious. Yet emotions beneath the threshold of consciousness exert a strong influence on what we perceive, how we perceive it and how we react to it. Thus, we may re-present the diagram as shown in Figure 5.3.

Cognitive rational processing is clearly instrumental in defining a brand. Without it consumers would be hard pushed to know why a brand exists in the first place. Indeed, traditional marketing practice is centered on this approach, the strategy being to grab the target's attention and then to persuade him or her through a rational, needs-benefits demonstration that your brand is the one that best meets

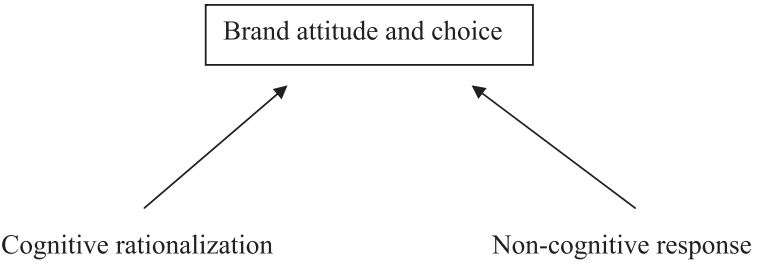


**Figure 5.3** Cognitive and noncognitive brand responses.

those needs: "The notion is that positioning is about one salient, overriding cognitive thought in the mind that will justify engagement and purchase" (Wilson 2002, p. 47). Important though this may be, it is only part of the picture. There is a bigger opportunity still: "To understand more fully how a brand and a person interact we need to understand better what happens at the deeper, more primitive, noncognitive levels of brain organization as well" (ibid.). For although active, rational processing of brand information goes on with each brand encounter, so too, semi- or unconsciously, does the continuous emotional and noncognitive imprinting of the brand.

To quote Gordon (2002, p. 285), "Brands are coded in memory on a cognitive (thinking, analytical, considered) *and* emotional (somatic) basis. These two elements of brand encoding are inextricably linked and it is emotional coding rather than reasoned argument that determines whether or not people take notice of the stimuli related to the brand …." Figure 5.4 summarizes the way these processes work to ultimately generate brand meaning.

We have already seen in Chapter 1 how a brand exists in the brain as a neural associative network, or an engram, and how these associations are influenced by brand perceptions and determine brand meaning. It is important to remember that a considerable proportion of brand perceptions are acquired under low involvement conditions

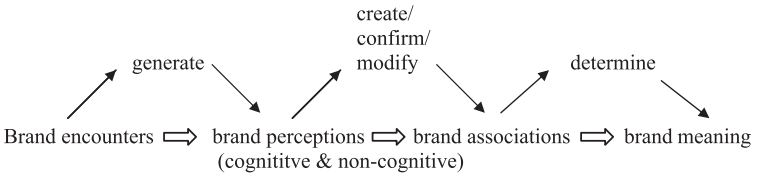


**Figure 5.4** Generation of brand meaning.

and thus are not subject to elaborate or even conscious processing by the brain. Brand meaning, like any meaning, is created largely unconsciously as we compare sensory, emotional and cognitive inputs with internalized patterns stored in the brain. The resulting meaning determines our day-to-day experience and influences our memories and behaviors (Marci 2006).

Though we tend to think of brand associations as verbal descriptors of a brand, some two thirds of all stimuli that reach the brain are visual, and there are further modes of representation of brand associations, such as sensory and emotional modes. It is important to keep these different modes of representation in mind when considering associative networks. An associative network involves anything that can be interconnected in our brain with a given concept, including cognitive representations but also connections between a brand, for example and associated emotions, feelings, attitudes and behavioral tendencies or habits (see next section). So many brand associations are in fact stored unconsciously, in nonverbal mode, making them difficult to access from a research point of view.

The brain is designed to store and recall experiences and information of all kinds—for example, cognitive, emotional, motor and social. When we ride a bike, play the guitar, feel our heart race in an empty parking lot at night, or feel calmed by the caress of a loved one, we are using memory. All incoming information sets up neural patterns of activity that are compared against previously experienced and stored patterns. New patterns can modify existing memories or can create new ones. The vast majority of those stored memory templates are based on experiences and interactions that occurred in early childhood. The majority of our memories are noncognitive and preverbal. Furthermore, many of these neural imprints are the result of exposure to storylines and characterizations that come to us in the form of myths, legends, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, parables and religious teachings. This raises the theme of archetypal memories, which is mentioned in Chapter 2.

We also construct throughout our lives what Damasio (1994) calls "somatic markers." He describes somatic markers as particular feelings generated from secondary emotions that have been connected, through learning and experience, to predicted future outcomes. Somatic markers represent the intuitive and emotional feelings aroused in reaction to situations: "When a negative somatic marker is juxtaposed to a particular future outcome the combination acts as

an alarm bell. When a positive somatic marker is juxtaposed instead, it becomes a beacon of incentive" (Damasio 1994, p. 174). Somatic markers help us to make rapid, favorable decisions as we go about our lives. They usually function as a warning (i.e., a negative marker). For instance, the emotional shock of nearly having an arm bitten by a lion at a zoo or wildlife park creates a negative somatic marker, which results in our proceeding with caution next time we approach a lion. Physiological changes serve to strengthen the somatic marker: We breathe faster and begin to sweat; our heart rate rises. When we make decisions and behave based on somatic markers we do not necessarily recall the specific experiences that created the positive or negative marker—rather, we are acting from instinct.

These primal responses and feelings can become attached to brand experiences, too, and result in intuitive brand decisions. When elements associated with a brand trigger somatic markers, they can favorably dispose consumers to the brand at an instinctive level. Somatic marking is thus another area of brain activity that contributes to forming the brand engram. Moreover, these types of responses are quicker and more automatic than rational, considered judgments, which often constitute the postrationalization of an intuitive reaction. Brands that manage to connect up with these memories and trigger these markers through their associations do so at a very deep, instinctual and potent level: "… Since the depth of neural imprinting is likely to be much stronger at the non-cognitive level (being older and more heavily used), patterning that occurs here is likely to constitute the most robust and significant aspects of a brand …." (Wilson 2002, p. 49).

## Types of Brand Associations

Brand associations may take many different forms. They range from the concrete to the abstract, from the conscious to the unconscious, the direct to the indirect. Direct associations are those that occur directly between two elements without the need or presence of a third, intermediary element. If we see the words *Veuve Clicquot* stamped on the side of a box we immediately think of champagne. Indirect associations are what lead to associative chains, where elements are linked together through one or more intermediary elements. So Veuve Clicquot may generate the following association chain:

Veuve Clicquot → champagne → France → sophisticated

or, alternatively,

Veuve Clicquot → champagne → celebration

A housewife planning for Thanksgiving thinks of turkey. That makes her think of cranberry sauce and then she thinks of Ocean Spray. The diversity in the form and origin of associations underlies the multidimensionality of brand meaning. Moving from the concrete to the more abstract, it is possible to categorize brand associations into three significant groupings: attributes, benefits and attitudes (see Keller 1998, p. 93). In turn, these categories may be further divided in terms of abstractness, according to the association in question.

### *Attributes*

Attributes may be product-related or non-product-related. Product-related attributes refer to the physical composition of a product and those elements, such as ingredients and design features, which affect product performance. Non-product-related attributes are extrinsic attributes that do not have a direct bearing on product performance, though they may be very important in the purchasing decision.

User and usage imagery refers to the type of people who use the brand and in what situations and circumstances they do so. User imagery is more important to a brand like Pepsi than it is to a brand like Duracell. When the values associated with a brand correspond positively with our own value systems, we are likely to identify with that brand. Often we use brands to communicate to others those values we consider important, thus helping to define ourselves in society. This may be part of conforming to the norms and expectations of a certain group or subculture. The topics of impression management and the self-concept are covered in Chapter 2. Price is included as non-product-related attribute as it can be an important association in the formation of brand perceptions, particularly with regard to value and desirability and is a criterion by which consumers often segment their knowledge of a market or category.

Utilitarian considerations such as functional benefits and product-related attributes constitute the more concrete and pragmatic

meanings of a brand. These are often a function of what the brand is, what it does and its usage context. Non-product-related attributes and elements that are not factual, objective or instrumental underpin the more symbolic meanings of the brand. It is useful to keep in mind the difference between the two dimensions as well as the interplay between them. They come into play, for instance, in the way people classify and categorize things. As Franzen and Bouwman (2001, p. 92) describe, the classification of items into groups or categories is performed on the basis of their perceived properties, such as the physical manifestation, their functions for us and the deeper (symbolic) meanings we allocate to them:

> On the one hand, the classification is based on natural, objective properties of things (birds have wings, fish have fins); on the other, they emanate from artificial (propositional) meanings they are given by people in a specific culture. Rosch and Lloyd (1978) posit that categories are neither "natural" nor "artificial"; they are rather always the result of an interaction between structural properties of the things as they present themselves to us in the world and our human reactions to them, which for a large part are socially, culturally and situationally determined.

From a very young age we learn to classify objects according to their physical properties. We come to realize that things with four legs and a back that people sit on are chairs, even before we know what the word *chair* means. We then notice that some are wooden and others plastic and start to form subcategories. Traditionally, products and product-related attributes formed the basis for categorization in consumer behavior, particularly given that most brands were monobrands—that is, based on single products or product types—with specific attributes. As umbrella brands and corporate brands become more prevalent, consumers find it more difficult to categorize those brands themselves along purely concrete, pragmatic lines. Virgin is an extreme example.

### *Benefits*

Benefits describe how a brand can solve a problem or offer an opportunity to the consumer or how it can make a consumer's life easier, more fun, more enjoyable, or more meaningful. The differentiating benefits that motivate brand purchase may be functional, sensorial,

expressive, or emotive. Strong brands often deliver a combination of these benefit types.

*Functional Benefits* Most brands offer functional benefit to their consumers as a result of one or more product attributes and the functional utility they provide.

Some examples are as follows:

- Cleans without scratching the surface.
- Spreads straight from the fridge.
- Leaves your hair more manageable.
- Relieves allergy symptoms without causing drowsiness.

Functional benefits are increasingly easy for competitors to copy, either by imitating the product or by providing the same benefit in a different format. In the oral-care category, besides toothpaste alone, the teeth-whitening benefit is now provided in gels and strips that are applied to the teeth.

*Sensorial Benefits* Sensorial benefits are discussed in Chapter 3. They relate to the physical experience of a brand and derive from its sensorial properties—its look, taste, smell, texture and so forth.

Some examples are as follows:

- The pleasure of biting through thick chocolate into smooth ice cream
- The sensation of wallowing in the evocative fragrances of Herbal Essences
- The creamy texture of Boddington's Beer
- The total sensorial appeal—taste, aroma, appearance and even sound—of Bailey's

*Expressive Benefits* Expressive benefits allow the consumer to express certain values, contributing to a sense of identity. The expressive benefits of brands help us to express and define ourselves. For instance, a person may communicate and define his or her self-image in the following ways:

- Nonconformist and individualistic by using an Apple Mac
- Rebellious and free-spirited by riding a Harley-Davidson
- Adventurous by driving a Land Rover

- Conscientious and caring by buying Newman's Own or Body Shop products
- Successful by wearing a Rolex

*Emotional Benefits* Emotional benefits consist of the positive feelings created in consumers when buying or using a brand. Consumers may be more or less aware of these benefits and their genesis—or rather, of the psychological importance of the benefits. Often, emotional benefits have a deeply symbolic dimension and respond to profound human needs such as the need to be cared for or the need to give and receive love.

Emotional benefits relate to how buying or using a brand makes consumers feel. For example, consumers may feel the following:

- Exhilarated driving a Porsche
- Sexual and feminine wearing Victoria's Secret lingerie
- Important when using or receiving a Mont Blanc pen
- Rugged when wearing Caterpillar boots

*The Difference between Expressive and Emotional Benefits* There are similarities between expressive and emotional benefits. Whereas a brand's functional and sensory benefits are based on physical attributes and perceivable elements of the product, emotional and expressive benefits are based on psychological and emotional aspects of the consumer. Expressive and emotional benefits are part of the symbolic appeal of a brand. Though expressive benefits may be similar to emotional benefits, though, they are not the same. Aaker (1996) points out that, in comparison with emotional benefits, expressive benefits focus on the following:

- Self rather than feelings
- Public settings and products (e.g., cars) rather than private ones
- Aspiration and the future as opposed to memories of the past (some brands provide a warm feeling of nostalgia—an emotional, not expressive, benefit. Aspiration and the future usually have to do with the person I would like to be(come), so expressive benefits are more relevant)
- The permanent (something related to an individual's personality) rather than the transitory
- The act of using the product (wearing a cooking apron declares one as a gourmet cook) rather than a consequence of using the

product (the feeling of pride and satisfaction from preparing and serving a well-appointed meal)

### *Attitudes*

Brand attitudes are a function of the beliefs that consumers have with regard to a brand and the degree to which the brand possesses certain attributes or benefits and consumers' evaluative judgment of those beliefs (i.e., how desirable it is that the brand possesses these salient attributes or benefits). Brand attitudes can be seen as consumers' affective responses to a brand. The recognition of the importance of the evaluative and attitudinal component within meaning, in regard to Osgood et al.'s (1957) semantic differential, was discussed at the beginning of Chapter 4. Where attitudes toward a brand are determined in large part by more rational and functional elements, consumers are likely to be more able to verbalize their attitudes and their reasons for them. Where it is the emotional and symbolic elements of a brand that are predominantly generating attitudes toward it, consumers may be less aware of the real reasons for their attitudes and motivations toward the brand. These major categories of brand associations are summarized in Figure 5.5.

### *Brand Emotions and Emotional Benefits*

Strictly speaking, the emotional benefits of a brand refer to the feelings created in and experienced by consumers when buying or using the brand. As such, emotional brand benefits most convincingly accrue from brands in which the underlying products have some connection with these emotions. The emotional benefit corresponds to some emotional aspect of the consumer. So, for instance, driving a Volvo may make somebody feel safe, thus diminishing the fear that person would otherwise feel on taking to the roads.

Alternatively, it is possible for a given emotion to become associated with a brand even when there is no, or only a tangential, relation between the underlying product and the particular emotion. This is not so much about the consumer experiencing the emotion as a consequence of using the brand but rather refers to the cognitive recognition by the consumer that a certain emotion pertains or belongs

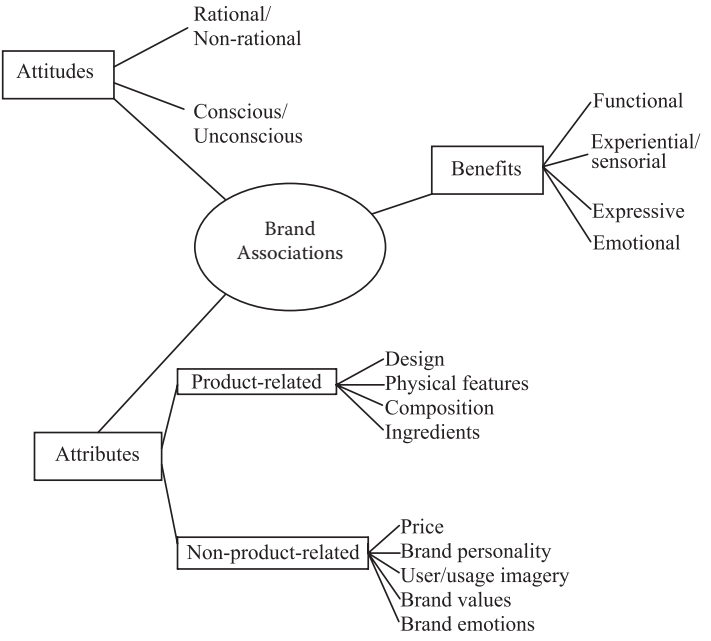


**Figure 5.5** Types of brand associations.

to a brand. This is usually achieved through advertising whereby the emotions portrayed in the advertising or invoked in the viewer become linked to the advertised brand. Coca-Cola and McDonald's would be examples. The critical issues are the extent to which the affective response to the advertising transfers to the brand and the credibility with which the brand can claim emotional benefits.

## Strength of Brand Associations

The relative strength of brand associations and indeed of any associations, varies considerably. Generally speaking, the more attention that is given to the meaning of brand information during the process of encoding, the stronger the resulting association will be. Another key factor is the structure and solidity of existing brand associations in the memory. Other things being equal, it will be easier for consumers to form an association on the basis of new brand information when a sound and relevant associative structure already exists in the mind. Related to this is the consideration of consistency or

congruency with the existing associative network, which will affect the ease of assimilation and integration of new brand information.

Several other determinants have been formulated over time into "laws" regarding the emergence of associations and the likely strength of those associations (Franzen and Bouwman 2001, p. 52). For instance, the law of contiguity states that elements that are perceived together in time (i.e., simultaneously) and space (i.e., in juxtaposition) will become connected. The law of repetition, or frequency, holds that the more often elements are perceived together the more they will be connected. The more often we encounter *Pampers, nappies,* and *dry bottoms* together, the more strongly the connection among the three memory elements is cemented. The law of similarity provides that activating the element of Pepsi, for example, can lead to the activation of Coca-Cola. A further law is that of recency, whereby associations that occurred most recently will be most readily remembered. A corollary of this observation is the gradual waning of connections over time, where associations are left dormant and begin to recede. It is this that allows outdated and no longer relevant brand associations to fade and new associations to replace them, as in the example of Lucozade and its association with convalescence (mentioned later). Finally, the law of vividness holds that the more unique and vivid an association is, the more readily it will be recalled.

It should be noted that, even if a certain association is a strong one, in the context of a purchase or consumption decision it may not necessarily be influential or relevant (see Keller 1998, p. 108). Moreover, the importance ascribed to brand associations may be situation or context dependent (ibid.) and be determined by the specific aims of a consumption situation. Overnight service may be crucial if a deadline looms or less relevant with the luxury of time.

This leads Keller (1998) to propose a sequential structure for brand associations. A robust brand differentiates itself in the first place by the relative strength of its associations, then by the degree to which those associations are evaluated as desirable by consumers and finally by the uniqueness of those associations. The order is significant: In other words, it does not matter how unique an association is unless it is relevant and favorably evaluated, and it does not matter how favorable an association is unless it is sufficiently strongly connected with the brand for consumers to recall it spontaneously. Equally, it does not matter how strong an association is unless it is favorable and relevant and it does not matter how favorable an association is

unless it has uniqueness and can distinguish the brand from competing brands.

## Core Associations

A brand's core associations, those at the heart of the brand associative network, are those that determine the essential meaning ascribed to a brand and the attitudes developed toward it. Figure 5.6 shows a basic associative network for McDonald's. The core associations would be the restaurants, the meals served there and the people who serve them and, in the case of kids, fun. Note that the brand associative network is a present tense representation of a brand. It depicts how a brand is currently perceived, not how it might be perceived.*

The core of the associative network contains the main primary associations of the brand—the strongest associations that are activated spontaneously when we think of the brand. They would normally include a product or service and a dominant characteristic or property, a product application or usage situation, or more symbolic elements such as user imagery. From this core all sorts of other associations may be triggered, depending on the context within which the brand is encountered and the cues provided.

## The Brand Meaning Framework: Primary Brand Meaning and Implicit Brand Meaning

### *Primary Brand Meaning*

The primary associations previously described constitute the core brand meaning, or *primary brand meaning*. This is the meaning of the brand that would be played back by consumers in research without too much reflection or probing. Gatorade means sports drink. eBay means online auctions. Bayer means aspirin. Starbucks means coffee in different varieties and a nice place to drink it. Primary brand meaning is a summation of the consumer's primary associations and

* Note also that the brand associative network shown in Figure 5.6 is, logically, similar in composition to the associative neural network in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.1). The latter is simply introduced from a different—neuropsychological—perspective.

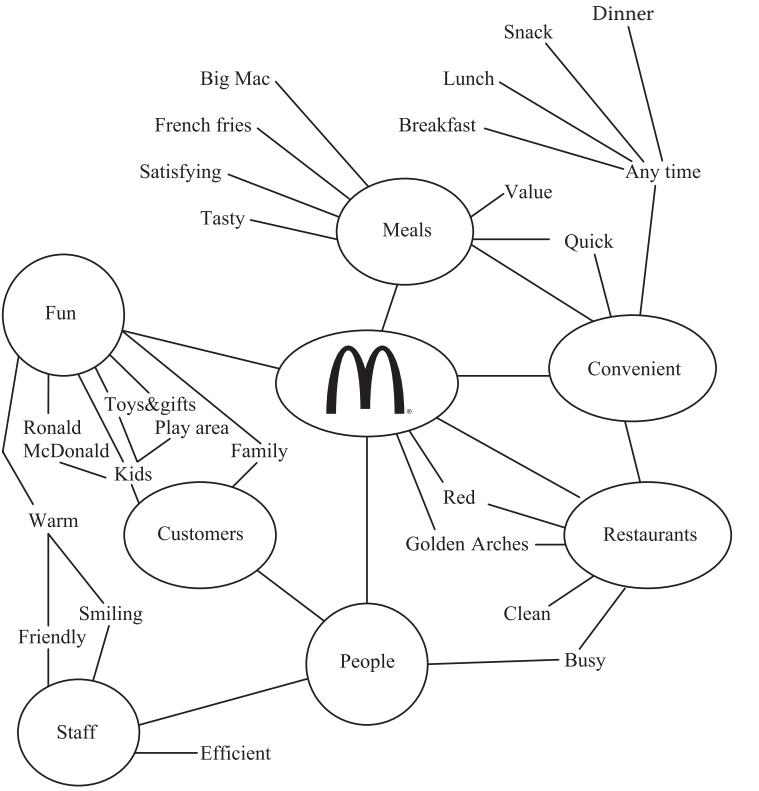


**Figure 5.6** Brand associative network—McDonald's.

dominant perceptions about a brand, the snapshot that immediately comes to the mind's eye upon hearing the brand name. Simply stated, it is how consumers spontaneously define a brand.

Given that primary brand meaning tends to be largely influenced by brand attributes and functional consequences, it is likely that it will be correspondingly influenced to some extent by the product category. No product or brand exists in a vacuum and it is probable that perceptions of the category to which a brand belongs (i.e., the context in which it has been placed) and product characteristics found within that category will influence the consumer's definition of a brand's primary meaning. As we will see in later sections, the extent to which this is the case will vary according to the nature of the product (e.g., how important functional aspects are), the stage the brand is at in its own development, as well as the stage the

category is at and the brand's communication. Moreover, primary brand meaning is not the domain of solely concrete, palpable product attributes. Abstract product attributes may also inform primary brand meaning. These may be summations of product attributes in catch-all meanings—cars, for example, may be categorized as *family cars* or *sports cars* or defined as *utility vehicles* or *people carriers* (Franzen and Bouwman 2001, p. 208).

Researching primary brand meaning among consumers is essential in that it clarifies and confirms the extent to which the consumers' definition of a brand's essential meaning coincides with the marketer's intentions. An article published in the *Journal of Advertising Research* in late 2000 (Oakenfull et al.), for example, describes how a team from Miami University in Ohio, working with researchers from Pennzoil, conducted research into the meaning of the Pennzoil brand (this in the context of potential brand extensions—we will return to this theme and the research later in Chapter 6). Interestingly, although Pennzoil managers had deemed "protection" to be a fundamental component of the brand's meaning (the word featured in the brand slogan: "We're driving protection"), research results and other company findings indicated that "while protection may be a *property* of Pennzoil, it does not *define* the brand in the public eye" (op. cit. p. 48 author's italics).

Researching the primary brand meaning of Federal Express would probably reveal that it is seen as a delivery service for important documents. It would be interesting to find out if the words *overnight* or *speedy* came up or, indeed, *secure*. Federal Express would hope so: It created a strong point of difference as the fastest and most dependable delivery service around—"When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight"—becoming market leader in the overnight delivery service category. Of course, it may be speedy, but not as speedy as sending documents digitally. On the other hand, it still has the advantage of offering timely delivery direct to the intended recipient of confidential documents, so security and confidentiality may be elements of its primary brand meaning.

Investigating primary brand meaning among consumers can identify and help eliminate misconceptions about the brand. Dr. Pepper provides an example. In 1969, research indicated that there was a high degree of prompted awareness of Dr. Pepper being a soft drink. However, misconceptions about the brand abounded: that it was made from prune juice, that it contained peppers or pepper

sauce, that it was medicinal, that it aided regularity and so forth (Plummer 2000). Indeed, those misconceptions gave rise to a famous advertising campaign for the brand: "Dr. Pepper—America's Most Misunderstood Soft Drink."

The Bic brand offers a salutary lesson to marketers of the consequences of failing to fully understand a brand's primary meaning and to grasp the motivational dynamics and ramifications of that meaning. The French company Société Bic successfully created a market for nonrefillable ballpoint pens in the late 1950s, disposable cigarette lighters in the 1970s and disposable razors in the early 1980s. The company managed to leverage the brand's primary meaning of convenient and inexpensive disposable products across different categories amenable to such a proposition. However, when in 1989 the company tried to extend this primary brand meaning to the perfume market in the United States and Europe they came unstuck. The perfumes (Nuit and Jour [for women] and Bic for Men and Bic Sport for Men) came in glass spray bottles resembling bulky cigarette lighters. The promotional campaign, with the line "Paris in your pocket," featured stylish people using the perfumes. The problem was that through the years consumers had incorporated into their mental definition of the brand an extreme form of detached and impersonal utilitarianism and this was at odds with the very emotive and personal perfume category, even at its lower end.

It is no coincidence that those brands with a clear sense and projection of their most valuable asset, their meaning, are the most successful and enduring brands. Again, Disney is a good example. As mentioned, the Disney brand's primary meaning has to do with fun and wholesome family entertainment—at Disney World, for instance, or through Disney films. When the corporation saw the potential opportunity provided by films suitable for a broader audience it invested in brands such as Touchstone and Miramax, thus preserving the integrity of its Disney heartland.

Besides the more rational and functional associations that contribute to primary brand meaning, a brand's composite meaning may encompass a greater or lesser number of associations of a more symbolic and sociocultural nature. For although the brand associative network is a concept that helps illuminate primary brand meaning, brands are more than just fixed cognitive associations of meanings. To quote Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003, p. 31), "Brands mean more than relatively fixed arrangements of associative nodes

and attributes. Complexity, heterogeneity, dynamism and paradox are integral aspects of the consumer-brand relationship." The actual or potential symbolic and sociocultural meanings of a brand are important to understand because such meanings provide two important elements for a brand: differentiation and greater depth. We are here dealing with a second dimension of brand meaning, one that is less manifest, more subtle and ultimately more motivating: implicit brand meaning.

## *Implicit Brand Meaning*

Just as objects, or objects as products, have the potential to be mediators of deep, symbolic meanings, so too have brands. Implicit brand meaning refers to the ultimate emotional and psychological implications and significance of a brand, to the psychic resonance that the brand has for its consumers. Implicitation represents the vital, visceral dynamic of consumer behavior and choice. Implicit brand meaning is complex. It is highly symbolic, psycho-social meaning, influenced in great measure by cultural norms and values. It may tap into archetypal patterns and may find expression and reinforcement though ritual. It evolves from the central truth that bonds the consumer to the product or brand and underpins that bond in a far more vital, deep-seated and enduring way than is the case with other facets of the brand. For example, though on the surface Hallmark is a brand of greeting cards, it is the emotional satisfaction of giving and receiving love that is inherent in the implicit meaning of the brand. Disney is about fun and family entertainment, but its implicit brand meaning resides more in keeping alive the magic and wonder of childhood. To most people, IKEA's primary brand meaning is functional, stylish and affordable furniture. Consumers would not spontaneously talk of democratizing quality design, but projective research techniques may well point to an implicit brand meaning in that area. The laundry category is one of the most fiercely competitive arenas in which a brand could choose to compete. Product performance and innovation is and always has been critical to the category. Unilever's long-standing Persil brand in the United Kingdom has been no exception to this rule. Yet the brand really evolved through its instinctive understanding of a mother's pride and the

caring and nurturing values behind it—again, the subtle distinction between primary brand meaning and implicit brand meaning.

Despite implicit brand meaning being where brand and consumer really connect, marketers often fail to realize this potential meaning of their brands to consumers. A perfunctory appraisal of brand perceptions is inadequate if truly fertile territory is to be identified. To take an example, independence is a value claimed by hundreds of different brands. But how many go farther than the tip of the symbolic iceberg of this value? Independence from what? Or for what? Is it more about a search for something (e.g., a more authentic, rewarding life) than being free from something (e.g., routine, monotony, convention)? Is it about outer seeking or inner searching? Discovering the world, or one's own limitations and possibilities? Is it about making a stand and being heroic, or making a withdrawal and being at peace with oneself? Is there a spiritual element to it? What would be the symbolic significance, for example, of a brand like Jeep Wrangler, with its slogan, "Take your body where your mind has already wandered?"

Value expressiveness is one facet or level of implicit brand meaning. It is where a brand represents, or symbolizes, ideals and values with which the consumer identifies. When Apple Computers declares, "Think different," the brand strikes a chord with consumers characterized by the type of accomplishment/fulfillment, independence/individuation mindset described in Chapter 2. Apple's classic 1984 Super Bowl commercial, inspired by George Orwell's *1984*, featured a totalitarian society with robotic, gray-clad subjects filing into a vast assembly hall. As Big Brother lays down the party line from a huge screen, a young, athletic-looking woman suddenly appears and shatters the screen with a sledgehammer. The announcer then reads the caption: "On January 24, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like *1984*." Despite only being shown once, the ad had one of the highest audience recall figures in America. A $1.6 million production budget and Ridley Scott's directing talent certainly helped, but beyond the on-screen visual impact, the deep, visceral impact of the commercial lay in its dramatization of what Apple means at a higher-order symbolic level. Consumers choosing Apple computers are endorsing the brand's noncorporate, democratizing stance and empathizing with an ethos of individualism and ground-breaking pioneerism.

Brands such as Apple, Disney and Marlboro exemplify a fundamental truism with regard to brand meaning: that meaning cannot simply be borrowed or appropriated through a short-term advertising campaign or promotion. Whereas brand personality dimensions, for example, can be altered or recalibrated quite readily through advertising and executional devices, brand meaning is about becoming an enduring and consistent expression of a given meaning. It is about how that meaning is sustained in the face of changing times and market conditions, how it is replenished and rejuvenated, how it is leveraged across multiple segments or in different cultures, without contamination, violation or dilution.

### *The Relationship between Primary Brand Meaning and Implicit Brand Meaning*

The principal associations of a brand include both the defining properties on the basis of which the brand is categorized by consumers with similar brands (e.g., Marlboro is a cigarette just like Camel or Lucky Strike) and the often symbolic characteristic properties of a brand that help differentiate it from others in the category (e.g., Marlboro is ruggedly individualstic and invokes the freedom of Marlboro Country). As it taps into deep universal truths and cultural values, implicit brand meaning is generally less category influenced and more culturally influenced than primary brand meaning. In the automotive category, for example, a Porsche Boxster and a Volkswagen Beetle both have symbolic meaning—but that meaning is radically different from the one (status symbol, executive toy) to the other (from its roots in sixties counterculture, the "Small is beautiful" anticar to its present-day playful reincarnation). The theme of brands that develop out of their categories and into the prevailing culture is taken up in Chapter 7 on the evolution of brand meaning. At the same time, there may be a symbolic dimension to the category itself, possibly already appropriated by a leading brand. We will explore this theme later in this chapter.

It is worth underlining that primary brand meaning and implicit brand meaning are two distinct concepts, two separate dimensions of total brand meaning, with a greater or lesser degree of interrelationship. They are like two different lenses for looking at a brand. Each will bring the brand into focus in a somewhat different manner.

We have seen that primary brand meaning is largely determined by the brand's direct benefits and physical attributes. Brands that establish strong emotional ties with their consumers may possess a less functionally determined primary brand meaning. Similarly, service brands, such as USPS or Avis, are less obviously defined by their physical characteristics and their benefits are less tangible than in the case of packaged goods. Whatever the case, that element, or those elements, that prevail above all others will most readily define the brand in the consumer's mind—that is, constitute primary brand meaning. Primary brand meaning is important to understand because it reveals how consumers perceive a brand.

Implicit brand meaning resides in the extended emotional and psychological significance of brand attributes, benefits and other associations and may tap into deeper category dynamics, higher-order consumer values or archetypal influences. Implicit brand meaning is important to understand because it reveals potentially motivating depth and resonance in a brand. The profundity and robustness of a brand's implicit brand meaning will depend on the way it is understood, interpreted and embraced by the consumer and the extent to which it is cultivated and perpetuated by the marketer. The differences between the two types of brand meaning are illustrated in Figure 5.7.

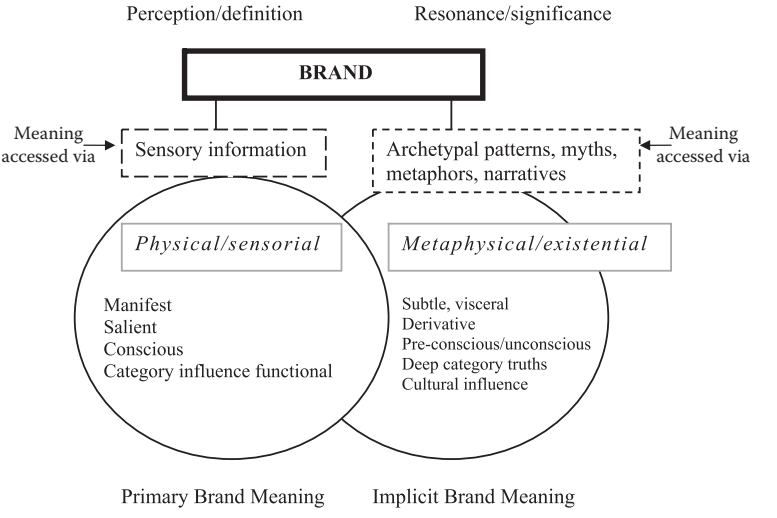


**Figure 5.7** Brand meaning model.

Brand managers who are faced with the constant concern of product or service delivery, a reputation for quality, developing new features or line extensions, or appropriating category benefits often lose sight of the symbolic potential of their brands. Not that these marketing considerations are without importance. They are important, and they will largely determine primary brand meaning in the eyes of the consumer. On the other hand, some commentators dismiss the discipline of developing and highlighting unique features and benefits as mundane and uninspiring. The truth is that although appropriating archetypal or cultural high ground affords brands iconic status in the longer term, people usually access brands through their underlying products. So when there is synergy, connection and correlation between primary brand meaning and implicit brand meaning, when actually using and experiencing a product provides cues and triggers to higher brand meaning, that is when total brand meaning is at its most robust and compelling. When you sit astride a roaring Harley, pull on a pair of Nikes, or power up a Macintosh, you are participating in a brand narrative; you are drawing meaning from that experience. That is what brand mystique and brand myth are about.

The Oreo brand provides another example. Introduced in the US in 1912, Oreo has become the most popular cookie in the world (according to Euromonitor International), and is the biggest selling cookie in the US. Consisting of a rich vanilla crème filling sandwiched between two dark chocolate plain cookies, Oreo's primary brand meaning should in theory be quite straightforward. Indeed, the sandwich cookie has remained remarkably unchanged down the years. Despite the multitude of Oreo extensions, for the most part these have been variations on a theme. Chocolate Crème Oreo, Double Delight Oreo with Peanut Butter 'n Chocolate, the vanilla-flavored Golden Oreo, and so forth. Oreo cookies were among the first "interactive" foods, offering consumers different ways of accessing and enjoying them. Consumers are encouraged to use their creativity when eating them, to take ownership of the process and make it an individual experience. There is a traditional ritualistic way to eat an Oreo—twisting the cookies apart, licking the crème and dunking the cookies in milk. This eating experience is portrayed in the global "moments" advertising campaign. At the same time this campaign has consistently nurtured the concept of sharing and connection. Oreo, and its distinctive method of consumption and enjoyment,

brings together a son and his dad, or grandpa, or friend, as they share a rewarding moment together. The fact that these moments of connection are often between different generations keeps the tradition alive and relevant for all ages. As stated earlier, a rich implicit brand meaning is not the preserve of substantial, high-priced items, as the example of a simple sandwich cookie demonstrates.

### *Implicit Brand Meaning in Practice*

Gillette is an example of a brand with great depth of brand meaning. Traditionally, Gillette has been about razors and shaving, though the company has sought to expand that meaning to personal grooming with the launch of the Gillette Series line following the success of the Sensor razor. The slogan "The best a man can get" is one of the cleverest slogans ever penned. It evokes the rich dimensions of meaning of the Gillette brand. Its supremacy claim as the best available product is supported by the brand's track record of always being at the forefront of shaving technology. The dynamic look and design of its razors bear testimony to this, with their abundance of silver and black: "What makes this packaging great is not that the shaving system, the handle and blades look pretty, but that the shaver's handle sends a strong message of the best technology any man or woman can get in the world of shaving" (Gobé 2001, p. 113). The other interpretation of the slogan, as the best a man can be(come), alludes to Gillette's implicit brand meaning. On the one hand, the campaign that first introduced the slogan for the Sensor razor depicted a very clearly defined set of masculine values: the well-groomed, fit, successful executive and family man. The somewhat stereotypical portrayal of the ideal American male according to Gillette even passed over into the vernacular, as single women yearned to meet a "Gillette man." On the other hand, at a deeper symbolic level, research reveals that men feel "reborn" when they have just shaved—as if returned to their original pristine state, the way they were when they entered the world. The brand's symbolic meaning thus has both a more conscious, value-expressive dimension and a subconscious psychological dimension. Gillette's previous slogan, by comparison, was the more linear "comfort and closeness."

Levi's provides an instance of a brand that suffered the consequences of a shifting and inconsistent brand meaning. Levi's primary

meaning for a long time was original, tough-wearing jeans. In fact, it was the brand that invented the concept of *blue jeans* and defined it for decades. Its move into more general casual clothing diluted and altered this meaning and was not a great success. As fashion changed, Levi's started to lose share to trendy newcomers like Diesel, with baggier, low-cut jeans. Suddenly, contemporary youth started to see Levi's as their parents' brand. Moreover, its symbolic meaning was becoming multifarious and diffuse. To an extent this was an outcome of the brand's rich and far-reaching heritage. Levi's are still the original blue jeans, first riveted for added strength, more than a century ago. The brand's cultural antecedents are rooted in the rugged American West, a symbol of frontier independence and pioneering spirit. For generations, Levi's seemed to catch and represent the mood of the young—never more so than in the 1950s, when Levi's meant jeans and jeans meant youth, particularly rebellious youth. By the 1970s the blue jean was an American icon, ripe for export, and Levi's, along with Lee and Wrangler, were its representatives. Through the rise and fall of the 1980s and 1990s, the brand's implicit meaning has wandered through the symbolism-rich foothills of pioneering independence, freedom, rebelliousness, heroism and sexual confidence, with a bit of humor thrown in for good measure—all while losing touch with the brand's primary target.

It is not unusual for brand meaning to shift and evolve with the passage of time. Consider the earlier example of the Lucozade brand in the United Kingdom. Lucozade is a glucose-rich drink introduced by Beecham Foods (now Glaxo Smith Kline) in the 1930s. It was traditionally positioned as a source of quick and easily assimilated energy in times of sickness. Advertising featured convalescent children and ran with the tag line, "Lucozade aids recovery." The product was packaged in a distinctive 25-ounce bottle with yellow cellophane wrap. Some 20 percent of sales volume went through pharmacists. By the late 1970s volume was trending down and the brand was in decline. New faster-acting, more effective drugs had reduced convalescence periods and many children's diseases were now rarities. The Beecham Foods convalescence drink was losing its way.

The problem, or rather the opportunity, was that to consumers the brand had a somewhat different meaning from that assumed by the company. A "Usage and Attitude" study conducted at the time turned up some interesting findings. Only about 20 percent of the volume was actually being used for convalescence, and only some 30 percent

was being drunk by children. A significant proportion of the volume was being consumed in health and by adults. To consumers, the perceived primary brand meaning was shifting toward one of energy boost. Housewives would use it as such during their busy day.

Gradually and cautiously, the company began to embrace this meaning. At first it was framed in the context of an energy boost to help the body regain its normal energy level. With time this evolved into an energy boost to provide extra energy for normal, healthy bodies. The brand's extension into the growing and lucrative sports drink segment provided a natural fit with Lucozade's energy proposition. Today Lucozade is a thriving brand, still marketed on an energy platform. Fundamentally, the underlying product has changed little since its introduction. The sociocultural changes in the environment in which it is marketed have been far more dramatic. Primary brand meaning has evolved from "energy for recovery" through "energy boost to keep me going" to "energy boost to perform." Note how perceptions derived from elements such as packaging cues have consolidated this process—vivid ring-pull cans and smaller, more dynamic portable plastic bottles communicate *energy* in a very different way from the old cellophane-wrapped glass bottles.

Though there has been a linear evolution in the drink's primary brand meaning, it is not hard to understand how its symbolic brand meaning would have undergone a revolutionary transformation. Consider the brand's early associations with convalescence compared with the present casting of energy provision in a more mental-spiritual-attitudinal frame. In brand archetypal terms, the brand has gone from nurturing caretaker to swashbuckling hero.

The General Electric brand, with its former slogan, "We bring good things to life," is an example of a company-generated brand concept and consumer-perceived brand meaning coinciding. Such slogans as this, or Visa's "It's everywhere you want to be," are more than just clever double entendres. By combining functional promise and symbolic connotation, they pave the way for people to perceive the full depth of the brand. In the case of General Electric, a recently introduced product bore perfect testimony to the slogan. The lighting division—another category with great symbolic potential—launched a line of light bulbs called Reveal. According to the company, they filter out the yellow rays that hide true colors, producing a truer, cleaner, whiter-looking light. "The bulb that uncovers

the pure, true light," says the sales literature—a product that brings implicit brand meaning to life.

## Researching Implicit Brand Meaning

Traditional positioning approaches fall back on the apparent dichotomy of a brand: what in Coca-Cola terminology are sometimes referred to as the *intrinsics* and the *extrinsics,* that is, product-related aspects and non-product-related aspects, or added values. Similarly, it is common practice to divide a brand's appeal into rational–functional areas and emotional areas. This process is an essential part of understanding a brand's make-up but goes only so far in terms of uncovering the full spectrum of brand meaning. Brand marketers usually stop at defining emotional appeal rather than excavating further into the hidden depths of emotional significance. Emotional appeal is frequently derived from facets of the brand personality (e.g., friendly, warm, accessible) and is a strong driver of consumer acceptance. It is therefore a powerful ally to, but not the same as, the brand's emotional significance. Researching a brand's symbolic and metaphorical properties is paramount if we are to understand and harness brand depth.

Yet probing implicit brand meaning is a complex process. Precisely because of its elusive, symbolic nature, this dimension of brand meaning is unlikely to be that at which a brand readily and predominantly defines itself in a consumer's mind. A brand's more immediate, manifest meaning is perceived at a less abstract level. Nobody goes into a supermarket and asks, "Where do you keep your maternal solicitude products?" or tells a car dealer, "I was looking for something in the way of symbolic self-completion."

At the same time, it is often assumed that brands of an overtly functional and rational nature, particularly packaged goods found in a domestic environment, are necessarily bereft of symbolic meaning. Nothing could be farther from the truth: "Packaged goods are as emotionally charged, as laden with symbolism and psychological meaning, as any other, as qualitative research can immediately demonstrate" (Restall 1999, p. 207). You just have to dig a little deeper to find it. For, like meaning itself, symbolic brand meaning is multilayered, its composition ranging from the conscious to the unconscious. Somewhere between these two states are symbolic meanings that lie

just below the threshold of consciousness—they are subconscious, or, as they are sometimes called, *preconscious*.

This means that implicit brand meaning can be difficult to access, given the fact that the key drivers of this type of meaning often reside in the deep recesses of the consumer psyche. The more functional and rational associations of a brand will usually be readily communicated in verbal descriptions of the brand. But a large proportion of consumer brand perception is acquired through low involvement processing and many associations are unconsciously stored in a nonverbal mode. Eliciting these nonverbal and pre- or unconscious associations, which often underpin the symbolic meanings a brand holds for its consumers, necessitates a more holistic and wide-ranging approach to research. To encompass the different modes of representation of brand associations (i.e., verbal, visual, emotional and sensory) and recognizing the fact that most associations are unconscious, it is evident that a variety of research techniques is called for to uncover brand meaning in all its subtlety and profoundness.

Such research can be problematical. People are often less willing or able to reveal what is private, highly personal, unspoken and potentially embarrassing. Furthermore, they may not be conscious of their real motivations or may find it difficult to articulate them. Specifically there are three fundamental areas of complication: (1) the problem of access; (2) the problem of representation modes; and (3) the problem of impression management.

*Access* The conscious primary associations of a brand are the easiest to elicit in research. Though they are informative in terms of a brand's primary meaning, the risk is that if research does not get farther than these to the less conscious associations, a superficial and lopsided impression of the brand's meaning will emerge. Potentially valuable insights will remain locked away in the consumer psyche and marketers may come to the erroneous conclusion that their brands lack psychological depth.

*Representation Modes* Much brand information is not processed rationally, so asking consumers to rationalize about brands is problematical. Moreover, though most human communication is nonverbal, most research information is provided in a purely verbal format. When that research is concerned with less conscious material the situation is even more unsatisfactory. Verbal feedback is usually the

result of highly cognitive linguistic rationalization. This is not the ideal way to retrieve impressions represented in visual, sensory and emotional modes or to tap instinctual responses, none of which have been subject to active cognitive reasoning. Moreover, the average person's verbal capacity is simply inadequate when faced with the task of describing in words visual, auditory and other types of sensory impressions. Consider, for instance, how limited our vocabulary is when it comes to describing scents. The risk here, then, is that, even if research manages to access nonverbal impressions and associations, these may not be correctly identified and recorded due to the overreliance on verbal techniques.

*Impression Management* As mentioned previously, *impression management* is a term introduced by Erving Goffman (1959), who presented the concept in a dramaturgical light in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Interaction is viewed as a "performance" through which individuals attempt to control the impressions that others form of them, in accordance with the desired goals of the "actor." Whether consciously or not, there is a tendency for people to control the information they provide about themselves. Usually, we process others' impression-relevant reactions to us at a preattentive or nonconscious level. Without consciously considering how other people may be perceiving us, we nonetheless scan the social environment to pick up signs of how others might regard us (Leary and Kowalski 1990). When we are "on show," or the focus of attention, the mechanism of impression management becomes more active and deliberate. Interviews are a prime example, be it a job interview, or a research interview where there is a focus on our self-concept. As a result, respondents monitor and manipulate their responses in keeping with their desired identities and may withhold potentially valuable information. Of course, this possibility exists in any kind of elicitation interview situation.

Tapping the intuitive and unconscious levels of the consumer psyche through the techniques of projection and empathy is essential if we are to understand how consumers relate to brands and their advertising at a deeper level. Ethnographic methods, observation and cultural analysis may also play a role in the more holistic approach required to access symbolic brand meaning. Figure 5.8 illustrates some of the different research methodologies suited to investigating symbolic brand meaning (Lannon and Cooper 1983, p. 204).

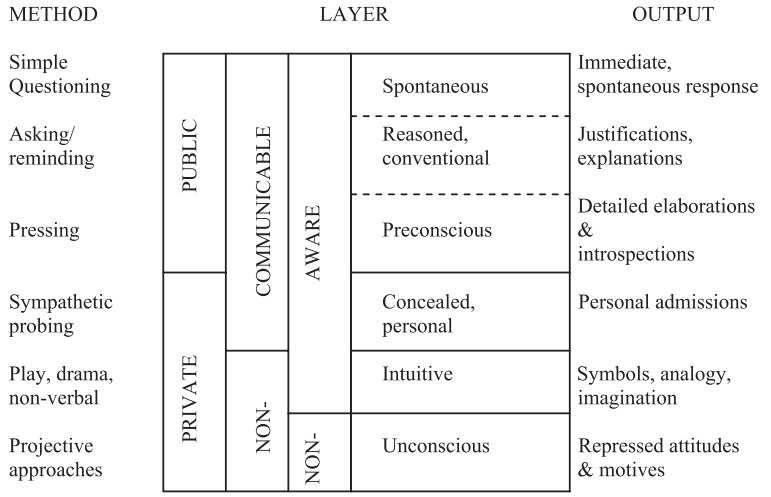


**Figure 5.8** Researching symbolic meanings in brands and advertising.

The type of research methodologies listed toward the base of Figure 5.8 are particularly valuable in uncovering associations and attitudes that, for whatever reason, consumers are reluctant to verbalize and may unknowingly be concealing through the feedback they give. A famous example of this and one illustrating the benefits of projective, psychographic techniques, was an experiment carried out by Mason Haire in the 1940s (see Keller 1998, p. 315). The experiment was conducted to uncover consumers' true beliefs and feelings toward Nescafé instant coffee. A survey had been run to investigate why initial sales of Nescafé had fallen short of expectations. People were asked if they used instant coffee and, if not, what they disliked about it. Most who said they did not like the product attributed this to not liking the flavor. However, Nescafé's management already knew from consumer taste tests that people found the taste of instant coffee to be acceptable when they did not know what type of coffee they were drinking. To get to the truth Haire devised an ingenious experiment.

Haire drew up two shopping lists with the same six items (Table 5.1). The first list included Maxwell House Drip Ground Coffee, whereas the second contained Nescafé Instant Coffee. Each of two groups of subjects, identically matched, were given one of the lists and asked to project themselves into the situation and to characterize the woman who bought the groceries. Two distinct profiles resulted (Table 5.2).

**TABLE 5.1 Haire Study Shopping Lists**

| Shopping List 1 | Shopping List 2 |
|---|---|
| Pound and a half of hamburger | Pound and a half of hamburger |
| Two loaves Wonder Bread | Two loaves Wonder Bread |
| Bunch of carrots | Bunch of carrots |
| One can Rumford's Baking Powder | One can Rumford's Baking Powder |
| Maxwell House Coffee (drip ground) | Nescafé Instant Coffee |
| Two cans Del Monte peaches | Two cans Del Monte peaches |
| Five pounds potatoes | Five pounds potatoes |

Haire's interpretation was that, for these respondents, using instant coffee was inconsistent with the traditions and mores associated with caring for one's family. Thus, the convenience aspect of instant coffee, at that point in time, was proving to be more of a liability than an asset. It was only when consumers were given a projection exercise that this deeper reason for rejecting instant coffee was uncovered. As a result of these findings a new campaign was developed that highlighted how using Nescafé freed up time for housewives to spend on other important housekeeping tasks.

Projective techniques can help reveal emotional reactions. Because projective questions have no obvious answer and the techniques used are open ended, they can encourage the expression of novel ideas and of fantasy, idiosyncrasy and originality. They can reduce social constraints and self-censorship, leading to respondents being more self-revealing. Such techniques can take many forms, including collages in which respondents are asked to put together a collage using pictures and images from selected stimuli or from magazines and newspapers. Picture completion and psycho-drawing are other techniques. The use of analogies and metaphors is also common in

**TABLE 5.2 Haire Study Shopper Profiles**

| | List 1 (Maxwell House) % | List 2 (Nescafé) % |
|---|---|---|
| Lazy | 4 | 48 |
| Fails to plan household purchases and schedules well | 12 | 48 |
| Thrifty | 16 | 4 |
| Not a good wife | 0 | 16 |

this type of research methodology. A metaphor is the representation of one thought in terms of another. Taken broadly, the term can refer to similes, analogies, allegories, parables and proverbs.

### *Metaphor Elicitation*

Metaphors can help us to interpret what we perceive in the world around us. They can lead us to see new connections and to draw new meanings. Because they can reveal cognitive processes beyond those that mere literal language can identify, metaphors can bring to the surface thoughts that would otherwise go unspoken. Metaphor elicitation and response latency techniques can be particularly effective in uncovering unconscious thoughts and feelings (Zaltman 2003, p. 76). That is why professionals in the fields of clinical psychology and psychiatry are increasingly turning to metaphor elicitation to enable patients to make unconscious experiences more conscious and communicable (ibid., pp. 89–90).

Harvard Business School professor Gerald Zaltman (2003 p. 89) gives the example of consumers' understanding of Chevrolet trucks in terms of a rock, in response to the brand's "Like a rock" advertising campaign. The campaign was developed on the back of metaphor elicitation research with consumers. The metaphor and its subsequent elaboration in advertising reflected the associations already present in the minds of existing loyal Chevy truck owners and communicated them to the broader truck-buying public. The phrase "Like a rock" triggers four basic associations in consumers' minds: "rock" with "take abuse"; "Chevy" with "reliable"; "Chevy" with "rock"; and "take abuse" with "reliable." In making a connection between the idea of a Chevy truck and the idea of a rock, consumers assign certain rock-like attributes to Chevy trucks—like the ability to take abuse—and these are translated into perceptions of reliability and ruggedness. To be able to attribute rock-like qualities to Chevy trucks, consumers have to draw on their existing concepts of rock. The metaphor of a Chevy truck as a rock thus forms a relationship between two different memory structures: that of Chevy trucks and that of rock. The elements of that relationship were already present in the minds of dedicated Chevy truck owners. In the minds of potential first-time buyers, the advertising campaign helped seed the

relationship, cause a fusion between the two memory structures and make a connection not previously made.

Zaltman's patented marketing research tool ZMET (Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique) combines projective methodology with in-depth interview. Drawing on neuroscience, semiotics and the ideas of Carl Jung, the technique uses metaphor and visual imagery to uncover the structure of meaning in consumers' thoughts and feelings with regard to a given topic, such as a brand. The technique reconciles the mismatch between the way consumers experience and think about the world around them and the traditional methods market researchers employ to gather this information. Consumers are asked to select images from materials they have at home that represent their thoughts and feelings about the topic under study. In-depth probing by interviewers explores the metaphors, their meaning and their relationship to each other. The emphasis is on probing and not prompting. Effective probing enables respondents to answer in multiple, creative and often unexpected ways, whereas prompting tends to set boundaries and channel participant responses toward the interviewer's own assumptions. The interviews are augmented by developing digital collages of consumer-generated images, which helps summarize many of the ideas discussed and also enables the interviewer to further explore relationships between emerging themes.

Specific steps included in such a session could include the following:

- Storytelling through pictures: Respondents describe how each picture represents their thoughts and feelings regarding the topic.
- Missing pictures: Participants are asked to express thoughts and feelings for which they could not find any images.
- The triad task: Respondents have to talk about similarities and differences among three images chosen at random by the interviewer.
- Metaphor probe: Selected images are explored more deeply to probe for any hidden meanings not yet uncovered. For instance, in "expanding the frame," interviewees are asked to widen the image and describe what they think might be there.
- Storytelling: Participants are invited to tell a story about the images, including plot, characters, emotions and sounds.
- Digital imaging: As described already.

These and other projective techniques are particularly useful for penetrating the human mind to reveal the unconscious constructs

of implicit brand meaning. As it is informed more by functional and rational considerations, primary brand meaning can usually be accessed through less sophisticated research methodology and more straightforward, direct questioning. In any case, given the complexity of human thought and behavior, it is always preferable to use a variety of research methods when probing for brand meaning.

### *Neuromarketing*

The new and controversial field of marketing research dubbed neuromarketing measures brain activity to gauge consumer reactions to brands and advertising and to better understand their buying decisions. High-tech tools like functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) enable researchers to map the degree to which certain parts of the brain become activated when exposed to different stimuli. The prospect neuromarketing offers is alluring: the potential to access directly and objectively consumers' thoughts without external interference. Against the backdrop of growing dissatisfaction with focus groups in which people often do not say what they mean or do not mean what they say and in which stimuli are mediated by an interviewer, the idea of getting straight to the source—the brain—is attracting client money. Though still only accounting for a fraction of the $8 billion spent in the United States on market research in 2006 (Park 2007, p. 114), many major marketers are turning their attentions to the techniques of neuromarketing. Moreover, they are doing so with respect to diverse areas of the marketing mix, including new product development and packaging design. In the auto industry, for instance, Daimler Chrysler has invested in neuromarketing research to understand how consumers evaluate car exteriors. Ford recently funded a number of neuromarketing experiments that included monitoring people's brain activity during the viewing of programs interspersed with ads (Wilkinson 2005, p. 22).

Interest in the field was heightened by a version of the Pepsi Challenge performed by neuroscientist P. Read Montague of the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Conducted inside fMRI machines, researchers monitored the brain scans of 67 people who were given a blind taste test of Coke and Pepsi. After consuming the colas, all volunteers displayed strong activation of the parts of the brain associated with reward–pleasure and brand preference was about equal.

However, when the experiment was repeated and participants were told what they were drinking, the Coke brand had a dramatic effect: It activated not only the reward–pleasure areas of the brain but also new areas: the memory-related brain regions. The result? Three quarters of the volunteers said they preferred Coke: "This showed that the brand alone has value in the brain system above and beyond the desire for the content of the can," commented Montague (Park 2007, p. 114). In other words, factors other than taste alone, such as the positive associations derived from years of seeing Coke commercials, were so potent that they could override, in Coke's favor, a taste preference for Pepsi.

Neuromarketing has a number of hurdles to overcome before it figures as a mainstream research tool. It remains to be demonstrated in the long run how meaningful its findings are and, in particular, how much they contribute to an understanding of brand meaning. It is very expensive research and is still limited in scale. Then there are the not inconsiderable objections to it from an ethical standpoint. However, as its techniques and applications become more sophisticated and more and more client research money flows into it, neuromarketing looks likely to establish itself as a viable research mode in the years to come.

## Sources of Brand Meaning

### *Brand Experience*

As discussed throughout the book, brand meaning is drawn from a number of public and private sources. Advertising is one of the most influential public sources and is discussed at length in Chapter 8. Many marketing professionals still tend to regard advertising and other paid-for communication as the only way to create and maintain brand meaning. Even in the absence of advertising support, though, brands can come to hold vivid meaning for their consumers. The Body Shop is a good example. Famous for creating a niche market sector for naturally inspired skin- and hair-care products, The Body Shop evolved from one small shop in Brighton on the south coast of England selling around 25 products, to become a global network of nearly 2000 stores in 50 countries. The strong meaning of the brand resides in a potent combination of product, sensory experience and a single-minded company ethos, epitomized by founder Anita Roddick and spanning environmental concern, animal rights and humanitar-

ian issues. With its pioneering commitment to tackling global poverty ("Trade, not aid") and its determination to challenge the stereotypes of beauty perpetuated by the cosmetics industry, The Body Shop has come to incorporate a unique set of meanings for its aficionados, the envy of those companies who have tried unsuccessfully to spend their way to brand fame.

With service brands in particular, such as hotels and airlines, experience is likely to be the main source of brand meaning. By way of contrast, with a product like cigarettes, or bottled water, most of the brand meaning comes from the advertising. Direct experience will contribute less to brand meaning. Figure 5.9 illustrates the difference between these two examples. Firsthand experience and advertising are two of the biggest contributors to brand meaning. Their relative importance varies from category to category and brand to brand and is a function of the degree of firsthand experience on the one hand and the amount of advertising consumed on the other.

One of the best examples of an "experiential brand" is Starbucks. Starbucks reinvented the coffee shop and is steadily reinventing a category. Not so many years ago finding a decent cappuccino or a bag of specialty coffee beans was something attainable only by the privileged few who had been initiated into the wonders of *coffea arabica*. Today

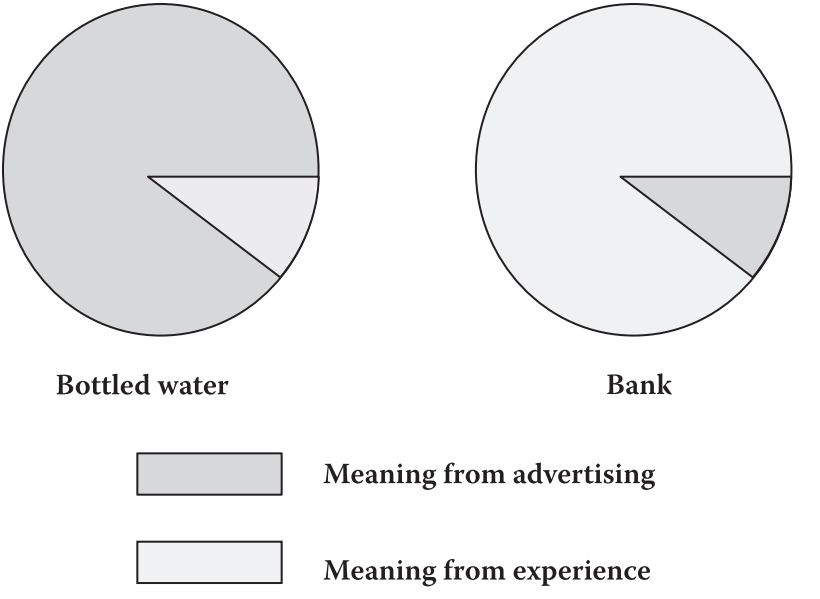


**Figure 5.9** Sources of meaning compared.

specialty coffee stores and coffee bars are mushrooming throughout our cities and Jamaica Blue Mountain coffee (considered by many to be the finest in the world) can be ordered over the Internet. While visiting Milan in 1983 when he was director of retail operations, Starbucks' chair and chief global strategist, Howard Schultz, had an epiphany about bringing the Italian coffee shop to the United States. He observed the customs of Italian coffee-lovers as they visited any of the country's 200,000 espresso bars and was struck by the environment and the elements of the overall experience.

Schultz's mantra of "retail is detail" finds expression in every facet of the company's operations. The aromas of freshly ground coffee, expertly drawn espresso shots and drip-brewed coffees of the day that greet customers as they enter a Starbucks heighten the anticipation of what is to come. To keep it that way the company banned smoking and asked employees to refrain from wearing colognes or perfumes. Then there is the distinctive color palette cueing coffee in its different stages—the greens of coffee trees and unripe beans, the red of ripe berries, coffee mocha and roasted bean browns. There is a spaciousness and comfortable informality about the shops and their seating areas. The interesting menu boards invite attention. The floors are clean, the packaging attractive and the jazzy, bluesy music easy on the ear. And the baristas will prepare your coffee just the way you want it. Starbucks has turned retailing coffee into an art form, one that appeals to all the senses. It is as much about the sights, sounds and smells as it is about the taste. Starbucks connects with its customers by generating a narrative consistent with their values and preferences. And those customers are involved in the experience, unhesitatingly slipping into Euro-latte Starbucks speak ("Mine's a decaf grande extra cocoa mocha"). What was previously a rather unglamorous beverage to most Americans—an uninspiring cup of joe—has become stylish and trendy thanks in large part to Starbucks—and all with hardly a dollar spent on advertising.

### *Brand Heritage*

Sometimes the brand's own history and the heritage associated with it may be a significant source of its meaning for consumers. Hovis bread in the United Kingdom is a brand with a rich heritage. No

other food has been as central to the British diet as the humble loaf of bread. Hovis started out in 1886 as "Smith's Patent Germ Bread." The name Hovis arose from a competition in 1890 and comes from the Latin *hominis vis*, "the strength of man." The original Hovis was a solid wheatgerm loaf. The brand's growth was driven by many successful advertising campaigns, from "Don't say brown, say Hovis" in 1916, to "Have you had your Hovis today?" in 1936 and "Hovis is the slice of life" in 1954. But the most famous campaign for the brand began in 1973 with the "Boy on the Bike" commercial. The ads, set in the early part of the century, were shot against a backdrop of cobblestone streets, rolling hills and country lanes, evocative of the Yorkshire countryside (though actually filmed in Dorset) and accompanied by Dvorak's New World Symphony, with its distinctly old-world feel. The boy on the bike is delivering Hovis loaves. "Last stop on t'round was Old Ma Pegarty's place," he reminisces in a thick northern accent. "It were like takin' bread to top o't'world. 'Twas a grand ride back though…. I knew the baker would have t'kettle on and batches of hot Hovis ready…." The campaign is a classic in nostalgic advertising, oozing the homely, down-to-earth values and goodness of yesterday, going back to the very roots of the brand. It ran for 20 years. It is interesting to ponder whether such a campaign would have the same effect on today's media-savvy, somewhat more cynical audience. Nostalgia, as they say, ain't what it used to be….

Another brand that looked to its roots for meaning was Wrangler, in the European jeans market. The Wrangler name came into being in 1947 when the Blue Bell Overall Company designed a denim jean specifically for professional cowboys (the name itself refers to the job of herding and caring for livestock, particularly horses, on a ranch). In 1993, Wranglers began to be marketed as the "Authentic Western Jeans." It was a credible enough claim, given the brand's history and one that offered the potential, at least, to compete with the Levi's brand, which effectively owned originality in the blue jeans market. But it was not until 1997 that this meaning was really consolidated. The challenge for the brand was to make its Western heritage relevant and attractive to young European consumers. The response was the "Rodeo" advertising campaign. Though largely understated in Europe, in America Wranglers are inextricably linked with the sport of rodeo. They are the only jeans made especially for professional rodeo riders. The jeans often come with a copy of the Professional

Rodeo Cowboys' Association booklet in the back pocket, attesting to the fact that 99 out of 100 rodeo riders wear Wranglers. By presenting rodeo as the ultimate extreme sport, the company managed to avoid falling into the obvious, clichéd Western territory, which would have left young Europeans indifferent.

### *Brand Names*

The selection of an appropriate brand name is one of the most important decisions a marketer has to make in launching a new brand. It can play a critical role in providing cues about brand meaning. For that reason, even if a brand has been in the market for some time, probing consumer reactions to the name can reveal some of the underlying reasons for broader brand perceptions and attitudes. The criteria usually suggested for evaluating brand names are more straightforward than attempts to classify types of names. Desirable brand names (1) can be encoded into, retained in and retrieved from memory with relative ease, thus facilitating recall and recognition; and (2) can favor the creation of images and associations consistent with intended brand meaning. Not all successful brand names meet both criteria. Just as research suggests names with an "x" are particularly memorable—Rolex, Radox, Xerox—there are phonetic reasons why Kodak is an easy brand name to register in the mind and recall, yet there is nothing inherently meaningful about the word *Kodak* to suggest any attribute or category associations.

Kodak is an invented, or *coined*, word. Coined, or made-up, names are just one of the name types usually identified in describing the variety of brand names. Other descriptors include *concrete* (Dove) versus *abstract* (Zest), *real words* (Budget) versus *nonwords* (Avis), *descriptive* (Craftsman) versus *nondescriptive* (DeWalt) and *suggestive* (Pearl Drops) versus *nonsuggestive* (Arm & Hammer). The terms *meaningful* and *nonmeaningful* are also used. Though it is true that some brand names convey no inherent meaning, for the rest it is more practical to think in terms of degrees of meaningfulness, which relates to the two central premises of this book: (1) People are very resourceful in finding and creating meaning; and (2) there is often meaning where, on the surface, little would seem to exist. Even in the case of a nonword brand name, individuals are capable of extracting some meaning (see Chapter 3 on sound symbolism). For

example, in a study of computer-generated random brand names as potential candidates for the breakfast cereal and laundry detergent categories, it was found that *Whumies* and *Quax* were more remindful of breakfast cereals and *Dehax* was remindful of a laundry detergent (Peterson and Ross 1972).

There are thus two potential sources of meaning in a brand name: (1) the meaning that may be derived from semantic associations; and (2) the meaning generated by sound symbolism. Take the brand name Viagra, for instance. Viagra rhymes with Niagra, as in Niagara Falls, the famously powerful waterfall. Psychologically, water is linked to sexuality and life. *Vi* suggests vigor or virility and *agra* triggers associations with the fertility of agriculture and the energy of aggression. From a sound symbolism perspective, *v* connotes speed and energy, while the guttural *g* connotes toughness and masculinity. When executives at a well-known naming consultancy saw the handheld wireless prototype developed by Research In Motion Ltd., they thought the little keyboard buttons looked like seeds. The name *strawberry* was thrown up, but *straw-* is a slow, drawn-out sound. *Black* works better; the short vowels in the first two syllables of Blackberry suggest a brisk sprightliness, while the alliteration conveys a user-friendly informality, an impression accentuated by the final *y,* which is a friendly sound often found in nicknames. Semantically, the name suggests accessibility, *while* berry conveys smallness and compactness (Begley 2002 p. B1). Ziplok sounds like a brand that will lock in freshness quickly and effectively and benefits from both sound symbolism and semantic associations.

Other brand names are more inherently and explicitly meaningful. That is, they deliberately cue some aspect of the desired brand meaning. They may allude semantically to the category (e.g., Lean Cuisine low-calorie frozen foods) or to some attribute or benefit of the brand (e.g., Die-Hard batteries, Odor-Eaters, Duracell, Band-Aid). Whereas the most explicitly meaningful brand names, like I Can't Believe It's Not Butter or Gee, Your Hair Smells Terrific shampoo, leave little room for mistake as to what they are, their downside is that such names severely limit future brand extension possibilities—that is, stretching or reframing their meaning. Indeed, this consideration holds true for any brand name with at least some intended meaning. Generally, the more "motivated" (to use a term from semiotics) the meaningfulness, the more limiting it could prove to be in the long run. Compaq was a great name for small computers, but the

company has had to invest heavily to facilitate the successful introduction of bigger personal computers. Similarly, Keller (1998, p. 139) gives the hypothetical example of a brand of laundry detergent that is initially given the name *Blossom* and marketed as "adding fresh scent." If it is subsequently felt necessary to reposition the product and add a new brand association, for instance that the product "fights tough stains," this may be difficult to accomplish if the brand name continues to remind consumers of the original meaning the brand holds for them. Rather more literally, when Dell decided it wanted to mean not just your computer but also everything that attaches to it (e.g., printers, projectors), the company had to ask shareholders to approve dropping "Computer" from its name.

High-imagery words are particularly suitable for brand names as they have an advantage in terms of recall over low-imagery words. High-imagery words readily create vivid visual references in consumers' minds. Concrete nouns, with tangible, visual referents (e.g., *mustang*) more easily inspire these mental images than low-imagery, abstract nouns (e.g., *bold*) (Robertson 1989). Blockbuster is a good example of a high-imagery brand name. Originally, blockbuster movies were so named because people would queue around the block to get in to see them. Blockbuster is therefore an excellent name for a company that rents movies. It relates to the category without being generic. JB's Video Rentals or National Video Rentals, whereas descriptive and concrete, inspire less imagery and fewer mental representations, affording the consumer fewer cognitive access points and making the brand names less memorable and distinctive.

Of course, much of the imagery that meaningful, high-imagery brand names elicit is connotative meaning and stored perceptions already existing in the individual's mind for the words used in the brand name. The brand name taps into that existing meaning reservoir. That is the advantage of using a meaningful name as opposed to an invented, nonmeaningful name such as Kodak or Exxon, in which meaning has to be originated from scratch.

Foreign branding can dramatically affect the meanings ascribed to products. By foreign branding is meant the strategy of spelling or pronouncing a brand name in a foreign language (Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé 1994). Häagen-Dazs may sound Scandinavian, but it is made in the United States and was first served in New York. Klarbrunn water does not originate from mountain springs in the German or Swiss Alps, as the name may suggest; it is American water

bottled in Wisconsin. Foreign branding triggers cultural stereotypes and imagery and can influence and enhance product perceptions and attitudes, more than compensating for any initial difficulties in pronouncing and recalling them. The cue *French*, for example, activates a network of associations related to flair, elegance and sophistication (e.g., being *chic* and having a certain *je ne sais quoi*), sensitivity to good aesthetics and appreciation of sensory pleasure, refined taste and an educated palate. In a word, French culture is seen as one of hedonism (ibid.).

Hedonic products afford pleasure—typically sensorial, experiential products—as opposed to utilitarian products, which are evaluated according to their functionality. Thus, hedonism-utilitarianism is both a basic cultural dimension and a central consideration in product perceptions (Robertson 1989). In a series of experiments Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé (1994) examined the extent to which foreign branding influences product perceptions and evaluations. Focusing on French brand names, they found that, for "hybrid products" with a mixture of hedonic and utilitarian features (e.g., shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant and body lotion), the brands were perceived as more hedonic when the name was pronounced in French than when pronounced in English. French brand names were found to have more effect on attitudes to hedonic products than country-of-origin information. Naturally, country-of-origin information (e.g., "Made in Germany") will add country-specific imagery to the brand associative network, but the apparently stronger cues triggered by foreign branding alone are significant.

Besides the cognitive links that consumers make between brand names and product categories, attributes and benefits are the emotional and expressive connections. Brand names that have strong positive associations, connotations, or symbolism and that stir the emotions and arouse pleasant feelings enjoy enhanced recall. This is particularly so when the product category itself is an emotional one. According to the psychological phenomenon of state-dependent memory, memory of past events is better when those events coincide with an individual's current emotional state (Martineau 1957). Thus, we are more likely to recall happy memories when we are in a happy mood, romantic memories when we are in a romantic mood and so on. So a consumer thinking about brands in an emotional category such as perfumes, colognes, or jewelry should more easily be able to recall emotional brand names, such as *Love, Passion,* or *Happy.*

Brand names, then, can play a fundamental role in the formation of brand meaning. They may carry no inherent meaning, in which case ascribed meaning is provided solely by marketing efforts and consumer responses. Or they may hold a greater or lesser degree of intrinsic meaningfulness. Some names offer little in the way of connotation and are very literal descriptions of the products (e.g., *Shake 'n Vac*), whereas others work less through their denotative meaning than by connecting with the connotative meanings already existing in consumers' minds. Automobile brand names such as Explorer, Mustang and Land Rover are examples. Pierre Martineau (1957) accurately captured the spirit and importance of the brand name more than fifty years ago when he described it as a "psychological label" capable of paving the way for the critical symbolic interpretation of products (Floch 2000).

### *Brand Logos and Symbols*

A logotype consists of the brand name rendered in a distinctive typeface, often combined with a trademark, which is a visual brand device or symbol, such as the Prudential rock. Given that the brain receives and processes pictures more easily than words, visual devices and symbols are potent branding tools and they have proven to be more memorable than words. Often these symbols and visual devices are designed to enhance or reinforce brand meaning in some way. In his book *Marketing and Communication: Beneath the Signs, the Strategies*, Jean-Marie Floch devotes an entire chapter to a semiotic analysis of the IBM and Apple logos:

> Our logo is a great mystery: it is a symbol of pleasure and knowledge, partly eaten away and displaying the colors of the rainbow, but not in the proper order. We couldn't wish for a more fitting logo: pleasure, knowledge, hope and anarchy (Jean-Louis Gassée, ex-chairman of Apple Products. Floch 2001, p. 186).

The logo draws on the story of Eden and the fruit of the tree of knowledge, forbidden to Adam and Eve. Once bitten into, the apple empowered mankind with the gift of knowledge. The reordering of the rainbow stripes connotes free-spiritedness, rebellion and imagination—an appropriate logo for a brand that urges us to "think

different." Of course, Apple has since moved away from the rainbow logo (presumably for reasons of practicality, design quality control and modernization), just as it has evolved from flashy colors to predominantly white polycarbonate for its consumer computer lines.

In the late 1800s, Henri Nestlé, a chemist and inventor, devoted several years to the development of Farine Lactée Nestlé, a milk-based food for babies whose mothers could not breastfeed them. At a time of high infant mortality the product saved the lives and health of many infants in Europe. Today Nestlé ("little nest") uses the bird's nest device as a seal of guarantee on all human food products under Nestlé corporate brands. The device is a symbol of the company's ethos of quality nutrition, representing nourishment, security and a sense of family.

Prudential's rock and Legal & General's (United Kingdom) umbrellas are metaphors for solidarity and strength and protection, respectively. The Well's Fargo stagecoach is another example of a meaningful brand symbol, with connotations of the old West, a commitment to make it through and deliver for its customers and the reliable safekeeping of funds.

### *Relative Richness of Brand Symbols*

Incidentally, it is useful to consider the development and employment of visual brand symbols and logos in respect to status symbolism. Status symbolism is the lowest, most basic and most generic level at which implicit brand meaning operates, as well as the most conscious level—where the symbolic value of a brand to an individual amounts to nothing much more than its power as a badge. Designer symbols like the Lacoste alligator merely identify the brand and its wearer. There is little emotional or metaphorical content in the symbol. Similarly, the Michelin man is a symbol that, though it may help create and enhance the brand personality, has no metaphorical meaning. By contrast, the more richly symbolic nature of other brands is often embodied in some physical symbol such as the Harley-Davidson eagle, the Marlboro cowboy, or the Esso tiger. These symbols or icons immediately connote the brand's symbolic meaning regardless of the local language, assuming that the icon and symbolic values have similar currency in the given culture. Whether in the case of the brand itself as symbol (e.g., brand as status symbol),

or visual brand symbol (e.g., the Harley eagle), some symbols are clearly more meaningful than others.

One fundamental source of brand meaning that is often overlooked is that of the intrinsic nature of the underlying product and of the product category itself.

### *Product and Category Significance*

Many of the most successful brands have one thing in common: Ultimately, their meaning is grounded in some physical or symbolic truth about the product or category. Kodak, Gillette, Hallmark and Harley-Davidson are examples. The more we probe the nature of the product and its usage, the closer we will come to discovering what the Leo Burnett agency traditionally challenged itself to relentlessly pursue: the "inherent drama" in the product. Bill Bernbach's declaration that "the magic is in the product" was probably more true in his day than today but serves as a useful reminder that sometimes a product has its own story to tell. Returning to the technique of laddering, such an approach, by providing a hierarchy of benefits and values, can offer insight into the symbolic significance of products and categories. For while at one level products and their categories may be fulfilling simple physiological requirements, at another they are often simultaneously responding to more fundamental human needs.

The personal-care category, with its personal wash, grooming and hygiene products, is a case in point. Cleansing may seem like a daily chore, but it is also a ritual that has been associated for centuries and across cultures and religions, with the removal of sin and guilt, the washing away of what makes us feel impure. Ivory soap taps this reservoir of symbolic references. The brand connotes purity, renewal and innocence. From its famous "99 and 44/100% Pure" slogan, arrived at when scientists tested the soap and found that it contained only 0.56 percent impurities, to its ability to float (the serendipitous result of an employee failing to shut off the soap-making machine when he went to lunch, allowing air to get into the soap mixture) and from its product positioning as the more mild and more gentle soap to the name itself, Ivory and its advertising have remained a consistent expression of a brand idea intimately tied to the symbolic nature of cleansing.

Hallmark's brand meaning, mentioned earlier, is founded on the insight that sending cards can actually help us in our everyday relationships. This is a quite different perspective to that of simply fulfilling obligations on special occasions. Moreover, cards are sent not only to benefit the recipient but also because it makes the sender feel good. Recognizing these deeper category motivations enabled Hallmark to take the high ground and at the same time increase card usage—a wonderful example of leveraging category meaning and by appropriation brand meaning, to grow market size and share.

The hair-care market provides an example of untapped potential in this context. By and large the category has completely overlooked the emotional and psychological significance of hair. Deep down (or high up, on the ladder), consumers regard hair as an important indicator of psychological well-being. A good head of healthy, well-kept hair transmits self-respect. Women will often change their hair (by cutting or dying it) after a traumatic experience such as a divorce, the act being a symbolic representation of a break with the past and a new beginning. The Rodgers and Hammerstein song "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right out of My Hair" from the film *South Pacific* provides a metaphorical variation on the theme. A "bad hair day" is about more than a few wayward curls. Most men, notwithstanding the current trend for baldheadedness, dread losing their hair as they feel it represents a loss of their virility and a kind of unwelcome rite of passage into old age. Yet despite the fact that hair is such an intimate and personal extension of the self, the category has historically treated it as something disembodied and objectified. Most brands are purely functionally driven, treat women as little more than "heads of hair," and never get past clichéd hair shots and stereotypical representations of external beauty. Hair-care brands that reassess category parameters and start to connect with consumers on a different plane will reap handsome rewards.

Guinness, probably Ireland's most famous export, is a brand steeped in tradition. It dominates the global stout category. Arthur Guinness first set up business at St. James's Gate in the heart of Dublin in 1759. Guinness is a stout beer created from four simple ingredients: barley, water, hops and yeast. In its formative years, the brand touted its nutritional properties: "Guinness is good for you," proclaimed early advertising, a reference to its fortifying iron content. In the late 1980s and early 1990s it cultivated a distinctive, individualistic and somewhat mysterious personality through an advertis-

ing campaign featuring Rutger Hauer. The commercials were replete with Guinness brand iconography: the blond Hauer dressed all in black suggesting the renowned black and white of the beer's body and head, the fields of barley indicative of its natural ingredients and, above all, the theme of time—for Guinness has become a "graduation beer," a beer that drinkers aspire to and grow into. It takes a while for the palate to become accustomed to its slightly bitter taste.

Furthermore, it takes time and patience to pour and enjoy a pint of Guinness. In fact, Guinness is the only beer you have to wait for. Serving up a perfect pint of Guinness is an art. This from the official Web site:

> GUINNESS® Draught is best served at 6°C (that's 42.8°F), with the legendary two-part pour. First, tilt the glass to 45 degrees and carefully pour until three quarters full. Then place the glass on the bar counter and leave to settle. Once the surge has settled, fill the glass to the brim. It takes about 119.5 seconds to pour the perfect pint. But don't fret. It's worth the wait. (http://www.guinness.com)

During the "surge" phase grayish white clouds billow inside the glass as in some mystical potion. Then, slowly and magically, black and white begin to separate (technically it is a deep ruby color; though it is universally referred to as black, as in, "A glass of the black stuff").

Pouring and savoring a pint of Guinness is a ritual in itself, and this ritualistic pattern of painstaking and dedicated preparation, keen anticipation and rewarding consumption is synthesized into a compelling metaphor in the brand's best commercial to date. *Surfer* (1999) was filmed in Hawaii. Shot in black and white and highly atmospheric, the commercial dramatizes the metaphor of surfers waiting for the ultimate wave representing the anticipation of waiting for a perfect pint of Guinness to be poured. The surfer (not a young actor, but a weather-beaten veteran surfer) waits patiently on the shore for his chance. Finally his patience is rewarded and he launches himself and his board into the ocean to ride with white horses on the long-awaited wave.

The word *diamond* comes from the Greek *adamas*, meaning unconquerable, which passed into Latin and then Old French as *diamant,* with the sense of hardest material (the adjective *adamant* has the same origin). Diamonds are one of nature's miracles, pure crystalline carbon created deep within the earth millions of years ago. Discovered by man more than 4,000 years ago in India, they are

valued for being the hardest natural substance on Earth. Diamonds have had a privileged role in history. They have had special powers attributed to them, have been fought over and have even been worshipped. Across time and cultures, the diamond has been associated with invulnerability, lightning, magic, healing, protection and poisoning. The ancient Greeks believed that diamonds were slivers of stars that had fallen to the earth. They were claimed by others to be the tears of the gods. They were originally carried as talismans, before being worn as decorative adornment.

The De Beers mining syndicate promotes diamond jewelry around the world on behalf of the entire diamond industry. The line "A diamond is forever" was conceived in 1947, inspired by the fact that the indestructibility of a diamond makes it the perfect symbol for a lasting relationship. Before De Beers associated the precious stones with eternal love, the diamond ring as the standard token of betrothal hardly existed. Today, cultural differences notwithstanding, the diamond has become the gemstone of choice when people want to express the love they feel for another. This naturally occurring substance, the transparent form of pure carbon, has acquired the most sublime of meanings: the ultimate symbol of love.

Products, then, have the potential to become mediators of deeply motivational meaning. Understanding the context of a product, its original purpose and usage brings us closer to fathoming its fundamental meaning. Brands that succeed in tapping macrotruths about a category or market and its underlying structure and dynamics acquire a larger brand meaning. This transcends simply owning the category benefit. It requires capturing and coming to represent the meaning that lies behind that benefit.