When Familiar Brands Match Your Conversations: The Role of Brand Familiarity in Conversation-related Advertising

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Despite denials from companies, research shows that consumers believe their phones listen to their conversation for personalized advertising (i.e., conversation-related advertising). Brand familiarity plays an important role in advertising literature, but has not been explored in the context of conversation-related advertising. Grounded in the dual processing theories, the DEAL framework, and expectancy violation theories, we study how consumers respond to conversation-related ads depending on the familiar or unfamiliar brands that are seemingly related to the conversation. Study 1 (a survey, $N = 250$) showed that brand familiarity was beneficial rather than harmful. Study 2 (a field experiment, $N = 138$) further confirmed these results. This brings insights to advertising practitioners that familiar brands could mitigate negative consequences.

Keywords: personalized advertising, brand familiarity, trust, smartphone, ad attitude

Introduction

Technology has enabled data-driven services and products to match with consumer interests such as personalized advertising, which offer benefits especially relevance but also increase concerns such as privacy and loss of control (Pew Research Center, 2019; Strycharz et al., 2019). One phenomenon is when personalized ads are seemingly related to offline conversations, so-called *conversation-related advertising* (Segijn et al., 2024). Although companies have denied that devices and apps actually listen or eavesdrop on conversations for advertising purposes (Haridy, 2019; Smalley, 2025), a recent survey shows that more than half of respondents believe this is happening to generate personalized ads (Segijn et al., 2024). While research has mostly documented the prevalence of such beliefs, less is known about how brand-related characteristics shape consumers' reactions to conversation-related ads. Brand-related factors, such as brand familiarity, have not been studied in the context of conversation-related ads. However, they may determine the effectiveness of the ad (Campbell & Keller, 2003). Brand familiarity has been

extensively studied in the advertising literature, with consumers responding more positively to familiar brands. However, conversation-related ads are considered creepy (Krause & Groeppel-Klein, 2026; Segijn et al., 2024), and consumers' expectation towards familiar brands may easily be violated. It is possible that brand familiarity in conversation-related ads could backfire, but whether this holds true remains unknown. Therefore, the current study aims to examine whether consumers respond differently towards conversation-related ads depending on whether they see a familiar versus an unfamiliar brand that is seemingly related to the conversation. By doing this, the current study will contribute to theoretical understanding of the dual processing theories (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Chaiken, 1980), the Dataveillance Effects in Advertising Landscape (DEAL) framework (Strycharz & Segijn, 2022), and expectancy violation theories (Burgoon, 1993). By applying this integrated approach, this research will advance our understanding of the mechanism of how brand familiarity leads to positive or negative consumer outcomes in the context of conversation-related advertising. The study will also extend these frameworks by examining subsequent consumer responses including trust in data handling by the brand and brand loyalty. The results are important to practitioners by providing insights about whether brand familiarity could mitigate unintended effects of personalized advertising as perceived by consumers.

Conversation-related Advertising

Conversation-related advertising is a type of personalized ad that is seemingly related to offline conversations (Segijn et al., 2024). When encountering this type of ads, consumers may form an e-eavesdropping belief that their electronic devices are listening to their offline conversations (Segijn et al., 2025). A recent study indicated that there was no consensus among advertising professionals about the existence of conversation-related advertising (Segijn, Zhang et al., 2025).

Regardless of whether it's true or not, consumers' beliefs may still affect their cognitions, attitudes, and behavior. To study effects of conversation-related advertising, the current work is guided by the Dataveillance Effects in Advertising Landscape (DEAL) framework (Strycharz & Segijn, 2022). This framework states that consumers may treat a data-driven ad as an observable instance of data collection, or surveillance episode, depending on their surveillance beliefs (Strycharz & Segijn, 2022). Similarly, ads that match the conversation can be considered as a surveillance episode when consumers believe their devices are eavesdropping (Segijn, et al., 2024). Surveillance beliefs such as e-eavesdropping belief can be activated or strengthened through a surveillance episode, which subsequently lead to surveillance responses, such as a feeling of being watched, or perceived surveillance (Segijn et al., 2022).

Brand Familiarity Effects

Brand familiarity may play a key role in conversation-related advertising. Brand familiarity refers to "the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer" (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987, p. 411). This prior knowledge difference may affect how consumers process conversation-related advertising, which could be explained by the dual processing theories (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Chaiken, 1980). Consumers tend to have more knowledge stored in memory about familiar brands, therefore, engage in less cognitive effort and interpret ads from such brands more heuristically compared to ads from unfamiliar brands (Campbell & Keller, 2003; Maheswaran et al., 1992). Based on this processing fluency difference, brand familiarity has many positive ad and brand effects, such as higher brand attitude (Laroche et al., 1996; Catalán et al., 2019), higher trust (Benedicktus et al., 2010), purchase intention (Catalán et al., 2019), and recall (Kent & Allen, 1994; Mikhailitchenko et al., 2009).

Still, expectations of familiar brands in conversation-related ads could be violated. According to the expectancy violation theory, expectancy is shaped by various factors including past experiences, and can be met or violated (Burgoon, 1993). As previously mentioned, consumers hold certain expectations such as a positive attitude and trust towards familiar brands. When conversation-related ads involve familiar brands, these expectations could be violated and consumers may feel betrayed by a familiar brand. For instance, ads collected personal information may be perceived as too personal, which could be considered as a violation of personal space (Moore et al., 2015). Given the mixed evidence through processing fluency and expectancy violation, we raise a question about how brand familiarity in conversation-related advertising influences (a) e-eavesdropping belief, (b) perceived surveillance by the sender, (c) trust in data handling by the sender, (d) attitudes toward the sender, and (e) brand loyalty (**RQ_1**)?

Surveillance and Ad Responses

According to the DEAL framework, when an e-eavesdropping belief is formed, perceived surveillance (a feeling of being watched) (Strycharz & Segijn, 2022) and also other negative outcomes could be subsequently activated. Data collection without consumers' consent and related information privacy concerns could lower their trust (Malhotra et al., 2004; Ahn & Haley, 2025). Therefore, we predict that the strength of the e-eavesdropping belief is negatively related to trust in data handling by the sender (**H_1**) and positively related to perceived surveillance by the sender (**H_2**). Additionally, aligned with the DEAL framework, previous research found perceived surveillance is associated with negative outcomes such as more privacy concerns, privacy risk perceptions, and perceived creepiness (Segijn et al., 2022), as well as lower trust in smart devices (Frick et al., 2021). We argue that perceived surveillance of the brand is negatively related to (a) trust in data handling by the sender, (b) attitudes toward the sender, and (c) brand loyalty (**H_3**).

Furthermore, higher trust in data handling has positive outcomes, including less chilling effects and more viewing time (Strycharz & Segijn, 2024), lower risks beliefs and higher likelihood of disclosing personal information (Malhotra et al., 2004). We predict that trust in data handling by the sender is positively related to (a) attitudes toward the sender and (b) brand loyalty (**H_4**).

Method Study 1

We examined brand familiarity in two studies, a survey (Study 1) and a field experiment (Study 2). The IRB approved survey aimed to provide preliminary insights of the relationship between brand familiarity and perceptions about conversation-related advertising. We conducted an online survey through Prolific in which respondents described their experience with conversation-related advertising on social media. Based on their experience, respondents were asked to rate brand familiarity by answering a question "how would you rate your familiarity with the product/brand advertised?" on a 5-point differential scale (Campbell & Keller, 2003). Next, they answered questions about perceived surveillance by the advertiser, e-eavesdropping belief, trust in data handling by the advertiser, and ad attitudes (all items can be found in Table 1). The final sample included 250 respondents (M_{age} = 34.62, SD_{age} = 11.57) with 50.80% male.

Results and Discussion Study 1

To answer the research questions and test all hypotheses, we ran simple regressions for Study 1. **RQ_1** examined the relationships between brand familiarity (independent variable) with e-eavesdropping belief, perceived surveillance by the brand/advertiser, trust in data handling by the brand/advertiser, and attitudes toward brand/ad. We found that brand familiarity was positively related to both trust in data handling by the advertiser ($p < .001$, $b^* = 0.23$) as well as ad attitude ($p < .001$, $b^* = 0.29$), confirming that respondents have more trust and like conversation-related ads of familiar brands better than unfamiliar brands. However, we did not

find a significant relationship regarding relationships between brand familiarity and e-eavesdropping belief (p = .161), and perceived surveillance by the advertiser (p = .110). Supporting $\mathbf{H_1}$ and $\mathbf{H_2}$, we found e-eavesdropping belief was negatively related to trust in data handling by the advertiser (p < .001, b^* = -0.33), and was positively related to perceived surveillance by the advertiser (p < .001, b^* = 0.48). In line with expectations, perceived surveillance by the advertiser was negatively related to trust in data handling by advertiser (p < .001, b^* = -0.23) ($\mathbf{H_{3a}}$) and ad attitude (p < .001, b^* = -0.34) ($\mathbf{H_{3b}}$). Therefore, both e-eavesdropping belief and perceived surveillance by the advertiser were associated with negative consumer perceptions. As expected, we found that trust in data handling by the advertiser was positively related to ad attitude (p < .001, b^* = 0.48) ($\mathbf{H_{4a}}$). Study 1 provides initial evidence that brand familiarity is not harmed by perceived conversation-related advertising. Building on these correlational findings, Study 2 entailed an experiment with small changes to further test whether brand familiarity causally influences consumers' reactions to conversation-related advertising.

Method Study 2

We conducted an IRB approved field experiment with a single-factor (familiar vs. unfamiliar brand) between-subjects design (the procedure is outlined in Figure 1). We recruited participants who aged 18 years or older with a smartphone at a big local event in 2025, with a cover story on playing a mobile game. After they signed the informed consent, they were asked to verify if they had a smartphone. This worked as a prime to make sure the phone was there during the conversation. Then, research assistants had a short casual conversation with the participant about butter in relation to an activity at the event. Next, participants played the game on their own smartphone for two minutes in which a five-second ad appeared about butter for either a familiar

(local) or unfamiliar (foreign) butter brand (Figure 2) after one minute. Finally, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire (items can be found in Table 1). The final sample consisted of 138 participants, with the average age of 43.35 (SD = 16.85) and 63.04% as female.

Results Study 2

The manipulation check for brand familiarity was measured using the same item from Study 1. ANOVA showed that the local brand (M = 4.16, SD = 1.01) was significantly more familiar than the foreign brand (M = 1.65, SD = 0.86), $F(1, 134) = 402.58$, $p < .001$. Additionally, there was no significant difference regarding brand conditions on brand familiarity ($F(1, 134) = .19$, $p = .662$) nor an interaction effect ($F(1, 134) = 0.50$, $p = .480$), which indicates that brand familiarity was not influenced by exposure to the conversation-related ad. Thus, the manipulation check was successful.

Study 2 provides replication of results from Study 1 and further adds findings of brand-related outcomes. We used ANOVAs to examine the effects of brand familiarity ($\mathbf{RQ_1}$). Results showed that when participants were exposed to familiar brand condition, they had higher e-eavesdropping belief (familiar brand: M = 2.97, SD = 1.04; unfamiliar brand: M = 2.51, SD = 1.15; $F(1, 136) = 6.23$, $p = .014$) and trust in data handling by the brand (familiar brand: M = 3.11, SD = 0.64; unfamiliar brand: M = 2.87, SD = 0.44; $F(1, 134) = 6.45$, $p = .005$) than when they were exposed to the unfamiliar brand condition. Next, we examined the effects on brand attitudes and loyalty. Because both of these were measured for both brands in both conditions, we added the variables as a within factor. Regardless of condition, participants were more positive towards the familiar brand in terms of brand attitude (familiar brand: M = 3.53, SD = 0.84; unfamiliar brand: M = 2.72, SD = 0.57; $F(1, 133) = 106.72$, $p < .001$) and brand loyalty (familiar brand: M = 2.76, SD = 0.89; unfamiliar brand: M = 2.08, SD = 0.74; $F(1, 134) = 60.65$,

$p < .001$) compared to the unfamiliar brand. Results showed no interaction effect for brand attitude ($F(1, 133) = 0.07$, $p = .797$) and brand loyalty ($F(1, 134) = 0.01$, $p = .931$), indicating the effects on brand attitude and loyalty were not influenced by the brand familiarity condition (i.e., exposure to the conversation-related ad). Finally, the analysis showed that perceived surveillance by the brand did not significantly differ between the familiar or unfamiliar brand conditions ($F(1, 136) = 1.60$, $p = .207$).

Contrary to expectations, a regression analysis showed that the strength of the e-eavesdropping belief was not significantly related to trust in data handling by the brand ($p = .074$) ($\mathbf{H_1}$). Similar to Study 1, e-eavesdropping belief was positively related to perceived surveillance of the brand ($p = .014$, $b^* = 0.21$) ($\mathbf{H_2}$). Contrary to expectations, a regression analysis showed that perceived surveillance by the brand was not significantly related to trust in data handling by the brand ($p = .356$), attitude toward familiar brand ($p = .172$), attitude toward unfamiliar brand ($p = .808$), brand loyalty toward familiar brand ($p = .109$), and brand loyalty toward unfamiliar brand ($p = .456$) ($\mathbf{H_3}$). A regression analysis for $\mathbf{H_4}$ showed that trust in data handling by the brand was positively related to attitude toward the familiar brand ($p = .003$, $b^* = 0.26$), brand loyalty toward familiar brand ($p < .001$, $b^* = 0.31$), and brand loyalty toward unfamiliar brand ($p = .043$, $b^* = 0.18$). However, we did not find any significant relationship between trust in data handling by the unfamiliar brand and attitude towards the unfamiliar brand ($p = .056$).

Discussion Study 2

The overall results are similar to Study 1 that brand familiarity is not affected by perceived conversation-related advertising. For example, we found that trust in data handling by the brand and brand attitude was significantly higher for the familiar brand than the unfamiliar

brand regardless of exposure. We also did not find a direct relationship between brand familiarity and perceived surveillance by the brand. However, different from Study 1, e-eavesdropping belief in Study 2 was significantly higher for the familiar brand than the unfamiliar brand, which could be explained by a selection bias. e-Eavesdropping belief in Study 1 (M = 3.40, SD = 1.34) was higher than it in Study 2 (M = 2.75, SD = 1.11). This could be explained by the difference in the sampling method, since Study 1 recruited respondents who already believe in conversation-related advertising, and who recalled ads that already stood out in their minds. Additionally, we included brand loyalty which was consistent with brand attitude, where the familiar brand indicated more positive brand attitude and loyalty. Furthermore, we found that attitudes towards the unfamiliar brand were less affected by trust in data handling by the brand compared to the familiar brand, which might be explained by limited prior experience with the unfamiliar brand.

General Discussion

This research examined brand familiarity in conversation-related advertising. Both studies confirm that it is not the conversation-related ad but the brand familiarity that leads to positive perceptions in general. Additionally, e-eavesdropping belief is positively associated with perceived surveillance by the sender (brand/advertiser). On brand-related factors, one difference that we found was that consumers may hold neutral opinions about unfamiliar brands, therefore perceptions of the unfamiliar brand were not easily affected compared to the familiar brand. Consumers may need more interactions with the unfamiliar brand or product to form more knowledge of the brand in order to develop subsequent perceptions.

The study advances theories by studying brand familiarity of conversation-related advertising and how this is related to subsequent consumers' responses (i.e., perceived surveillance and trust

in data handling). To our knowledge, the current study is the first study to explore brand familiarity in this context. The study confirms the dual processing theories that consumers may process familiar brands more heuristically. We contribute to the DEAL framework by introducing brand familiarity as an extended feature of surveillance episodes. We also extend the DEAL framework by including trust in data handling by the brand as a surveillance response that could contribute to ad responses such as attitude and brand loyalty. The current study has methodological implications. We manipulated conversation in the field experiment to create the illusion of ads related to past conversations, which increased the ecological validity of the study. This is a novel method to study this new phenomenon. Finally, the current study highlights practical implications. We found that brand familiarity in conversation-related advertising is more beneficial than harmful. This provides practical insights that brand familiarity could mitigate potential negative consequences of perceived conversation-related advertising. Advertising practitioners can consider increasing familiarity to consumers by enhancing exposure or interaction.

In summary, by investigating brand familiarity as a feature of conversation-related advertising, this study shows that brand familiarity does not backfire and is effective in increasing positive ad and brand outcomes. The current study advances understanding of familiarity as a brand-related factor in this context and provides insights to advertising practitioners for better advertising strategies.

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Table 1. Overview of Measures

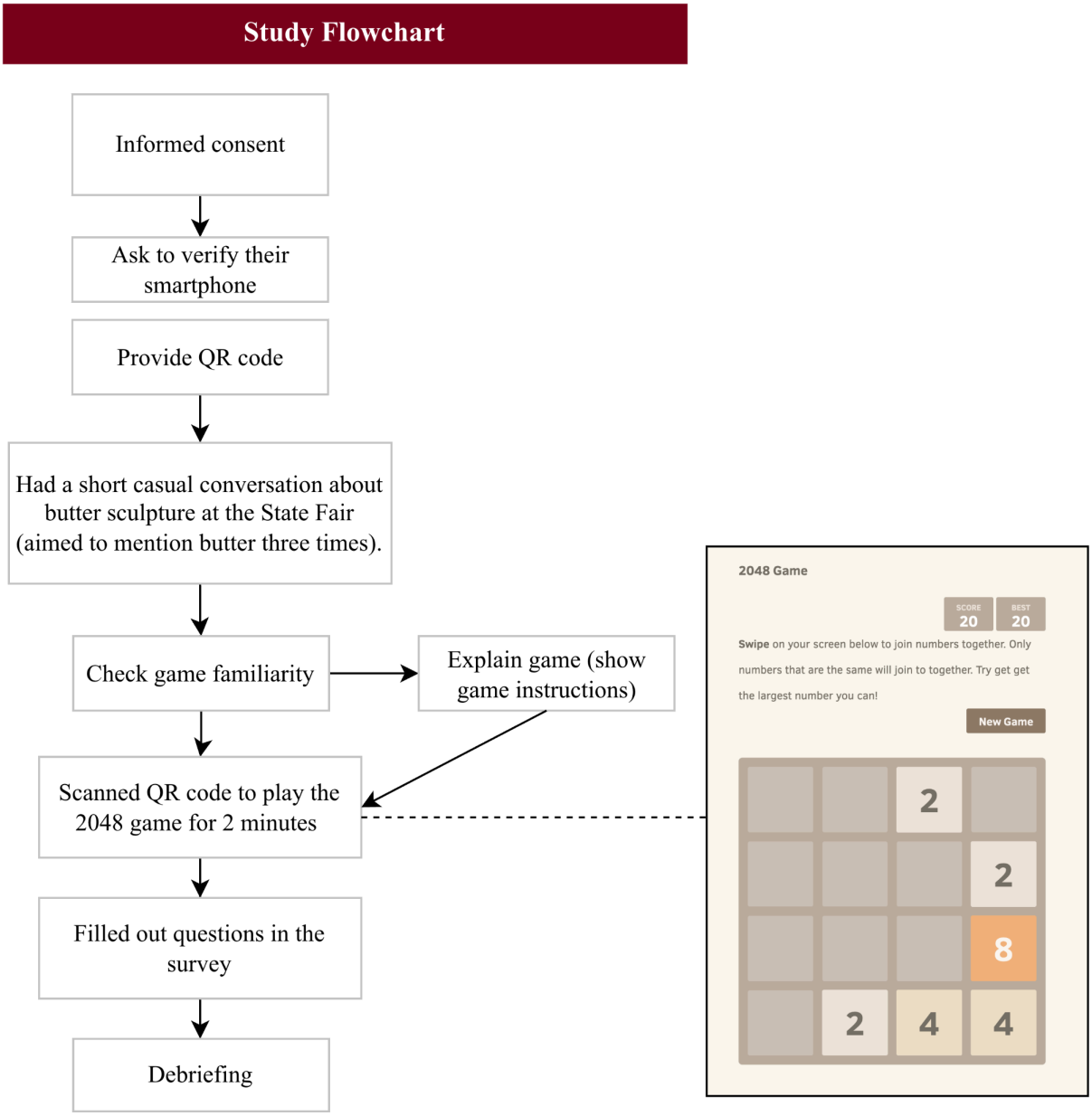
Concept	Study	Measurement	Scale	Reference	Reliability	Descriptive
Brand familiarity	Study 1	How would you rate your familiarity with the product/brand advertised?	1 = very unfamiliar, 5 = very familiar	Campbell and Keller (2003)	NA	*M* = 3.77, *SD* = 1.12
	Study 2	To what extent are you familiar with the following butter brand?	1 = very unfamiliar, 5 = very familiar	Campbell and Keller (2003)	NA	Familiar brand (*M* = 4.16, *SD* = 1.01) Unfamiliar brand (*M* = 1.65, *SD* = 0.86)
Perceived surveillance	Study 1	Perceived surveillance of advertisers: When I saw the ad, it made me feel that advertisers were: watching my every move, checking up on me, looking over my shoulder, entering my private space, eavesdropping on me.	1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree	Segijn et al. (2022); Segijn, Opree et al. (2025)	0.89	*M* = 3.57, *SD* = 1.07
	Study 2	Perceived surveillance of the game and the brand: The ad in the game made me feel that [] is: watching my every move, checking up on me, looking over my shoulder,	1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree	Segijn et al. (2022); Segijn, Opree et al. (2025)	0.89	*M* = 2.62, *SD* = 0.80

		entering my private space, eavesdropping on me.				
e-Eavesdropping belief	Study 1	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I received the ad because my phone or another device was listening to the conversation. This belief was embedded among five beliefs and the order was randomized.	1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree	Segijn, Strycharz, Turner et al. (2025)	NA	*M* = 3.40, *SD* = 1.34
	Study 2	To what extent do you believe the ad in the game was based on… something that was said earlier. This belief was embedded among seven beliefs and the order was randomized.	1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree	Segijn, Opree et al. (2025)	NA	*M* = 2.75, *SD* = 1.11
Trust in data handling by the brand	Study 1	Trust in data handling by advertisers: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding personal data and advertisers? Advertisers would be trustworthy in handling my personal information; Advertisers would tell the truth and fulfill promises	1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree	Malhotra et al. (2004)	0.91	*M* = 2.64, *SD* = 1.09

		related to the information provided by me; I trust that advertisers would keep my best interests in mind when dealing with my personal information; Advertisers are, in general, predictable and consistent regarding the usage of my personal information; Advertisers are always honest with customers when it comes to using the information that I would provide.				
	Study 2	Trust in data handling by the brand: Same with Study 1, and asked about the butter brand participants were exposed to.	1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree	Malhotra et al. (2004)	0.89	*M* = 3.00, *SD* = 0.56
Attitudes	Study 1	Ad attitude: To what extent do you believe the ad you received was: Bad - Good, Unappealing - Appealing, Attractive - Not Attractive, Interesting - Not Interesting, Useful - Not Useful, Valuable - Not Valuable.	5-point semantic differential scale	Chang and Thorson (2004); Crites et al. (1994)	0.95	*M* = 3.89, *SD* = 1.04
	Study 2	Brand attitude: Same with Study 1, and asked about each butter brand and	5-point semantic differential	Chang and Thorson 2004; Crites et al.	Familiar brand: 0.92 Unfamiliar	Familiar brand (*M* = 3.53, *SD* = 0.86)

		game.	scale	(1994)	brand: 0.82	Unfamiliar brand (M = 2.74, SD = 0.57)
Brand loyalty	Study 2	To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements about both butter brands: I consider myself to be loyal to []; [] would be my first choice; I will not buy other brands if [] is available at the store.	1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree	Yoo and Donthu (2001)	Familiar brand: 0.83 Unfamiliar brand: 0.81	Familiar brand (M = 2.76, SD = 0.88) Unfamiliar brand (M = 2.09, SD = 0.74)

Figure 1. Flowchart of the field experiment (Study 2).



Note: The 2048 game is a puzzle game with numbers in a 4×4 square that allows players to swipe tiles in any direction.

Figure 2. Advertising stimulus: familiar brand vs. unfamiliar brand (Study 2).

