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Introduction

The halo effect (halo error) was first described in the psychology literature around the turn of this century. Thorndike[1] coined the term in connection with his observation that supervisors seemed unable to rate their subordinates independently on different (presumably independent) characteristics. Rather, supervisors' ratings exhibited a consistently high correlation with their global impression of the subordinate being rated. In an early study involving the evaluation of teachers, for example, *rated* intelligence was highly correlated with *rated* ability to discipline (0.80), even though rated ability to discipline was correlated at only 0.30 with intelligence as measured by standard tests. In the context of personnel evaluations, the halo effect is seen as distorting ratings on the individual dimensions, and is thus a source of error to be avoided.

Marketing researchers face a similar problem in connection with the use of multi-attribute rating models which are employed for product evaluations. If evaluations of individual product attributes are influenced by a person's overall attitude (global affect) towards the product being rated, then the individual attribute ratings may be similarly distorted. Such distortion, in turn, may result in misleading conclusions about competitive positioning, and may even lead brand managers to make erroneous decisions concerning product modifications and product strategy. Accordingly, there has been considerable attention in the marketing literature given to understanding the halo effect and its consequences for brand evaluation.

The notion of brand equity, a topic of more recent interest, has much in common with the halo effect, and marketers interested in assessing brand equity can benefit from prior research on the halo effect and its measurement. Although definitions of brand equity vary, a commonly accepted view is that brand equity represents the value (to a consumer) of a product, above that which would result for an otherwise identical product without the brand's name[2]. In other words, brand equity represents the degree to which a brand's name alone contributes value to the offering (again, from the perspective of the consumer). The purpose of this article is to present a methodology for measuring brand equity, borrowing from extant research on the halo effect.

The article begins with a brief overview of the halo effect, and then focuses on research directed toward the measurement of halo. We demonstrate the usefulness of halo effect measures for assessing brand equity. An illustrative example, using consumer rating data for commonly purchased household products, is used to explain the method.

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Halo effect defined

Since Thorndike's[1] original conceptualization, the halo effect has been fairly consistently defined as a rater's failure to discriminate among conceptually distinct and potentially independent attributes, with the result that individual attribute ratings co-vary more than they otherwise would. In accordance with cognitive consistency theories, people strive to maintain a consistent set of beliefs and attitudes. Inconsistency in the cognitive system is hypothesized to induce adverse psychological tension. This tendency towards consistency manifests itself as higher-than-actual correlations between attribute ratings because individuals are psychologically motivated to "level out" discrepancies which appear in belief structures at a micro level[3]. To make the discussion more concrete, consider the multi-attribute attitude model. The multi-attribute attitude model[4] is typically stated as follows:

$$A_{jk} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} I_{ik} B_{ijk} \quad (1)$$

where:

- i = attribute, or product characteristic
- j = object (brand)
- k = individual
- A_{jk} = individual k's attitude score for brand j
- I_{jk} = importance weight to attribute i by individual k
- B_{ijk} = individual k's belief as to the extent to which attribute i is possessed by brand j

The basic multi-attribute model hypothesizes that a person's attitude towards a brand is measured by the summed product of individual beliefs (the "B"s in equation 1; the extent to which the brand possesses an attribute) and importance weights (the "I"s) associated with those beliefs. Beliefs are conceptualized as fundamentally cognitive mechanisms, free of affective colouring. The model, therefore, assumes a beliefs-cause-attitude linkage, an assumption which has held sway for many years in attitude research, and one that continues to underlie much evaluative research in marketing. The halo effect, however, suggests dual causality for the model in Figure 1, that is, that attitudes also cause beliefs. This view has been supported by findings that importance weights do not add significantly to the multi-attribute model's ability to predict individuals' preference rankings of products, when compared to a beliefs-only model[5]. The consequence of this is that product attribute ratings represent a composite of individual attribute assessments, adjusted ("haloed") by a rater's global attitude towards the product. Statistically, the effect results in inter-attribute correlations which are higher than they would be in the absence of halo, because attribute ratings tend to be correlated significantly with raters' global evaluations of the products. For managers seeking to make brand decisions at the attribute-level, halo is a problem – a source of measurement error. However, the same perceptual processes that lead

Rater	Attribute 1	2	3	...	j
1	X_{11}	X_{12}	X_{13}	...	X_{1j}
2	X_{21}	X_{22}	X_{23}	...	X_{2j}
3	X_{31}	X_{32}	X_{33}	...	X_{3j}
.	.	.	.		.
.	.	.	.		.
.	.	.	.		.
i	X_{i1}	X_{i2}	X_{i3}	...	X_{ij}

Figure 1.
Ratings for product A

to halo error also form the basis of brand equity. When consumers formulate a consistent set of associations with a brand name, regardless of whether we adopt the perspective of "halo error" or "brand equity", the measurement effects are statistically equivalent. In our efforts to measure brand equity, we wish to isolate the influence of that consistent set of brand associations.

It is important to note that consumers often avoid active processing of product information. These "cognitive misers" eschew the intellectual effort of making attribute-by-attribute evaluations and instead form overall affective impressions[6-8]. While consumers may engage in such limited information processing on many purchase occasions, brand managers still need attribute-level information to make informed decisions concerning product positioning, repositioning and competitive differential. Even though consumers often avoid attribute-level brand evaluations, they are usually able to provide such evaluations when presented with a listing of brand attributes and the request to evaluate the brand carefully. Whether this evaluation process accurately reflects consumer decision making in a given instance is beyond the scope of this article; the important issue here is that consumers are able to make these evaluations.

In our approach to measuring brand equity, it is important that halo effects are not artificially induced in the measurement process. There are a number of factors which can lead to artificially high inter-attribute correlations, referred to as "halo-like" effects. Halo-like effects are researcher controllable factors which tend to encourage raters to rely on global impressions when evaluating individual product attributes. Undersampling occurs when an insufficient number of attributes is rated, which forces consumers to rely on global impressions and encourages them to consider attribute-irrelevant information which may influence their ratings[9]. Halo may also be induced when rating instruments lack sufficient specificity and concreteness. Attribute categories may be viewed as partially redundant and overlapping, thus causing higher co-

variation. Likewise, ambiguous rating instruments may encourage consumers to resort to overall evaluations to infer ratings of the ambiguous categories[10]. When raters are insufficiently motivated, unfamiliar with the product, or lack product knowledge, they may revert to simpler, holistic impressions to guide ratings on individual attributes[9,10]. Finally, cognitive distortion occurs when raters must rely on memory. Detail becomes lost and may be supplanted with beliefs about how attributes are related[9,11,12]. We may conclude from the above discussion that the product attribute ratings should:

- adequately tap the domain of important and relevant product dimensions;
- be as specific and non-overlapping as possible;
- be performed by respondents with a level of product familiarity and expertise similar to the target audience; and
- to the extent practicable, result from relatively recent experience with the product.

Measuring halo

Approaches to measuring the halo effect have ranged from simple observance of the average inter-attribute correlations to factor analysis of the rating data coupled with statistical correction for halo. Consider the data matrix shown in Figure 1, which yields the $j \times j$ attribute correlation matrix shown in Figure 2.

Although it is difficult to state with any degree of precision the point at which halo is present, a rough rule of thumb is that average inter-correlations of around 0.60- 0.70 or greater are suggestive of a halo effect. The usual first step in assessing halo is a factor analysis of the rating data. Whatever halo effect is present in the rating data will be reflected in the first, or common, factor[13,14]. Therefore, the emergence of a large first factor may be evidence of a strong halo effect. The researcher can then use one of several approaches to estimate the degree of halo present. We discuss two such approaches below.

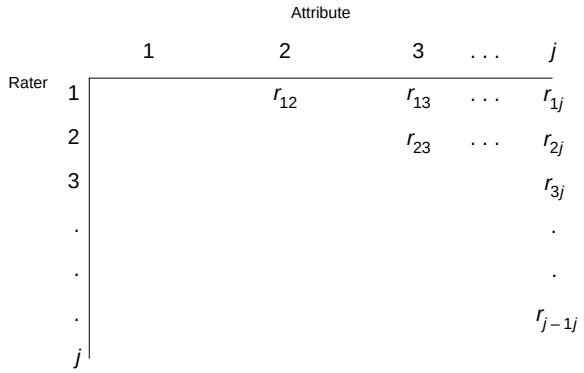

Figure 2.
Attribute correlation matrix

Partialling out

By far the most commonly employed technique for removing halo is the partialling-out technique[14-17]. When a significant halo effect is suspected, the basic strategy is to compute partial correlation coefficients between attribute ratings after taking into account the effect of overall brand evaluation. That is, computing

$$r_{12.3} = \frac{r_{12} - r_{13}\, r_{23}}{(1 - r^2_{13})(1 - r^2_{23})}$$

for each attribute pair (where the pair "1,2" represents any attribute pair and "3" represents overall brand evaluation). The logic underlying this procedure is that the inter-attribute correlations will be artificially higher in the raw data matrix because attribute ratings are influenced by the overall brand evaluation. Partialling out removes the effect of overall evaluation on the individual attribute ratings. The matrix of partial correlations is typically factor analysed to assess the underlying relationships among the attributes. Implicit in the partialling-out method is the assumption that true attribute correlation with the overall brand evaluation is zero. To the extent that this assumption does not hold, the method results in "overkill" by excessively removing the effect of true co-variation, and this is the major weakness of the technique.

Double centring

Dillon *et al.*[13] advocate a double centring technique which transforms raw rating data to "ipsative" data and which avoids the "overkill" problem inherent in the partialling-out technique. Ipsative data result when a matrix has rows which all sum to the same value. The data transformation procedure is straightforward, and is carried out in two steps. First, columns (corresponding to attributes) are standardized, followed by rows (corresponding to raters). The effect of this double centring is essentially to move the centroid of raters and attributes to the same origin, keeping the raters' response profiles intact across attributes, but removing mean differences which are considered to be irrelevant. The net effect is to remove response-set bias and halo effect from the rating data. Factor analysis of the centred data should result in dimensions which more accurately represent individual attribute judgements rather than global affect for the product. Specifically, the first factor should be largely free of halo effects (see [13] for a detailed discussion of this method). Below, we illustrate the use of the double centring technique to assess brand equity in several consumer product categories.

Brand equity: an empirical assessment

Brand evaluations of 12 commonly purchased household products in three categories were analysed to assess brand equity, employing the double centring procedure outlined above. Data were collected from 382 consumers in Austria, in connection with a larger study of consumer decision making[18]. Data were

obtained for five brands of laundry detergent, three brands of fabric softener, and four brands of liquid dish washing detergent. Extensive pretesting was conducted to determine the set of attributes which consumers considered important in each of the product categories, and to ensure that the presence of halo-like effects in the execution of the study questionnaire would be minimal.

This pretesting process resulted in the identification of 12 attributes for the laundry detergent category, 14 for the fabric softener category, and 15 for the dish washing liquid category. Overall brand evaluations were computed as the summed product of each attribute rating multiplied by its rated importance, in accordance with the multi-attribute model (1). Means and standard deviations for each brand are presented in Table I. Consistent with the relatively mundane nature of the products investigated, no significant differences in overall ratings are observed (at the 0.05 level) for any brand pairings in any of the three categories. Per traditional brand evaluation procedures, the brands appear very similar.

Next, the rating data for each brand were factor-analysed in two ways. First, factor analysis was performed on the raw data matrix. Following this, the raw data matrices were transformed per the centring procedure recommended by Dillon *et al.*[13]. The resulting centred data were again factor-analysed. As discussed above, the purpose of the transformation prior to the second factor analysis was to obtain a first factor free of halo.

To assess the degree to which global affect influenced consumers' ratings of the brands, two regression models were estimated for each brand, as follows:

	Mean	Standard deviation
Detergents		
Ariel	470.3	142.1
Dash	467.2	132.4
Dixan	480.2	123.9
Omo	484.6	116.5
Persil	451.2	135.0
Fabric softeners		
Quanto	453.1	128.7
Silan	447.5	139.7
Kuschelweich	426.9	132.3
Dish washing liquids		
Generic	407.6	130.1
Palmolive	419.5	115.3
Pril	421.7	129.1
Sunlicht flussig	392.6	120.8

Table I. Overall brand evaluations

Note: [a]Overall brand evaluations were obtained by summing the attribute ratings multiplied by their importance weights ($\sum \text{Importance}_i \cdot \text{Rating}_i$)

$$\text{Overall evaluation}_i = b_R \text{ Factor } 1_R + e_R \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Overall evaluation}_i = b_c \text{ Factor } 1_c + e_c \quad (3)$$

where Overall evaluation$_i$ is the overall evaluation for brand *i* as shown in Table II, Factor$_R$ is a variable computed as the summed items comprising the first factor from factor analysis of the raw data (the factor containing halo), Factor$_c$ is a variable computed as the summed items of the first factor from factor analysis of the centred data (the factor free of halo), the "*b*"s are the regression coefficients, and the "*e*"s are the error terms. For each pair of regression equations (2) and (3), a Chow test[19] was performed to assess the difference between b_R and b_C. A significant (positive) result from the Chow test indicates that the influence of Factor 1 on Overall evaluation$_i$ is stronger in equation (2) than equation (3). Specifically, in the above equations, a significant Chow test and $b_R > b_C$ suggests a significant brand equity effect (brand equity having been removed from Factor 1_c). Table II shows the results of this analysis.

As Table II shows, brand equity is present in varying degrees for most of the brands evaluated in this study. It is important to note that the notion of brand equity, viewed as the associations consumers make with the brand's name, does not necessarily imply a positive effect[2]. It is clearly possible for a brand to possess negative equity, in which case the name is a liability rather than an asset. Whether a brand's name tends to enhance consumers' evaluations of the product, or tends to diminish them, can only be inferred by observing both the

	R_R^2	R_c^2	R^2 differentiation	b_R	b_c	Chow test (F)
Detergents						
Ariel	0.58	0.49	0.09	0.76	0.70	29.31
Dash	0.60	0.56	0.04	0.77	0.75	9.73
Dixan	0.47	0.43	0.04	0.68	0.66	5.75
Omo	0.65	0.47	0.18	0.80	0.69	43.88
Persil	0.56	0.38	0.18	0.75	0.62	41.48
Fabric softeners						
Quanto	0.60	0.55	0.05	0.78	0.74	16.15
Silan	0.52	0.52	0.00	0.72	0.72	0.0
Kuschelweich	0.68	0.64	0.04	0.83	0.80	28.20
Dish washing liquids						
Generic	0.56	0.56	0.00	0.75	0.75	0.0
Palmolive	0.55	0.48	0.07	0.74	0.69	12.45
Pril	0.64	0.58	0.06	0.80	0.76	24.14
Sunlicht flussig	0.70	0.43	0.27	0.84	0.66	115.7

Notes: 1. All non-zero F values significant at the 0.05 level
2. Subscript R refers to regression using raw data
3. Subscript C refers to regression using centred data

Table II.
Regression results dependent variable overall evaluation, independent variable Factor 1

magnitude of the halo effect and the overall rating level for the brand. Strong halo coupled with a superior rating is clearly suggestive of positive brand equity, whereas strong halo coupled with an inferior rating is clearly suggestive of negative equity.

For the brands evaluated in this study, no significant differences were observed in overall ratings of the brands, yet there is a fairly wide variation in the level of halo observed across brands. The halo measures were judged by persons familiar with the brands to have generally good face validity. Also, Nielsen data collected at the same time as the consumer rating data are consistent with the findings reported in this study. Specifically, in the detergent category the brands Omo and Persil are considered to be the most popular among those in the study. Nielsen panel members reported higher brand loyalty toward Persil than the other brands investigated, and also reported a willingness to pay somewhat higher prices for this brand. Likewise, in the softener category Kuschelweich is the prominent brand. As far as dish washing liquids are concerned Sunlicht fluessig turned out to be the popular brand. These assessments correspond closely with the level of halo observed in our study. However, the general absence of differences in overall brand ratings for the product categories examined raises the question of the ultimate utility of brand equity-building efforts in these categories. While consumers may indeed assign an internally consistent set of characteristics to a brand, owing to associations with the brand name, it is not at all clear that the consistent set is necessarily a superior set. For the categories examined, the results of the present study serve to underscore this latter concern. Precisely because the overall rating, and value, of a brand is not necessarily elevated by high brand awareness and consistent brand associations, it is important for managers to have a means to measure these effects. Without such means, managers have little on which to judge the likely effectiveness of future resource commitments to the brand.

The results of the study also highlight the dilemma facing marketers in product categories characterized by very low differentiation. On the one hand, considerable resources may be required to establish high brand name awareness and consistent brand associations, even though such expenditures may result in only slight enhancements to brand equity. On the other hand, even slight perceived differences may significantly influence consumers' choices in such categories[20]. Our study does not assess consumer choice, and therefore employs an indirect measure of brand equity[2]. As such, it is possible that although we were unable to detect significant differences in brand ratings, significant differences in consumer choice behaviour would have been detectable. As noted earlier, there is a degree of face validity to the equity measures we obtained, but it would be useful to compare them to objective measures of choice. In this regard, market share data are frequently available to marketers, and Keller[2] discusses experimental methods of estimating the impact of brand identity on consumer choice. Marketers would be well advised

to use such direct measures of brand equity in conjunction with indirect measures as outlined in this article.

Conclusion

Past research on the halo effect is useful for guiding managers and researchers interested in assessing brand equity. The halo effect results from an individual's global attitude towards a brand, and causes individual attribute ratings to exhibit greater co-variance than they would in the absence of this influence. Other factors not directly related to global affect may produce halo-like measurement effects. In general, every effort should be made to minimize the influence of these factors, because although halo-like effects produce results which are statistically indistinguishable from true halo, they are not driven by enduring brand impressions. To this end, brand researchers should endeavour to adequately tap the domain of relevant attributes when performing brand evaluations. Otherwise, raters may "fill in" missing information, leading to excessive attribute co-variance. Attributes should be specified in clear and concrete terms to minimize conceptual overlap. Frequently, respondents for brand research are drawn from primary target market segments, where brand familiarity, knowledge and motivation are relatively high. However, responses from non-users and secondary market segments are also frequently sought. To the extent that these respondents are less familiar, knowledgeable and motivated, an unexpected side effect may be elevated attribute inter-correlations. Although there does not appear to be strong evidence to support a "memory" effect which results in halo-like effects, it seems prudent to seek responses to "experiential" offerings, such as services, soon after they are experienced. It is likely that salient attributes of the service will colour the less prominent ones to a greater extent as time passes. With attention to these considerations that can lead to halo-like effects, their impact on brand equity assessments should normally not be a major concern.

Following the above precautions, halo effect measures can serve as useful indicators of brand equity when used in conjunction with overall brand ratings. Further, halo measures are easily extracted from traditional multi-attribute rating data. On the positive side, what has traditionally been referred to as strong halo "error" may be indicative of strong brand equity in instances where the overall brand evaluation is correspondingly high. Conversely, where overall evaluations are low, strong halo suggests brand "deficit". It should be fruitful for brand managers interested in measuring their brand's equity to apply the method discussed in this article in their own competitive contexts. Because no single measure of brand equity is likely to capture all the important aspects of such a complex notion, indirect measures of equity such as the halo measure should be linked to objective measures of consumer choice whenever possible. By converging on brand equity from both perspectives, marketers can gain new insights into this important aspect of brand management.

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