A DECONSTRUCTION OF GRADED STRUCTURE AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS OF PASSENGER CAR AND APPROACHES TO DIFFERENTIATION, SEGMENTATION AND POSITIONING

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that the work in this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

ABSTRACT

Little to no work has been undertaken in research in marketing to address categorisation using prototype, exemplar, goal-derived and ad-hoc theories of categorisation in object categories such as brands of passenger car, and in abstract categories such as approaches to differentiation of passenger cars, segmentation of the passenger car market, and ways in which cars are positioned. This research explored the relationship between measures of categorisation and the rank-order of category members within different levels of the categories just mentioned. A sample of 400 managers was generated and a questionnaire was administered via email and internet. The rank-order of members of categories was constructed by asking respondents to rank members as to how good, important or, distinctive they were using words suited to the categories mentioned previously. Respondents were presented with their top, middle and bottom ranked selections, and asked to identify features that were salient for their selections. From the concurrence of category members and the features selected it was possible to construct a measure of family resemblance associated with categorisation in prototype theory of categorisation. The research extended prototype theory to classifying category members in different levels of the same category according to the amount of family resemblance each had. The exemplar theory of categorisation was extended to examine the relationship between the salience of category features and the rank-level of category members to determine if such an association was evident for the categories studied in this thesis. Goal-derived and ad-hoc theories of categorisation determine category membership by how ideal members are in achieving category goals. The best members of categories are those closest to achieving the category goals. In contrast with the other theories mentioned, best category members are not identified by featural similarity with other category members. The conclusions from this thesis suggest that the prototype theory has a place in categorisation in object categories, and a lesser

place in categorisation in abstract categories, confirming previous research. The implication circumscribes the domain of categorisation to object categories, and proposes research to explore the application of prototype theory to degrees of abstractness of categories from clearly defined object categories. The relationship between features and the rank-order of category members was demonstrated but the opportunity for research exists to explore the relationship in to determine a probability of categorisation. Goal-derived and ad-hoc theories of categorisation proved to be flexible and useful in object and some abstract categories suggesting that respondents have a mostly clear understanding of the goals associated with such categories.