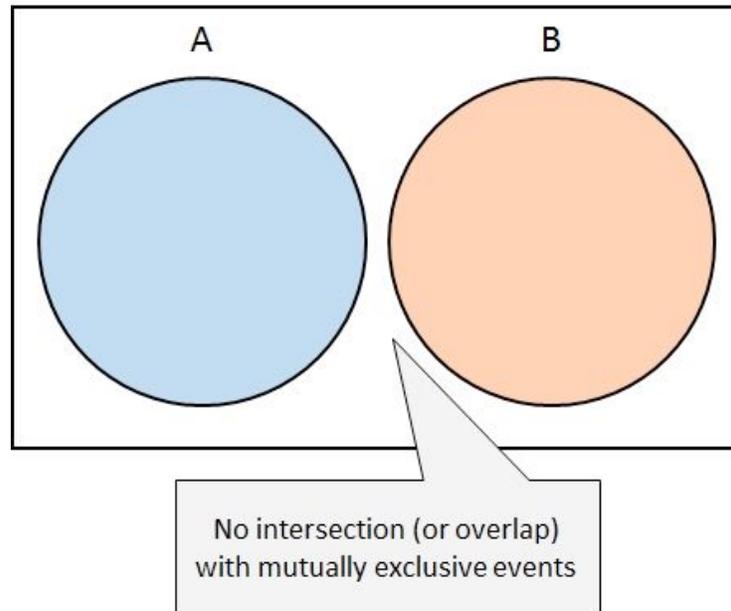




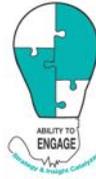
How to Get Consumers to Choose YOUR Brand or Product *Using mutual exclusivity to your advantage*



http://www.mathematics-monster.com/lessons/what_are_mutually_exclusive_events.html

The words “mutually exclusive” may sound familiar to you. You have likely heard it before in a high school statistics class or college data analysis course. If two events are mutually exclusive, they cannot occur at the same time. As shown in the picture below, there’s no intersection or overlap between two mutually exclusive events. But have you ever considered the role mutual exclusivity plays in consumer segmentation? Or your brand strategy? If you haven’t, read on. *The words “mutually exclusive” are about to take on new meaning.*

Mutual exclusivity is a term used in cognitive developmental psychology that describes a learning bias. It is typically exhibited by children, where only one label is applied to each object in early word learning.¹ When presented with two objects at the same time—with one name known and the other unknown—research found that a child, when asked to retrieve an object that the child had never heard before, would present the previously unknown one, and remember the name right after. For example, if a toy car and funnel were put on a table, and a child had never seen the funnel before, the child’s only association would be between the toy car and the word “car”. If we were then to ask the child to pass us the “toma” (or some other made up word), then he/she will retrieve the funnel—even though the word “toma” has never



been explicitly associated with the funnel. Children make use of mutual exclusivity to eliminate the car as the possible “funnel.” Based on this finding, researchers speculated that children may make use of this bias and determine that two things cannot have the same name and are mutually exclusive, to achieve faster mapping from words to objects.^{2, 3}

Mutually exclusive reasoning used in word learning bias can also be applied to the brand and consumer marketing world. If you are in the marketing world, you are aware of the value and equity associated with your brand name. We propose a simple, yet powerful, way to help establish brand awareness using this rule of mutual exclusivity.



<https://punkmarketing.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/brand-equity.png>

When we think of a specific term or product, we are often only able to associate one brand/product with the idea. It is often more difficult, though not impossible with the right marketing and product innovations, to create faster recall using mutual exclusivity bias for a category, such as pain or coffee. However, it is often more reasonable for a brand to endeavor to establish mutual exclusivity for sub-segments within a category, such as external pain, pain wraps or lattes.

If we take the brand IcyHot, which provides external pain relief, and we want to establish a new connection between IcyHot products and consumers, we can use



mutual exclusivity to quickly establish terminology related to the sub-category and brand via qualitative consumer research groups. For example, if we put both Tylenol and IcyHot in front of consumers, we can begin to understand if there are words that exclusively apply to one brand or product or if there are words that apply to both brands and products. Do consumers associate one product over the other for migraines, back pain, external, internal, arthritis, and menstrual cramps? Theoretically, the depth of connection established would be greater than presenting the IcyHot products alone. In this way, we can update brand language and communications with consumers, as well as establish new connections in an efficient manner—thanks to the innate learning bias of mutual exclusivity.

By understanding how mutual exclusivity plays a role in cognition, we can shape brand perceptions. This, in turn, can affect consumers' decision-making and ROI for your business. Who knew mutual exclusivity could be so useful? Time to start putting it to work on your business!

Want to understand how your brand can use mutual exclusivity for better advertising and strengthening brand equity? Contact us at info@abilitytoengage.com or follow us on Twitter [@AbilityToEngage](https://twitter.com/AbilityToEngage)

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2. Merriman, W. E., Bowman, L. L., & MacWhinney, B. (1989). The mutual exclusivity bias in children's word learning. *Monographs of the society for research in child development*, 1-129.
3. Golinkoff, R. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Bailey, L. M., & Wenger, N. R. (1992). Young children and adults use lexical principles to learn new nouns. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(1), 99.