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BY CHI LUU / FEBRUARY 17, 2015
What's in a brand name? No really, what do they put in it? It's a curious thing that a mere brand name can persuade us to engage emotionally with a product or company. Sometimes, we even develop an unwitting loyalty or long-lasting aversion to a brand, though we might know little about the product. How is this possible? The old Shakesperian adage would have us believe that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet but how does this really play out in the world of brand names?

What's in a Brand Name: the Sounds of Persuasion | JSTOR Daily

Jacksonville, and marry Jackie."

"Toby is more likely to buy a Toyota, move to Toronto, and marry Tonya than is Jack, who is more likely to buy a Jaguar, move to

Leif D. Nelson and Joseph P. Simmons' 2007 study

What is fascinating is how this might tie in with the well known

A 2007 study by Tina M. Lowrey and L. J. Shrum on phonetic symbols suggests that consonants and vowels in themselves can convey symbolic meaning, with certain sounds positive and others more negative in emphasizing certain properties and characteristics of a product. The study experiment by Edward Sapir in which participants were asked to associate the artificial words mil and mil (a pair that differs only in how people tend to gravitate to entities and conditions that share their

Based on studies of popular brand names and experiments involving made up brand names, it is perhaps unlikely that much attention was paid to the phonic complexities of brand name construction.

Linguists are often consulted to brainstorm appropriate names for products or services, and there are a number of popular linguistic devices that can be used to form effective brand names, such as the phonetic alliteration in Coco-Cola or the morphological elements in Craftmatic or semantic allusions in a brand name like Nike. Semantic metaphors, visible, easy to understand meanings ensure that iconic brand names like Apple continue to be popular. But even brand names built on solid naming principles out that the mere letters and sounds used in a brand name can have a curious reception by the public, persuading us into developing an emotional bond with

This kind of phonetic symbolism also seems to be significant in the initial consonants of brand names, but in a different way. They

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What is fascinating is how this might tie in with the well known Name Letter Effect, which describes the

Leif D. Nelson and Joseph P. Simmons' 2007 study outlines how the

“Toby is more likely to buy a Toyota, move to Toronto, and marry Tonya than is Jack, who is more likely to buy a Jaguar, move to Jacksonville, and marry Jackie.”
Most surprisingly, this unconscious preference for things resembling your own name even extends to negative initial letter represents a well-known negative state. The study shows that baseball players with a name beginning (which is represented by a K in baseball) more often than others. Similarly, students whose names start with C on the whole, to have lower grade point averages (where grades are represented by letters) than students who: A or B.

People have a strong propensity to seek out states and products that are represented by their first initial even if that has a negative impact on them. This might be a significant factor in explain people are loyal to certain brands and not others.

So it would seem, despite our cynicism about the ability of advertising to manipulate, ultimately it may be hard to persuade the very sounds that make up a brand name.

JSTOR Citations

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