The Effect of Fancy Brand Names on Brand Perception and Brand Attitude of Young Consumers

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Brand naming, as part of brand management effort, is one of the most crucial marketing decisions. Young consumers' brand perception and attitude may be especially influenced by brand names. The purpose of this research is to explore whether fancy brand names have an impact on young consumers' attitude toward brands and the associated purchase intentions. Experiments were conducted to explore whether fancy names lead to more positive feelings about the products compared with generic names, and if such feelings are associated with purchase intentions. The research results have implications about marketing practice involving young consumers in the case of brand naming.

Keywords: fancy brand names, young consumers, brand perception, purchase intention

INTRODUCTION

Good names pave the way for a good first impression. This might be said about a brand, a business, a product, or any object or entity, as a good name has the ability to captivate a listener or reader (Lancker and Leppert, 2018). Therefore, companies strive to choose attractive brand names for their products as part of the effort to persuade consumers that their products are better than those of competitors (Foxall & Goldsmith, 1996; Kohli & LaBahn, 1997). Suggestive and meaningful brand names help brand positioning and recall (Keller *et al,* 1998), and have the potential to significantly influence brand equity, which affects pricing strategy and future revenue (Kulshreshtha *et al.,* 2017). A well-known brand name conveys a positive brand image, which leads to competitive advantage and stimulates repeat purchase (Porter and Claycomb, 1997; Shen, 2001).

Past research has shed some light on the effect of brand names on consumer attitude toward brands and purchase decisions. Kohli and Suri (2000) show that consumers could easily recall meaningful (descriptive

and suggestive) names compared to the nonmeaningful (arbitrary and fanciful) names. Skorinko *et al.,*(2006) indicate that fancy names result in significantly more favorable ratings than generic names do. In addition, Lewison and Delozier (1992) conclude that general acceptance of non-branded products is not strong. In a study about meaningfulness vs. non-meaningfulness, Kohli *et al.*, (2005) demonstrated that consumers evaluate meaningful brand names more favorably than non-meaningful brands.

The age of consumers and the associated behavioral patterns can have an impact on consumer brand preference and choice (Chovanová et al., 2015). For example, today, young consumers' knowledge about brands often comes from social media, and such knowledge is an important source of brand equity (Jacob and Isaac, 2008; Sasmita and Suki, 2015). When evaluating brands in order to make purchase decisions, young consumers intensely and actively use their prior knowledge (Norazah, 2013), and their emotional attachment -- characterized as "brand love" -- plays a vital role to improve brand loyalty (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). As such, a good brand name that helps project and maintain a positive brand image in the minds of young consumers, especially in the digital age, is highly important for marketing efforts targeting young consumers.

Although a considerable number of studies focus on the effect of brand names on consumers' attitude, decision making and evaluations (Durgee and Stuart 1987; Grewal et al., 1998; Hulland, 1999; Leclerc et al., 1994; Shahzad et al., 2014; Smith & Brynjolfsson 2001; Robertson 1989), to date, fancy brand names have received a limited amount of attention in the context of consumer decision making, despite a few notable exceptions (Skorinko et al., 2006). Therefore, there is still a need to further study how fancy brand names affect consumers', especially young consumers', brand perception. Age, an individual characteristic, is related to the ability and resources that a consumer needs for decision making (Yoon et al., 2009). Moreover, the study conducted by Kulshreshtha et al., (2017) finds that younger consumers, compared with older ones, pay more attention to brands as they grow older. Therefore, it can be said that young consumers' attention to extrinsic factors, such as prices and brand names (Estelami & Maeyer, 2004; Iacocca, Sawhill & Zhao, 2015; Padel & Foster, 2005; Round & Roper, 2015; Roy; Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2011), warrants the need for this study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Brand & Brand Name

According to Davis (1981), a brand name is something beyond a label, maybe the greatest product attribute and part of what consumers pay to purchase. Blackett (1988) defines brand name as the summation of attributes that constitute the brand. To recognize brands and make purchase decisions, customers might need help of a symbolic meaning, which can be derived from a brand name (Herbig and Milewicz, 1993). Names convey meanings, evoke associations and images, and play a vital role in building brand equity (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Lerman & Garbarino, 2002).

Why Brand Names Matter

Papista et al. (2018) characterized brand as a logo or label, which helps define the brand's meaning and value to consumers. A majority (60%) of product and brand managers think a name itself can sway product sales even without the assistance of advertising (Kohli and LaBahn, 1997). Although the brand name is only one of many product attributes, managers spend a large portion of their time and energy to develop a brand, establish it, and make it sustainable (Alexander, 1989). They understand that the brand name is a powerful and dependable signal for brand information (Keller et al., 1998). Keller et al. (1998) investigate the impact of meaningful brand names on advertising recall, and show that suggestive (meaningful) brand names can help recall of advertised benefit claim consistent with the brand name's meaning (Keller et al. 1998). Kim (1989) points out that the brand name should be a simple, distinctive, and meaningful word, and it should elicit a mental image that let the customer have a visualization. He pointed out there should be an emotional word in the brand name because the emotional reaction to a word cannot be suppressed and requires little or no processing capacity or conscious attention. Furthermore, the formation of brand name should be considered in the aspects of sounds, morphemes, and phonemes.

Several other studies find that brand names affect consumers' attitudes, and could potentially influence consumers' evaluation and purchase intentions (Ahmed et al., 2004; Haubl, 1996). Research has also shown that it is extremely risky for companies to change or substitute a brand name, a further indication of the significance of brand names (Kapferer, 2007).

Generic vs. Fancy Brand Names

A name by which a product is known and seriously and accurately described is called a generic name or term (Kleinfeld, 1961). Consumers can get valuable product information through generic names, as they are often descriptive of the products. On the other hand, according to Bugher (2021), a fanciful name might be used along with a brand name on a product label. It is a phrase or descriptive name used for further identification of a product. Petty (2007) defined a fanciful brand name as a made-up word with no prior meaning (e.g. Xerox and Kodak). He also asserts that fanciful brand names are more flexible when someone wants to redesign it for brand extension and positioning.

One could easily understand the difference between fancy brand names and generic brand names with the following example: according to Hemnes (1987), when we apply "Apple" to computers, it would be considered as a fanciful name, but if we apply "Apple" for the fruits from a tree, it would be considered as generic. Besides, it could be descriptive when we use the word "apple" for pies.

The Effect of Fancy Brand Names

A brand name might be approached with a different color, a unique symbol, articulatory phonetics, or a fancy name. Recent research by Shen and Sengupta (2018) shows that consumers respond more positively with a spoken brand name compared to a written one. Yorkston and Menon (2004), in their research paper about phonetic effects of brand name, demonstrate that consumers, in order to get an idea about product attributes, use information that the phonemes (a composition of individual sounds) brand names carry. In the study of emotional sound symbolism, Adelman et al. (2018) find that the first phoneme of a word can effectively bring about certain emotions. Skorinko et al., (2006), in their study of influence of color names on decision making, find that consumers rate colors attached to a fancy name more favorably than colors attached to a generic name. Research by Miller and Kahn (2005) indicates that ambiguous names are preferred to common names. Their results also support the notion that when consumers face a surprising name, one that does not carry product information, they engage in further inquiry to understand why the name is given. There is also evidence showing that "fanciful" brand names are the most protected among all types (Hemnes, 1987). Memorable and meaningful brand names supporting the desired brand images are also preferred by marketing experts (Robertson, 1989).

Often, a fanciful brand name does not directly carry the attribute of or any information about the product (Hemnes 1987). However, Klink's (2001) study on semantics and sound symbolism indicated that products with brand names having sound symbolism to express product related information are preferred by consumers and prominently placed in their memory.

Brand Names and Young Consumers

Brand-consumer relationship has received much attention in consumer research (Macinnis and Folkes, 2017). A branch of this research area explores attitudes and behaviors of young consumers. After World War II, the baby boomer generation began becoming a significant consumer group, leading to major interest in young consumers (McNeal, 1992; Gunter and Furnham, 1998). These days, marketers are facing a new generation of young consumers. A significant number of studies on predicting young consumer behavior have been conducted (Kirmani & Rao, 2000; Shugan, 2006). Gregan-Paxton and Roedder (1995) demonstrate, in terms of consumer-oriented decision making, that differences in age groups matter. For example, since young people are more aware of the defining attributes of products and the associated advantages and disadvantages, their level of product involvement is lower than that of less critical and more excitable children (Te'eni-Harari and Hornik, 2010). Several other studies show that parents and peer groups are responsible for development of consumers and market information processing (Furnham, 2000; Lee and Brown, 1995; Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). For instance, students are concerned about the brand of their

smartphone they are using, and they are influenced by their friends' preference to keep them abreast of the trends in their social groups (Norazah and Norbayah, 2013). Moreover, children's lives are tremendously influenced by brands (Hemar-Nicolas et al., 2015). Young consumers pay much attention to brand image (Sasmita and Suki, 2015). Several factors may influence consumers' brand image perception. Hwang and Kandampully (2012), for instance, show that three emotional factors (emotional attachment, self-concept connection and brand love) are responsible for enhancing brand loyalty among young consumers, and that the emotional attachment has the biggest impact.

In summary, it is evident that brand names have an influence on consumers' decision making. But it is not entirely clear whether fancy names have a strong influence on young consumers' brand attitude and purchase decisions. The main terms discussed are shown Table 1.

TABLE 1
DEFINITIONS OF CONSTRUCTS

Construct	Definition	Source
Brand/ Brand Name	It might be a name, term, symbol or a combination of these ideas that point out the seller or producer of a product or service.	Bennett (1988)
Generic Brand Name	A name which is not a trademark for a product, is commonly referred to as the "generic" term for the product.	Hemnes (1987)
Fancy Brand Name	A brand name that is not currently used in English language, something referred to as a "fanciful" brand name.	Pavia and Costa (1993)
Young Consumer Behavior	The behavior revealed by youngster when they look for, buy, use, evaluate and get rid of products and/or services that they believe will meet their necessity is denoted as young consumer behavior.	Schiffman *et al*. (2012)

STUDY 1

Stimuli

The experiment consists of products with different names presented to participants and a questionnaire asking them about their perceptions of these products. Three categories of products were used --- towels, candles, and nail polishes. These products were selected because of the variety in the nature of these products. Towels are a daily necessity for most consumers. Candles are not a necessity in everyday life. Nail polishes could be argued to be somewhere in between (for some young females, they could be argued to be a daily necessity).

For the towels (See Appendix Figure 5), two products that were shown to the respondents had the same prices, quality, and colors. But one was given the name Soft Egyptian cotton, while the other was named Washrag. For the candles (See Figure 1), we included three sets of products. Each set consisted of two exactly same products but with different names. The generic names --- white candle, blue candle, and brown candle were directly chosen based on the apparent colors of the candles. The corresponding fancy names were "Fresh Cotton", "Blue Hyacinth", and "Hazelnut Cream". Lastly, with respect to the nail polishes (See Appendix Figure 4), again as for the candles, we had three sets of products. In each set, there were two items that were exactly the same, where the only difference was in the names. The generic names (the color numbers) were #990039, #991291, and #989998, and the corresponding fancy names were "Icing on the Cake", "Spice is Nice", and "Don't Need No Romeo".

FIGURE 1
EXAMPLE OF CANDLES USED IN STUDY 1

White Candle		**Generic**
Fresh Cotton		Fancy
Blue Candle		Generic
Blue Hyacinth		Fancy
Brown Candle		Generic
Hazelnut Cream		Fancy

Experimental Procedure

All the product samples were presented on a table in the student union building on a college campus in the Midwest of the United States. Students passing by the tables were recruited to participate. For the first part of the questionnaire, participants were asked similar questions for the three product categories on their preference of either fancy-name products or generic-name products. Then, the participants needed to finish the second part of the questionnaire, which asked respondents to give their thoughts about these two different types of brand names. Only female respondents (26 respondents) were asked to make choices and answer questions regarding the nail polishes.

Subjects

We recruited 31 college students for this study. One of the participants could not fully complete the experiment and thus 30 respondents were included. Most of the participants were young adults with ages ranging from 16 to 21.

Result and Discussion

The majority of the participants preferred fancy-name products. For towels, seventy-one percent of the respondents chose Soft Egyptian Cotton over Washrag. For the candles, a similar pattern was observed, and the percentages preferring the fancy-name products were 82.7% for Fresh Cotton, 83.3% for Blue Hyacinth, and 88.5% for Hazelnut Cream compared with the white, blue and brown candles respectively. The results for nail polishes are shown in Figure 2. In addition, compared with a generic name, a fancy name made consumers spend more time thinking, as participants spent more than 43 seconds, on average, examining the fancy-name products, but only 7 seconds on the generic-name products. This overall result of our experiment is in line with the findings of Skorinko et al. (2006) that a fancy name receives significantly more favorable rating than a generic name.

FIGURE 2
EXAMPLE OF FANCY NAME PREFERENCE FOR NAIL POLISH IN STUDY 1
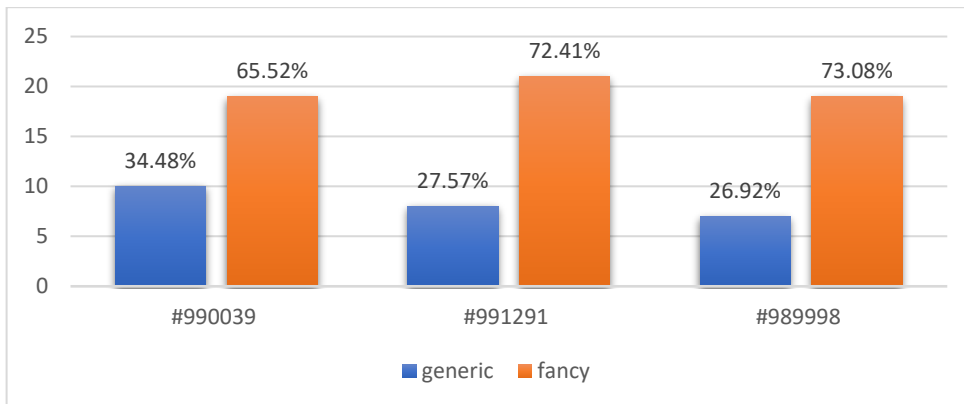
However, as these percentages indicate, there are respondents that do prefer generic-name products, or at least they are indifferent. The participants gave several reasons. The first one is price. Many people think fancy-name products are more expensive, and they are not sure if they are worth the higher prices. In addition, some expressed the view that the meanings of the fancy brand names could be ambiguous, and this does not help customers understand the attributes of products and confuses them. Some also thought that when they went shopping in a store, they can use their five senses to figure out what the better product would be, and the differences between the fancy-name product and the generic-name product become less obvious.

STUDY 2

Stimuli

The second study kept the same format of product presentations but was conducted online as opposed to the physical setting of Study 1. The depth of the questionnaire's content was also extended. The products were still divided into the three main categories of towels, candles, and nail polishes. The fancy-name items and generic-name items for each category were presented as two separate groups. For the category of towels, fancy names included "Turkish Ribbed in Taupe" and "Veneto in Natural", and generic names were "Dark Brown Hand Towel" and "Floral Hand Towel". For the candle category, the fancy names were "Eucalyptus Spearmint", "Teakwood" and "Bourbon", and generic names included "White Candle", "Black Candle" and "Red Candle". With regard to the category of nail polishes, the study used the same names as in the Study 1. Pictures of the products were shown on the website, but there was no difference between the respective fancy-name items and the generic-name items other than the names.

Subjects

We recruited 16 participants from an undergraduate business class. The ages of these students' range from 16 to 20 years.

Experimental Procedure

Participants received an email message with a link that led them to a website, which explained that they would take part in an experiment of brand choice. Participants then gave consent by clicking the "Proceed" button. The questionnaire was designed in a way so that the participants can scroll from the top to the bottom and see all the questions together. After they made choices between fancy-name and generic-name options, they were presented with several more questions using the 7-point Likert-Scale, where 1 indicated very strongly disagree and 7 very strongly agree. There was also a "Submit" button at the end of the web page to submit the response. These questions are:

- For most product categories, the best buy is usually the generic-name product. (BEST BUY).
- In general, generic-name brands are poor-quality products. (POOR QUALITY)
- Considering the value for the money, I prefer generic-name products to fancy-name products. (PREFERENCE)
- Buying generic-name product makes me feel good. (FEELING GOOD)
- When I buy a generic-name product, I always feel that I am getting a good deal. (GOOD DEAL)

The last question is an open-ended question: "Please use one word to describe what you think about the products with the fancier names".

Results

The number of participants that indicated they would purchase the fancy-name and the generic name options are 14 and 1 for towels, 12 and 3 for candles, and 14 and 1 for nail polishes, respectively. The means and standard deviations for the 7-point scale question are BEST BUY (M: 4.69; SD: 1.01), POOR QUALITY (M: 3.56; SD:.96), PREFERENCE (M: 5; SD: 1.30), FEELING GOOD (M: 4.69; SD: 1.30), and GOOD DEAL (M: 4.06; SD: 1.29). As can be seen in these results, when prompted to think about these issues, the respondents became more careful in forming their attitude toward fancy-name products. As most of the means are near the neutral point of 4, there is actually no strong advantage for fancy-name products when prompted to think more deeply about these comparisons.

For the open-ended question, the chart below shows the frequency of the word's participants used to describe products with fancier names. "Expensive", "High-quality" and "Nostalgic" are three high-frequency words mentioned by the participants (See Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
USING ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE FANCY-NAME PRODUCT IN YOUR MIND
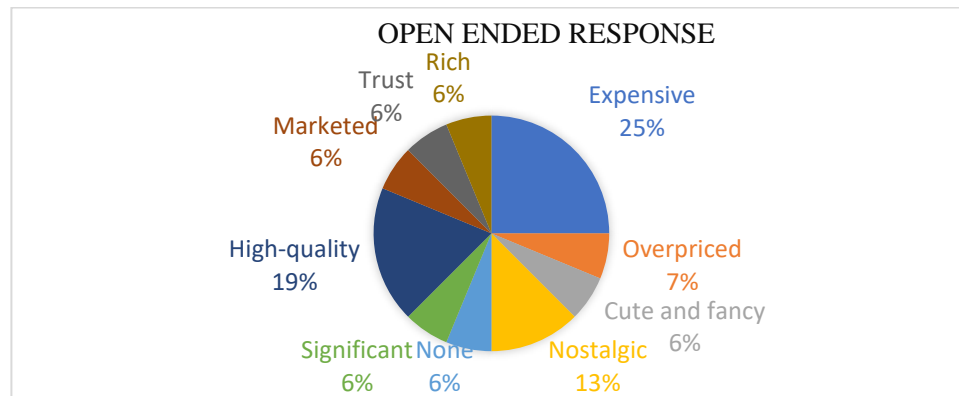
DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The current research examines young consumers' perceptions of fancy brand names and purchase intentions of products with fancy names. Overall, it appears that young consumers have positive attitude toward fancy-name products in all the three product categories in both studies. In study 1, actual products were presented to participants (a physical setting). In study 2, participants still preferred fancy-names products even when these products were presented in a group as an option (a virtual setting). Therefore, the positive attitude toward fancy brand names appears to be robust. When examining the items presented, these young consumers spent more time on fancy-name ones compared with generic-name ones. It is obvious that fancy brand names do entice young consumers.

However, these young consumers in our sample also considered factors other than brand names carefully, namely the issues regarding quality, price, safety, etc. Of particular importance is price. If asked

to choose between a fancy-name product and a generic-name product, irrespective of prices, most respondents indeed would choose the fancy-name one. However, when asked to think about prices, they would become more careful with their choices, and it appears that fancy-name products may not necessarily have stronger value in the eyes of the consumers compared with generic-name products. The implication here is that there may be tremendous opportunities for businesses to come up with creative brand names along with other considerations for the consumer, such as pricing the product competitively. Adopting this approach appears to have great potential in attracting young consumers.

Young consumers are more acclimated with online product information search compared with older consumers (Source *et al.*, 2005; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). As such, communicating effectively in digital venues is gaining more importance. The findings from Study 2 indicate that making brand names enticing and showing these names prominently on the website would help attract young consumers' attention. Since Study 2 listed brand names of similar items side by side, and the young consumers in our sample overwhelmingly indicated they would choose the fancy-brand name options in each of the three product categories, using fancier brand names would be particularly important on comprehensive online marketplaces like Amazon. In such online venues, consumers often use the search function to look for brands that offer products they need at that point in time, and the search results page lists many different brand names. Our research shows that it is critically important to have a more creative brand name relative to the competition.

Overall, the findings of this study will help marketers understand how fancy brand names affect young consumers' perceptions of such names and other factors related to this issue in their decision-making process. The findings suggest marketers targeting young consumers (e.g., youth apparel, technology, and video games businesses) need to view creative brand names as an important tool to attract young consumers.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Variance
Circle a group (A or B) for towel category which you would like to purchase.	15	1.00	2.00	1.07	.26	.07
Circle a group (A or B) for candle category which you would like to purchase.	15	1.00	2.00	1.20	.41	.17
Circle a group (A or B) for nail polish category which you would like to purchase.	15	1.00	2.00	1.07	.26	.07
Buying generic-name product makes me feel good	16	1.00	5.00	3.31	1.30	1.70
I love it when generic-name are available for the product categories I purchase.	16	1.00	6.00	2.94	1.44	2.06
For most product categories, the best buy is usually the generic-name product.	16	2.00	5.00	3.31	1.01	1.03
In general, generic-name brands are poor-quality products.	16	2.00	6.00	4.44	.96	.93
Considering the value for the money, I prefer generic-name products to fancy-name products.	16	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.21	1.47
When I buy a generic-name product, I always feel that I am getting a good deal.	16	2.00	6.00	3.94	1.29	1.66

FIGURE 4
PAIR OF NAILS

A #990039 Nail Polish

B #Icing on the Cake

C #991291 Nail Polish

D #Spice is Nice

E #989998 Nail Polish

F #Don't Need No Romeo

FIGURE 5
TOWELS

A #Washrag   B #Soft Egyptian cotton