

The Feminine Advantage

Marketing managers spend considerable time and money deciding what to call new products, with boutique naming fees running as high as \$10,000 per letter. A new study pinpoints a basic attribute they should consider: whether a name is linguistically masculine or feminine. Analyzing 20 years' worth of entries on the Interbrand Global Top Brands list, the researchers found that brands with feminine-sounding names—generally, relatively long words ending in a vowel and with an unstressed first syllable—were more likely than others to make the cut and to earn a spot high up on the list.

In five subsequent experiments involving both well-known and fictitious brands, the researchers confirmed the superior performance of feminine names and explored the reasons for it. Across products ranging from sneakers to hand sanitizer to YouTube channels, participants favored those with a feminine-sounding name (Nimilia, say) over more-masculine ones (Nimeld). They saw the feminine names as conveying warmth, which inspired more-positive attitudes toward the brand and made them more inclined to choose it.

There were exceptions, of course. When a product was aimed at a male audience, the researchers found, masculine and feminine brand names were equally well-liked. And although participants displayed a clear preference for feminine brand names when contemplating a hedonic purchase, such as chocolate, they preferred masculine names for strictly functional products, such as bathroom scales.

These results have obvious implications for naming new products and could also be deployed in service of the tried-and-true. "Brands...may be ill-advised to discard a well-established masculine name," the researchers caution. "However, it may be possible to imbue masculine brand names with warmth via feminine sub-brands, brand extensions, or logos. For instance, Fiesta is a linguistically feminine sub-brand of Ford that could add warmth to the masculine corporate brand."

 **ABOUT THE RESEARCH** "Is Nestlé a Lady? The Feminine Brand Name Advantage," by Ruth Pogacar et al. (Journal of Marketing, forthcoming)