

Brand ID: Is a car masculine or feminine?

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Languages affect brand perception and the English and Spanish gender system presents specific problems, such as whether a car is masculine or feminine.

In Spanish, car is "el automobile," making it masculine; in English, a car is a car -- what's more important is its make.

Now, a study in the September issue of the Journal of Consumer Research reveals linguistic gender plays a role for brand evaluation and recall in both languages.

Researchers Eric Yorkston and Gustavo de Mello of the University of Southern California said the research is the first to demonstrate that gender agreement between a brand name and its product class affects both brand attitude formation and brand encoding.

"In the formal gender system of Spanish, consistent formal gender marking enhances brand recall, whereas semantic product associations drive brand evaluation," the study said.

In the English semantic gender system, formal cues determine initial brand name gender. But they said associations between brand name and product category drive brand evaluations and recall.

"Consumers spontaneously utilize brand name gender associations and incorporate them into their evaluations of branded products, rewarding those brand name/product pairings that provide consistent gender cues,

even when additional product information is available," the study concluded.

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