

Study: Vowel sounds affect consumer buying

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A U.S. study determined product names with vowel sounds that convey positive attributes about the product are deemed more favorable by consumers.

Researchers Tina Lowrey and L.J. Shrum of the University of Texas-San Antonio created fictitious brand names that varied only by one vowel sound -- for example, nillen and nallen. They then varied product categories between small, fast, sharp objects -- such as knives or convertibles -- and products that are large, slow, and dull -- such as hammers and SUVs.

Study participants were asked to choose which word they thought was a better brand name. The researchers found participants overwhelmingly preferred words with front vowel sounds (nillen) when the product category was a convertible or a knife but preferred words with back vowel sounds (nallen) when the product category was an SUV or hammer.

"The implications of phonetic symbolism for brand names are relatively straightforward," said Lowrey and Shrum. "If sounds do convey certain types of meaning, then perceptions of brands may be enhanced when the fit between the sound symbolism and the product attributes is maximized."

The study is detailed in *The Journal of Consumer Research*.

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