

Some brand names are music to our ears, research shows

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University of Alberta marketing professor Jennifer Argo

If you're having a bad day, you may want to stay away from listening to commercials for Lululemon or Coca Cola. Or from any retailer or merchandise whose name bears a similarly repetitive phonetic sound.

University of Alberta marketing professor Jennifer Argo recently published a study in the [Journal of Marketing](#) indicating that hearing the names of brands containing these types of repetitive sounds can influence our mood and thus our decision-making ability when it comes to choosing whether or not we frequent that establishment or buy those items.

Argo, along with her colleagues, conducted a number of studies testing brand names, including identical samples of ice cream that were given two different names: one for which the name contained a repetitive sound and one where there was none. The researchers introduced the identical products to test subjects one at a time, citing the name for each sample aloud during the product description. Despite the same ice cream being used, the majority of respondents chose the brand with the repetitive-sounding name.

In other studies, giving people choices over everything from types of desserts in one or cell phone options in another, the researchers found similar results from the respondents' selections. In these cases, they chose based on an affective (emotional) response. Argo says that an audible repetition needs to be present—findings that are key for marketers, advertisers and store managers.

“Based on the results, it would say that tv and radio advertisements are critical to this strategy,” Argo said. “But the employees are also critical. Before customers order, a server can remind the name of the restaurant they’re at. Sales people can talk with customers and mention the [brand name](#).”

In all of the six trials Argo’s group conducted, each invented brand name underwent only minute changes in variations, such as “zanzan” versus “zanovum”. Argo noted that, in all cases, such small variations, even as much as a single letter, had a huge impact as to the person’s choice and how they responded.

Alas, too much sound repetition can also be a bad thing, as can developing a name that does not follow a natural linguistic sound, for example, “ranthfanth”. In these cases, she says, respondents displayed negative affect when these conditions were present.

“You can’t deviate too much from our language, otherwise it will backfire on you,” said Argo.

Argo, whose studies often deal with subjects related to consumer awareness, notes that there is one loophole to the brand/sound strategy: the device is less effective if the person is already positively affected. Argo’s advice for someone practising retail therapy would be to “plug your ears; don’t let anyone talk to you.” Overall, Argo notes that people need to be aware of the influence that a brand name may have on mood and choice and that marketing strategists have gone to great lengths in choosing the moniker for their product.

“The companies have spent millions of dollars choosing their brands and their brand names and they’ve been picked explicitly to have an influence on [consumers](#),” she said. “We show that it can get you at the affective level.”

Provided by University of Alberta

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