

UPPERCASE or lowercase? The way brands write their names sends a subtle message to consumers

April 12 2021, by Don Campbell



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Brand names are often written using a combination of uppercase and lowercase letters. Others defy convention by using all lowercase, such as amazon or ebay, or all uppercase, such as IKEA.

It turns out this unconventional use of text does more than simply draw our attention—it could influence how we think or feel about a brand or

product if there's a strong gender connection.

"Our first encounter with a brand quite often is seeing its name splashed in text. But how that text is used can go a long way in influencing our initial attitudes about that product," says Sam Maglio, an associate professor in the department of management at the University of Toronto Scarborough.

In a study published in the journal *Marketing Letters*, Maglio and co-author Aekyoung Kim from the University of Sydney looked at how the use of text influenced people's attitudes towards certain products. Across four experiments they found a link between using lowercase letters and femininity, and uppercase letters and masculinity—and these gender perceptions influenced how favorably certain products were viewed.

"We found that female-specific products are viewed more favorably when presented in lowercase, and male products were viewed more favorably when presented in uppercase," says Maglio, an expert on consumer behavior.

They also found that the effect seems to hold regardless of font size. In one experiment, brands were shown using a combination of uppercase and lowercase letters as well as different font sizes (large 100-point font, and smaller 20-point font). The result was that switching font sizes had little effect on gender perception compared to using uppercase or lowercase letters.

The study builds on past work by other researchers that looked at how use of lowercase brand names, such as adidas, was more closely associated with traditional female gender attributes such as friendliness. It found that using uppercase and lowercase letters for [brand names](#) can have an unconscious effect on consumers' attitudes based on gender associations.

The study by Maglio and Kim focused on how specific products like scarves and fragrances can be gendered using uppercase or lowercase letters.

Maglio says the lesson for marketers is there could be a benefit to using all lowercase or all uppercase if there is a clear gender connection to a particular product. If you're selling women's perfume, for example, lower-case letters may resonate more with customers. If you're selling men's aftershave on the other hand, using uppercase letters may be more effective.

For products where there is no clear gender connection, Maglio says it's likely most effective to use a combination of uppercase and lowercase.

"The simple message is they may want to line up their signals—in this case their use of text—with what their product delivers. So, if it's men's cologne, putting the name in uppercase letters could mean that consumers might like it more."

Maglio says the study focused on scarves and fragrances specifically because those products tend to have versions for different genders. He says they also found no difference in response to vacuum cleaners, which have been traditionally marketed to women.

"If people had a strong association between femininity and use of a vacuum cleaner, we should have seen a difference in our data depending on whether its brand name was written in all lowercase, but we didn't," he says.

"It's not like 'This type of product is for this gender, but it's not for that gender,' which would veer into problematic gender stereotypes."

As for why our attitudes towards a product can be influenced by the use

of text, Maglio says it comes down to how our brain processes information in order to derive meaning about the world around us.

"When you see a new [brand](#) and you don't know anything about it, you can't help but draw on a lifetime of experiences in making those snap judgements. People will latch on to whatever information they can in order to help them make sense of what they see.

"This effect works best for things with a strong [gender](#) connection, like a men's cologne, than if the connection is less obvious, like a vacuum cleaner."

More information: Aekyoung Kim et al. Text is gendered: the role of letter case, *Marketing Letters* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s11002-021-09556-w](#)

Provided by University of Toronto

Citation: UPPERCASE or lowercase? The way brands write their names sends a subtle message to consumers (2021, April 12) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-04-uppercase-lowercase-brands-subtle-message.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.