

Brand Names and the Use of Hedonic Symbolism: A Content Analysis of Luxury Cosmetics

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I. Introduction

Research has shown that consumers draw inferences from brand names (Peterson and Ross, 1972). Brand names can serve to enhance the image of the brand which, in turn, can lead to more favorable perceptions (Kohli and Harich, 2005).

In the case of luxury goods (i.e., those defined as prestigious and exclusive), Salciuviene, Ghauri, Streder, and De Mattos (2010) found that the use of **French words** resulted in perceptions of the brand as more *hedonic* relative to non-French sounding names.

Ajitha and Sivakumer (2017) also found that the use of **French words** resulted in both *stronger* perceptions of hedonic value and *more positive attitudes* toward the *luxury brand*.

Hedonic reflects feelings of '**fun, entertainment, fantasy, arousal, motivation, and sensory enjoyment**' (Babin, et al., 1994; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982)' (630, Lim, 2014).

Hume and Mills (2013) have argued that *cosmetic products* have an **inherent hedonic component**.

The purpose of this study is to explore the degree to which brands for cosmetic products use this evidence when developing brand names.

First, we propose that luxury brands of cosmetics will be more likely than non-luxury cosmetics brands to use French words for their brand names. We test this proposition using samples of brand names from luxury and non-luxury brands of American nail polish

Second, we extend the analysis to examine differences between a French and American brand of luxury nail polish. We expect that the French brand will utilize more French words.

Finally, we translate the French brand names (from both the French and American brands) into English in order to explore the extent to which they convey *uniqueness*.

Ritson (2006) maintains that unique brand names are those that are not generic to common language and, therefore, provide a basis for creating a more positive brand impression. This is thought to be especially true for luxury goods.

II. Method

A content analysis of brand of nail polish was conducted. First, two American brands of nail polish (one luxury and one non-luxury) were examined for differences in the proportions of French versus English words. In a follow-up, we compared the American luxury brand with a French luxury brand. In the final analysis, we translated the French words into English to gain insights into their uniqueness.

Brand profiles:

- 1) Marc Jacobs – Luxury American brand
n = 35 colors of Marc Jacob's Enamored Hi-shine
- 2) Revlon - Non-Luxury American brand
n = 59 colors of Revlon's Nail Enamel
- 3) Chanel – Luxury French brand
n = 35 colors of Chanel's Le Vernis Longwear Nail Colour

Coding Procedures and Test Statistic:

Each name was reviewed to determine whether the name was French or English. The test statistic is calculated by the CHITest in excel.

Table 1: Data

	Luxury American Brand	Non-Luxury American Brand	Luxury French Brand
French Words	25.7% (n=9)	5.1% (n=3)	71.4% (n=25)
English Words	74.3% (n=26)	94.9% (n=56)	28.6% (n=10)

Table 2: Representative Translations

Chanel French to English	Marc Jacob French to English
Gris Obscur -> dark grey	Oui! -> yes
Coquillage -> sea shell	Le charm -> the charm
Particulière -> particular	Lux -> luxury
Gitane -> gypsy woman	Madame -> Mrs
Mythique -> mythical	Blanche -> white

III. Results

Table 1 presents the data used in the analysis. Based on the observed and expected values for each cell, the test statistic for differences between the luxury and non-luxury brands of American nail polish is .004 which is **LESS** than the cut-off of .05. Hence, the proposition that luxury brands of cosmetics would be more likely to utilize French words in the brand names is **supported**.

In the second test, the American and French luxury brands were compared. We would expect that the French brand would be more likely than American brands to utilize French words simply due to country-of-origin. Not surprisingly, the test statistic yielded a value of .000 ($p < .05$) indicating that the *French luxury brand uses French words to a greater extent than their American counterpart*.

In the final analyses, we translated French words into English to explore the degree of uniqueness. The results are shown in Table 2. Inconsistent with the recommendation of Ritson (2006), the words do not appear to be unique in their English translation, but further elaboration is warranted to better understand the nature of 'uniqueness'.

IV. Conclusions

Developing an understanding of how branding elements, such as brand names, can influence consumer perceptions represents an important component of marketing knowledge.

The results help confirm that hedonic brands (in the present case, luxury brands of cosmetics) *have applied evidence from the common body of knowledge*.

Furthermore, the supplemental analysis suggests that the French words, when translated to English, are not unique; rather, they reflect fairly common terms.

As such, the results suggest that it might be the *symbolism of French words convey a higher image of luxury, rather than the actual meaning of the word*. In other words, the use of French words, regardless of the actual meaning, may convey a more positive image as a result of a country-of-origin effect. (Salciuviene, et al., 2010).

Finally, it would be helpful to further expand this line of research through an examination of other languages and cultures. Since language can convey a country-of-origin effect and that effect can differ across cultures, developing a better understanding of the nature and scope of language in terms of its influence on consumer perceptions of brand image is worthwhile.

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