The Name Game: How Naming Promotes Effects Beneficial to Marketers

Jennifer Stoner, University of North Dakota, USA
Barbara Loken, University of Minnesota, USA
Ashley Stadler Blank, University of St. Thomas, USA

This research finds that when consumers are induced to name an ordinary object, their naming of it increases liking, purchase intentions, and valuation. The marketing benefits occurred for both online photographs and an actual product. Perceptions of ownership of the object were found to mediate changes in attitudes toward it.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1024449/volumes/v45/NA-45

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
The Name Game: How Naming Promotes Effects Beneficial to Marketers
Jennifer L. Stoner, University of North Dakota, USA
Barbara Loken, University of Minnesota, USA
Ashley Studler Blank, University of St. Thomas, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Toyota is encouraging car owners to name their cars and has provided close to 100,000 name badges for owners to affix to their autos (Diaz 2015). Yet, the phenomenon of consumers naming even nonhuman-like products has not been examined by academic researchers. When a person spontaneously names an inanimate object (such as a car), the person is probably doing so because he likes the object. But what about the inverse: what happens when a company asks or directs the consumer to name an object? In the research reported here, we hypothesize and find that naming of products bestows benefits to the products when consumers are directed or requested to name them.

We hypothesize that naming of an object may increase liking for it because it increases feelings of ownership. Naming is an activity generally performed for newborns or pets in one’s family, or for nonhuman objects (e.g. dolls, cars, stuffed animals) that the namer believes to “be mine”. Abundant research on the endowment effect has shown that when consumers take ownership of an object, it increases in value (e.g. Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1990). These endowment or ownership effects are also found when consumers feel psychological (rather than actual) ownership. (Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks 2003).

Study 1 explores the basic effect of naming and whether it persists over time. Student participants were recruited for a two-part study on stress reduction. Participants were randomly assigned to either a naming or no-name condition. During the first lab session, all participants received a plain yellow stress ball and were either instructed to name it or not. Four weeks later, participants were asked to report how much someone would have to pay them to buy their stress ball from them. As predicted, the naming condition placed greater value on their stress ball than those in the no-name condition, $F(1,38) = 4.42, p < .05$. In fact, price values were remarkably more than $1 higher for participants in the naming than no-name condition ($M = 4.07$ vs. $2.67$).

In Study 2 participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: naming, no-name, assigned descriptive name “Blue”, or assigned non-descriptive name “Steve”. All participants viewed a picture of a stapler. Participants in the naming condition were asked to provide a name for it whereas in the assigned name conditions the stapler had already been given a name. An ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition, $F(3, 196) = 3.75, p = .01$, on purchase intention. Purchase intentions were highest in the naming condition ($M = 4.49$), followed by the “Blue” ($M = 3.75$), “Steve” ($M = 3.74$) and no name ($M = 3.50$) conditions. Planned contrasts showed that purchase intent was higher in the naming condition than each individual condition ($p’s < .05$). Additionally, mediation analysis demonstrated that psychological ownership mediated this effect.

In Study 3 we compare the effects of naming for an unbranded product (laptop) and for a brand product with a strong prior brand image (Apple laptop). Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (brand, no brand) X 4 (naming, no-name, assigned descriptive name “Slimbook”, or assigned non-descriptive name “George”) between-subjects design. Participants reported their attitudes toward the laptop on five items. Results revealed in the unbranded condition favorability was highest in the naming condition ($M = 5.03$), followed by the “Slimbook” ($M = 4.63$), no name ($M = 4.51$) and “George” ($M = 4.44$) conditions. Planned contrasts showed the naming condition was significantly higher than all the other conditions individually (all $p’s < .10$). For the branded condition, none of the contrasts were significant (all $p’s > .10$). Once again, the naming effect was significantly mediated by psychological ownership. Potential alternative mediators such as attachment, self-efficacy, and involvement were not significant.

Study 4 attempted to understand what name features drive self-name success. We employed a mixed design where product (stapler, mug) was a between subjects factor and name condition (no name, assigned descriptive name, assigned non-descriptive name) was a within subjects factor ($p > .05$). There was no difference in the product conditions and so these data were collapsed for analysis. A repeated measures ANOVA on attitudes ($F(2, 240) = 58.10, p < .01$) and purchase intentions ($F(2, 240) = 55.76, p < .01$) revealed a significant main effect of name. Participants reported higher attitudes ($M_{name} = 5.34$) and purchase intentions ($M_{name} = 4.84$) for self-names than assigned descriptive names (attitudes: $M_{assigned} = 4.26$; purchase intentions: $M_{assigned} = 3.89$) or non-descriptive (attitudes: $M_{non} = 3.36$; purchase intentions: $M_{non} = 2.98$) names. Participants also reported higher attitudes and purchase intentions for descriptive versus non-descriptive names (all $p’s < .05$). Furthermore, the MEDIATE macro (Montoya and Hayes 2017) for repeated measures designs demonstrated that this effect was driven by psychological ownership which in turn was driven by the fit and creativity of the name.

Study 5 compares the effects of naming to a form of co-creation, designing a mug. Student participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: naming, no-name, and designing. In the design condition, participants were given colored pencils to design a mug. All participants completed the same scales used in Study 3. An ANOVA on attitudes revealed a significant main effect ($F(2, 101) = 10.37, p < .01$). Participants reported higher attitudes for self-design ($M = 5.23$) than self-name ($M = 4.48$) or the control ($M = 3.61$). Importantly, participants still reported higher attitudes for self-name versus the control (all $p’s < .05$). Once again, this effect was mediated by psychological ownership. Interestingly, affective commitment also mediated the positive impact of self-design but did not mediate the difference between self-name and the control condition.

REFERENCES