

Research: Nomen est omen

Two US scientists did research into how we judge others on the basis of their first names. These studies particularly focused on the differences in our judgement of children with a name with regular spelling (such as Diane, Linda and Sherman) and children with the same name, but with 'unconventional' spelling (Dyan, Lynda and Shurmen). The results of the research show that children with 'unconventionally' spelled names got lower grades at school.

The researchers found that people with first names with regular spelling were more often associated with success, popularity, personal warmth, virtues and a good temper than people with names with so-called 'unconventional' spelling. It turned out that boys with unconventionally spelled first names were judged as less masculine, and that girls with unconventionally spelled first names were precisely judged as more masculine.

This research also involved a number of teachers marking the same essays, with only the name of the writer changing. The results showed that in some cases essays signed with a first name with unconventional spelling scored a full point lower than the same essay with a first name with conventional spelling on it.

Research by the brand name development firm Globrands from Amsterdam shows that first names evoke a whole set of associations when first meeting someone. As part of this study, 120 male university students in the age bracket between 19 and 26 were shown cards with three different girl's names: Carly, Carla and Carol. Carly turned out to evoke associations with a pretty, sporty and blonde woman in most cases. Carla was imagined to be a plain, brown-haired lady, while respondents saw Carol as a slightly fat, dark-haired woman. This study shows that names have an influence on our judgements in their own right.

There is no reason to assume this phenomenon will not occur in relation to brand names. Scientists who looked at brand names have already concluded that sounds alone can conjure up certain associations. Brand names that start with a hard sound (initial plosive) do well in terms of their perception as powerful and masculine (for example: Kodak). Names ending in 'a' evoke feminine associations (for example: Diorella and Kaloderma); names that contain an 'o' generally evoke associations with big things (for example: Omega) and names containing an 'i' lead to associations with small things (as in the case of Tigra, and most literally in the case of the name Mini).

Reference(s)

Mehrabian, A., Piercy, M. (1993), Positive or negative connotations of unconventionally and conventionally spelled names. *Journal of Social Psychology*, vol.133, no.4, p.445-451. *

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* : Available in the EURIB library.