

# The Impact of Audiovisual Representation of Brand Names on Consumer Psychology

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## Abstract

As a special category of lexical items, brand names exhibit formal representations that can be divided into visual representation (the visual characteristics of printed letters) and auditory representation (the holistic acoustic features of words), with typography (including letter case, font style, and color) and phonology (including phonemes, syllables, tone or stress) serving as respective proxies for the two. The influences of brand name typography and phonology on consumer psychology both occur during the lexical perceptual processing stage, with their resultant effects and underlying mechanisms being both interconnected and distinct from each other. Furthermore, cross-modal associations exist between the visual and auditory effects of brand names. Future research should integrate practical concerns and conduct supplementary investigations into the visual and auditory effects of brand names.

## Full Text

### Preamble

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## Abstract

As a special category of lexical items, brand names possess formal representations that can be divided into visual representation (the visual characteristics of printed letters) and auditory representation (the overall acoustic features of words). Font style (including letter case, typeface, and color) and phonology (including phonemes, syllables, tones, or stress) serve as proxies for these two modalities, respectively. The influence of brand name font style and phonology on consumer psychology occurs during the perceptual processing stage of lexical recognition, and while their outcomes and mechanisms are interconnected, they also exhibit distinct differences. Furthermore, cross-modal associations exist between the audiovisual effects of brand names. Future research should address practical problems and provide supplementary investigations into the audiovisual effects of brand names.

**Keywords:** brand name, formal representation, font style, phonology, consumer psychology

## 1. Introduction

Brand names serve as fundamental cues for consumers to identify brands. Typically comprising one or two words, brand names represent the most concise form of brand language and appear frequently in marketing communications between brands and consumers (Carnevale et al., 2017; Pogacar, Shrum et al., 2018). Lexical mental representation can be categorized into perceptual-based formal representation and meaning-based semantic representation, which influence individuals during the perceptual processing and semantic processing stages of lexical recognition, respectively (Tian & Huber, 2010). In today's era of economic globalization, the semantic representation of brand names is often difficult for consumers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to comprehend. For instance, the English brand name "Nike" carries the meaning of "the Greek goddess of victory," a connotation readily grasped by European and American consumers but less accessible to Asian consumers. In contrast, brand name formal representation—encompassing typographic style and phonological segments—operates through visual and auditory channels, influencing consumer psychology during the perceptual processing stage and conveying meaning independently of semantic content (Jun & Lee, 2022; Smith, 2014). To a certain extent, brand name formal representation not only facilitates brand and product identification and differentiation but also carries universal meaning unrestricted by language. Consequently, as brand-related stimuli, the formal representation of names can elicit corresponding audiovisual sensory responses in consumers, subsequently affecting their experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

In marketing practice, brand name font style commonly appears in brand logos, product appearance, packaging, posters, and web content, while phonology manifests through written spelling, oral mentions, and audio-video media. Some

well-known brands feature highly distinctive name styles that create lasting impressions among global consumers. For example, regarding font style, the technology company IBM presents its brand name in uppercase blue-striped letters with large, thick serifs, appearing both stable and innovative. The camera manufacturer Canon displays its Latin-script name “Canon” in white letters against a black background on its digital cameras, with the letter “o” slightly tilted, creating a striking and modern appearance (as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Regarding phonology, the Chinese website of the luxury automobile brand Cadillac highlights the phoneme repetition in its three-syllable name—the consonant “c” and vowel “a” each appear twice—a phonological feature that generates pleasant feelings. Fashion brand Dior’s product advertisements typically conclude with a female American pronunciation of “[di: :],” where the bisyllabic word’s phonology transitions from the front vowel “[i:]” to the back vowel “[:],” creating an elegant and soothing auditory experience (as shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]).

Thus, the audiovisual formal representation of brand names exerts significant influence on consumer psychology.

**Figure 1.** Font Styles of Brands “Canon” and “IBM”

**Figure 2.** Phonology of Brands “Cadillac” and “Dior”

Currently, as a crucial means of helping global consumers understand brands, the role of brand name audiovisual formal representation has not received adequate scholarly attention. Existing research primarily examines how individual components of brand name font style or phonology affect consumer responses, with few studies investigating interactions among different components. Moreover, these studies focus mainly on outcomes rather than providing systematic exploration of component structures and underlying mechanisms (Dew et al., 2022; Doyle & Bottomley, 2011; Jun & Lee, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to review existing literature on brand name audiovisual effects to reveal their distinctions and connections. This endeavor will not only provide a holistic research perspective for understanding brand name font style and phonology but also offer insights for theoretical research and marketing practice. This paper integrates multidisciplinary perspectives from psychology, linguistics, neurobiology, and consumer behavior to clarify the concepts and components of brand name audiovisual formal representation, elucidate their influence on consumer psychology and underlying mechanisms, and compare the two effects. Finally, we identify limitations in current research regarding practical problem explanation and propose future research directions.

## 2. The Visual Effect of Brand Name Font Style

### 2.1 Concept and Components of Brand Name Font Style

Companies carefully design brand name font style to ensure consumer recognition of printed words (Martin & Davis, 2019). The influence of brand name font style on consumer psychology occurs during the early stages of visual word

recognition, manifesting in various contexts, with the font style in brand logos representing the “standard form” (Schechter, 1993). Rastle (2015) defines the underlying visual representation of lexical items as the visual features of printed letters, including font type, size, letter case, color, and retinal location. Considering the diverse presentation contexts of brand name font style, this paper identifies its components as letter case (unconstrained by layout format), typeface (constrained by layout format), and color (constrained by both layout format and background), with progressively narrower application scopes:

**(1) Letter Case.** Wikipedia defines letter case as “the distinction between uppercase and lowercase letters in a particular language’s writing system.” Brand name letter case forms create obvious shape differences and appear widely across print and electronic media without layout restrictions. Brand name letter case can be categorized into three types: all uppercase, all lowercase, and mixed case.

**(2) Typeface.** Typeface refers to the visual characteristics of letterforms, encompassing typographic size and design style. Drawing on existing font classifications, this paper proposes that brand name typeface characteristics comprise four dimensions: structural features (aspect ratio, completeness, presence of special symbols), font style (roundness, handwritten vs. printed, presence of serifs), morphological features (size, weight, slant), and layout features (spacing, relative positioning) (Xie et al., 2021; Dew et al., 2022). Brand names with specific typefaces frequently appear in product appearance, packaging, and posters.

**(3) Color.** Compared to the previous two components, color exhibits the weakest cross-cultural meaning consistency and the narrowest application scope (Klink & Athaide, 2014). Research indicates that colored backgrounds for web text can distinguish content areas from the rest of the page (Léger & Chevalier, 2017). In word processing software, text highlighting color functions similarly to fluorescent markers on paper, serving to emphasize text. Therefore, this paper posits that the visual communication of brand name color depends on text color or text highlighting color (color blocks highlighting black, white, or gray text), comprising three dimensions: hue, saturation, and brightness, with hue being the most easily identifiable dimension (Smith, 1978). As a key brand visual symbol, brand logos can be categorized as wordmarks, combination marks, or pictorial marks, with the “text” element in the first two types referring to the brand name (Keller et al., 2021). Consequently, brand name color characteristics often appear as part of brand logo colors, encompassing the overall color of the name text and its background blocks. Regarding hue, brand names can feature single-color or multi-color combinations, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Brand Name Font Color Usage and Examples

Color Scheme	Wordmark Examples	Combination Mark Examples
Single-color	Coca Cola; Li-Ning	Alibaba
Multi-color	Hershey’s; Camel Asprey	Whole Foods; Vivo; Pepsi Slack; MaxMara; Chanel

Color Scheme	Wordmark Examples	Combination Mark Examples
	Bvlgari; Adidas	Geely; City of Hope
	Dunkin' Donuts	PayPal; Chem-Dry
	Google; Subway	

*Note: Examples use real brand logos (see “Brand Names” ).*

*Source: Compiled by the authors.*

## 2.2 Mechanisms of Brand Name Font Style Effects

# 3. The Auditory Effect of Brand Name Phonology

## 3.1 Concept and Components of Brand Name Phonology

### 3.2 Mechanisms of Brand Name Phonology Effects

**3.2.1 The Driving Role of Human Auditory Mechanisms** The human auditory system, as a component of the nervous system, endows organisms with auditory perception capabilities that provide intrinsic motivation for phonological symbol recognition. Theoretical models describing auditory lexical processing, primarily the Cohort model and Trace model, both divide the auditory lexical recognition system into three hierarchical levels: feature recognition, phoneme recognition, and lexical recognition (Feng et al., 2021). For brand names presented as auditory stimuli, consumers utilize their auditory system to identify phonological features and complete initial lexical encoding and comprehension. As a brand’s cueing signal, both Chinese and English brand name phonology is stored by the brain during early stages of auditory lexical recognition, influencing long-term memory representations of the lexical item and playing a crucial role in consumer recall (Grossberg, 2003). Therefore, the reason why phonological features affect consumers’ emotional experiences and memory levels lies in the driving function of the human auditory mechanism.

**3.2.2 The Mediating Role of Phonological Fluency** The phonological fluency of Chinese and English brand names is primarily determined by different phonological structural features. For Chinese names, phonological fluency depends on appropriate syllable quantity, rhythmic meter, and proper coordination of initials, finals, and tones. A name achieves high phonological fluency when it contains two or three syllables, features reasonable rhythmic division (e.g., three syllables divided as [1#2] or [2#1] rather than [1#1#1]), and avoids difficult sound combinations within and between syllables (Feng, 2011; Yin, 2011). For English names, phonological fluency depends on adherence to word formation standards, natural transitions between syllables, and rhyme patterns. A name achieves fluent pronunciation when it contains a conventional number of syllables and phonemes (at most three or four syllables, fewer than two vowels and three consonants), employs glide transitions between syllables (e.g., “ld” in

“falden” ), and features repeated phoneme/syllable stress patterns (e.g., Coleco or Better Business Bureau) (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; McGlone & Tofiqbakhsh, 2000; Klink & Wu, 2014; Usunier & Shaner, 2002). When Chinese and English brand names exhibit high phonological fluency, consumers’ attitudes and behaviors are positively influenced (Menon & Raghurir, 2003).

**3.2.3 The Mediating Role of Evaluation-Potency-Activity (EPA) Dimension Ratings** Unlike vowels or consonants, which show no association with the activity dimension, high-frequency phonemes receive higher evaluations on both evaluation and potency dimensions compared to low-frequency phonemes. Consequently, consumers’ perceptions of brand personality and product attributes can be explained by the semantic associations of phonemes along these EPA dimensions: low-frequency phonemes, with lower evaluation but higher potency, enhance consumers’ perception of brand ruggedness; high-frequency phonemes, with higher evaluation, lead consumers to perceive products as having lighter appearances (Motoki et al., 2022).

**3.2.4 The Mediating Role of Sound Symbolism** In English, sound symbolism refers to phonemes conveying inherent meaning and matching specific attribute types. For example, the vowel [yoo]/[ä] typically matches positive/negative attributes, while sonorants ([l], [m], [n]) and voiced stop consonants ([b], [d], [g]) associate with round and angular shapes, respectively (Bremner et al., 2013). The mediating role of sound symbolism in English brand name phonology has been extensively validated. Research indicates that people tend to match English phonemes in names to specific shapes and associate particular phonemes with different appearances and personalities (Sidhu & Pexman, 2019). Similarly, English brand name phonology triggers automatic processing of phoneme sound symbolism in consumers, subconsciously eliciting varied responses regarding experiences, memory, brand/product attribute inferences, and attitudinal intentions (Pogacar, Kouril et al., 2018; Yorkston & Menon, 2004).

**3.2.5 The Mediating Role of Phonological Meaning Perception** Cognitive linguistics’ iconicity theory posits that linguistic forms exhibit 映照性相似对应 (reflective similarity correspondence) with their referents in terms of sound (Wang, 2002). As an important brand symbol, brand names enable consumers to process their auditory formal representation stimuli, forming perceptions of product attributes and brand personality that subsequently influence attitudes and behavioral intentions (Klink & Wu, 2014). Unlike sound symbolism, which involves individual phonemes, phonological meaning perception connects more with overall phonological characteristics. For instance, in blended brand names (containing both semantic and non-semantic morphemes), the phonology of non-semantic syllables can position the brand: the syllable “lim” in automotive brand names implies compact vehicle space, appealing more to small families (Arora, Kalro & Sharma, 2022). Syllable repetition in brand names also carries mean-

ing, activating baby schema (a special mental representation formed by people in response to infantile features) and leading consumers to perceive the brand as warmer but less competent, thereby increasing preference for hedonic products with reduplicated brand names (Wei, 2016).

**3.2.6 The Driving Role of Articulatory Motor Simulation** Motor simulation represents the connection between perception and cognition, involving the transformation of sensory perception into action responses. For example, when viewing letter sequences, skilled typists' motor programs become activated (Jeannerod, 2001; Yang et al., 2009). According to Hickok and Poeppel's (2007) dual-stream model of speech processing, after the brain receives speech signals, the dorsal pathway transmits auditory-motor signals through temporoparietal and frontal lobes, mapping speech perception onto speech production. Consequently, when consumers receive brand name phonological information, their articulatory organs engage in motor simulation, with specialized pathways in the sensory and motor systems shaping their cognition. For instance, consumers evaluate products from brands with the mid vowel [ä] in their names as heavier than those with the short vowel [i], because articulating [ä] involves a lower, more posterior tongue position (Yorkston & Menon, 2004). Similarly, if a brand name phonology features back-of-mouth articulations (e.g., i and b) before front-of-mouth articulations (e.g., u and k), the pronunciation mimics regurgitation (vs. ingestion) actions, activating avoidance (vs. approach) mechanisms and negatively (vs. positively) influencing consumer attitudes (Kronrod et al., 2014).

**3.2.7 The Mediating Role of Country-of-Origin Associations** Since languages within the same family share certain phonological similarities, brand name phonological features carry implicit language family cues, leading consumers to associate brands with particular countries of origin. Country-of-origin associations triggered by brand name phonology have been extensively discussed in research on foreign-sounding brand names. Studies suggest that while companies cannot fabricate actual origins, they can manipulate consumers' origin perceptions. For example, Italian-sounding brand names like "Giordano" and "Rossini" lead consumers to associate the brands with Italy (Zhang, 2015). Such country-of-origin associations trigger different cultural stereotypes (e.g., France-hedonism, USA-utilitarianism), subsequently influencing consumer psychology.

## 4. Cross-Modal Connections Between Brand Name Audio-visual Effects

Although brand name font style and phonology can independently influence consumer psychology, their close relationship provides favorable conditions for cross-modal associations. Research indicates that product-related, non-predictive auditory stimuli (e.g., product usage sounds and related ringtones) presented spatially can cross-modally facilitate consumers' visual search and selection for products, with these modality effects occurring during early stages of visual

attention processing (Knoeferle et al., 2016). As visual and auditory stimuli of brand names, font style and phonology also exhibit cross-modal integration effects.

Scholarly consensus and controversy exist regarding cross-modal connections in brand name audiovisual effects. Researchers agree that when font style and phonology produce consistent brand personality/product attribute perceptions, they generate additive effects, enhancing brand attractiveness, likability, quality perception, and memory levels (Jun & Lee, 2022; Lieven et al., 2015). However, disagreement persists concerning the relative weighting of font style and phonology in integration effects: one perspective suggests that while brand name font style and phonology interact to influence consumer responses, neither dominates (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006; Jun & Lee, 2022); another argues that font style plays a more important role than phonology in conveying brand meaning to consumers in emerging markets (Klink & Athaide, 2014).

A series of studies also examine brand name multisensory interaction effects. Sensory marketing is defined as “marketing that utilizes consumers’ senses and influences their intuitions, judgments, and behaviors,” involving five sensory experiences: visual, tactile, gustatory, olfactory, and auditory (Krishna & Schwarz, 2014). Consumers exchange information with the external world through their senses, which function during brand name reception (Zhong et al., 2016). Beyond vision and audition, brand names also generate other sensory interactions: non-contact between visual elements in brand logos can activate consumers’ perception of dynamic imagery and influence engagement and attitudes (Cian et al., 2014); front (vs. back) vowels, long (vs. short) vowels, and incomplete (vs. complete) plosives in food brand names produce sweeter taste sensations (Motoki et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021); and product scents enhance consumers’ memory for brand name letter sequences and other product attributes (Krishna et al., 2010).

## 5. Future Research Directions

Under the overarching trend of global economic development, marketing activities in foreign markets constitute a crucial component of brand internationalization strategies, with the semantic comprehension 障碍 (obstacles) faced by foreign consumers regarding brand names representing an urgent problem to address. Market practice demonstrates that brand name font style and phonology effectively facilitate cross-cultural consumers’ understanding of brand meaning. Through reviewing relevant research on brand name audiovisual effects from psychology, linguistics, and consumer behavior perspectives, this paper identifies several gaps: few studies focus specifically on brand name font style, with discussions of its effects typically mentioned only in brand logo literature; research on brand name phonology predominantly occurs in English contexts, with limited attention to Chinese contexts; and studies on font style and phonology remain largely independent, lacking integration. Therefore, future research could proceed along the following dimensions:

### 5.1 Phonological Design Rules for Chinese Brand Names

Scholarly discussion of English brand name phonology effects is relatively rich, covering the influence of various phonological components. In contrast, research on Chinese brand name phonology effects remains scarce and largely exploratory rather than confirmatory (Chen & Huang, 2003; Yin, 2011). Chinese brand names feature a syllable-timed rhythm, with phonological patterns determined by syllable arrangement and the coordination of initials, finals, and tones within each syllable. However, existing studies have only examined the effects of syllable reduplication, neglecting other phonological structural features (Wei et al., 2016; Prator & Robinett, 1985). Chinese brand names may be created through direct design or translated from foreign names. Research indicates that English-proficient consumers rely on phonological and semantic relatedness between English and Chinese brand names, while non-proficient consumers depend more on semantic relatedness (Zhang & Schmitt, 2004). Phonology plays a crucial role in Chinese translations of foreign brand names (especially transliterations and their variants), conveying brand meaning through phonological similarity to the original names. However, differences in transliteration strategies not only affect the phonological fluency of these translated names but also create varying meaning perceptions and country-of-origin associations (Liu & He, 2015; Schmitt & Zhang, 2012). For example, the monosyllabic English name “Cross-tour” transliterated as “歌诗图” (gē shī tú) creates an easily pronounceable and memorable phonology associated with visual-emotional imagery of “song, poetry, and painting” (Liu & He, 2015). Conversely, the three-syllable English name “Buzz Rickson” transliterated as “巴斯雷克森” (bā sī léi kè sēn) features five syllables with awkward, jarring transitions that violate Chinese linguistic characteristics.

In summary, Chinese brand names should consider Chinese phonological features and follow specific naming rules to align with consumer preferences within Chinese linguistic and cultural contexts. However, what specific rules should govern Chinese brand name phonological design? How do different phonological characteristics of Chinese names influence consumer psychology? These specific questions require further exploration.

### 5.2 The Impact of Brand Name Font Style and Phonology Variations

Brand name font style appears not only in its standard form within brand logos but also in modified forms across marketing materials such as brand copy, product appearance, and packaging design, where visual features may partially change. For instance, the sportswear brand Vans uses the capitalized “Vans” in social media content, differing from the all-caps “VANS” in its logo. The bottled water brand Nongfu Spring displays its name horizontally or vertically on product packaging. The telecommunications brand Huawei transforms its “HUAWEI” logo color from understated black to eye-catching silver on product exteriors.

Regarding brand name phonology, brand nicknames used in online or offline communications represent common variations of formal name phonology. For example, the fast-food brand “McDonald’ s” is sometimes called “Mickey D’ s” in Europe and America, while the tea brand “奈雪的茶” (Nàixuě de Chá) is occasionally shortened to “奈雪” (Nàixuě). Brand nicknames are more concise and readable than formal names while maintaining phonological structural similarity. Research shows that when consumers use brand nicknames instead of formal names in online communications, other consumers perceive the review information as more authentic, increasing purchase and sharing intentions (Zhang & Patrick, 2021). This study examines the impact of brand nicknames on consumer responses from a semantic shift perspective without addressing phonological changes. Given the scarcity of research on how font style and phonology variations influence consumer psychology, this proposition urgently requires in-depth investigation.

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