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Product and Brand Name Linguistics and Logo Semiotics

“The strength of the symbol is in direct proportion to the power it has to convey an array of implicit meanings, which need to remain implicit to be powerful.”

—*Iain McGilchrist, All Souls College, Oxford University*¹

This conceptual note summarizes the basic concepts underlying the emerging field of brand linguistics,² as well as the practical decisions needed to design a product or brand name. Developing the product or brand name represents a more tactical decision related to the implementation of well researched and carefully designed product strategy, not unlike determining pricing, distribution, or promotional tactics. However, while companies can revisit and modify most of the marketing mix elements, they cannot easily change their essential product or brand name after launch.

Designing and selecting a product or brand name is, therefore, a decision of consequence for the firm. Brand managers must make related decisions regarding brand elements, including logo, font, and colors, to create a consistent and cohesive brand meaning.

Foundational Concepts for Understanding Brand Linguistics

Foundational theories and concepts from linguistics can help brand managers understand consumer perception, interpretation, and brand meaning. These foundational concepts include psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and semiotics.

Psycholinguistics is the study of the mental processes occurring in the human brain when a person acquires, stores, processes, perceives, and produces language or semantic concepts. Psycholinguistics helps brand managers understand how a product or brand name might affect consumer recall. Sociolinguistics studies how language reflects and defines social dynamics and interpersonal relationships. Sociolinguistics can help brand managers see how a product or brand name can communicate consumer social status.

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