

“Does NORTH in the southern hemisphere mean SOUTH? A global view on brand-name associations”

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Does NORTH in the southern hemisphere mean SOUTH? A global view on brand-name associations

Abstract

Brands and brand names can lead to different associations in consumers' minds. They can be interpreted or associated in different ways in different countries and cultures. The same brand name might also carry different associations according to geographical regions which could have a strong influence on the perception of multicultural brands. The concepts "north" and "south", for instance, are popular parts of brand names. These concepts trigger different associations in people, depending on the hemisphere they live in. In this research the authors discovered that brand which makes reference to north versus south leads to different associations for people from the northern versus southern hemisphere. This occurred not only for the words "north" and "south", but also for "nor", "sou", "N", and "S".

Keywords: brand names, brand associations, multicultural branding, priming.

JEL Classification: M31.

Introduction

Brands and brand names play an important role in marketing (Kapferer, 2012; Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen, 2009). Finding the "right" brand name is one of the most delicate issues companies face when creating new brands (Klink, 2000). According to Aaker (1991) and Kazmi (2007) the choice of the "right" brand name can enhance awareness and create a favorable image for a product. It can alter the consumers' judgment about a product and their purchase decision-making process (Hillenbrand, Alcauter, Cervantes and Barrios, 2013).

Whereas some brand names such as Adidas and Kodak are artificial words without any specific relationship to a product (e.g., Adidas is a combination of the name Adi Dassler) other brand names, for example, Nike and Lego inhere a deeper meaning (e.g., Lego is derived from the Danish words "leg godt" and means "play well"). Regardless of the native meaning, there is danger, that brand names can be interpreted or associated in different ways in different countries and cultures (Usunier and Shaner, 2002). The same brand name can for example sound positive or exotic in one language, but can be associated with an invective, or actually *be* an invective in another language (e.g., the Mitsubishi Pajero. The word "Pajero" is a Spanish slang word with the meaning "wanker"). But it is also true that the same brand name can carry different associations according to geographical region. Examples are brand names that contain the words "north" or "south", which evoke differential associations.

For thousands of years people have linked the climate with human behavior. The most common link is between uncomfortable hot temperatures and violent and aggressive behavior (Anderson, 1989;

Anderson, Anderson, Dorr, DeNeve and Flanagan, 2000). Although a long tradition exists that distinguishes cultures from northerly and southerly regions (Pennebaker, Rime and Blankenship, 1996), the most common contrast is usually between cold (north) and warm (south). This can be seen in the connection of the climate with the characteristics which tightly correlates with the geographical stereotypes (Allik and McCrae, 2004). According to Robbins, Dewalt and Pelto (1972), hot climates tend to have loose, easygoing cultures whereas cold climates tend to foster stricter cultures. In the 18th century Montesquieu (1748, 1989) had a similar climatic theory grouping the concepts of north/cold/cramped/rational and south/hot/loose/emotional. He argues that the climate forms the national character: warmer temperatures relax the skin and stimulate the nervous system with the result that hot weather makes people relatively lazy, hedonistic and impulsive (McCrae, Terracciano, Realo and Allik, 2007).

Examples of brands differentially associated with north or south include "the north face" and "southern comfort". These brands are clearly accompanied by connotations which strongly refer to the characteristics of the north and the south. Thus, people think of a cold day in the snow in the context of the brand "the north face", in marked contrast to the associations evoked by the brand "southern comfort"; here people imagine a relaxed person walking around on the beach enjoying him- or herself with a drink.

But what happens to brand image if "north" is replaced by "south" and vice versa? "The south face" would consequently not represent winter but summer clothing, and "northern comfort" could possibly be seen as a hot alcoholic beverage because it is drunk in the cold north. Hence, the connotations of the two brands would lead in opposite directions merely through inversion of the north-south reference.

The literature mentioned earlier primarily refers to the countries of the northern hemisphere. But what happens to the associations when brands with a north or south referent are marketed in the southern hemisphere (e.g., Australia)? Europe is located in the northern hemisphere, that is, northward from the equator. For these people the north implies something cold and dark, and the south, heat and brightness. Australia on the other hand is located in the southern hemisphere. Therefore, for Australians, the north should imply what the south represents in Northern America and Europe, and vice versa. As a consequence brands identifying themselves with the north or south may evoke completely different associations, with enormous ramifications for the experiencing and classifying of brands.

The central question of this research is whether participants, when confronted with a brand referring to the north or the south, recall stereotypes related to the north respectively south and therefore associate the brand with these same characteristics.

We conducted three experiments. Each was carried out in German-speaking Europe and in Australia, so as to be able to compare the results from the northern and southern hemispheres.

Experiment 1A: NORTH versus SOUTH (northern hemisphere)

Method

Participants, design and materials. Participants were 272 German-speaking university students (127 males, 145 females, $M = 23.98$) from a German-speaking university in Europe.

A between-subjects experimental design was employed with the brand name components as independent variables and three contrastive pairs of characteristics as dependent variables.

The independent variable consisted of a brand name which included the word “north” or “south” (e.g., “North Hotel”, “South Hill”). The dependent variables were three contrastive pairs (“hot-cold”, “bright-dark”, and “white-black”) which were to be ranked via a six-point rating scale (1 = hot/bright/white; 6 = cold/dark/black). The attributes “hot” and “cold” are purported to represent the main difference between the north and the south, by Montesquieu (1748, 1989), and also, later by Pennebaker et al. (1996). Considering that insolation increases with movement from north to south in the northern hemisphere (NASA, 2014), and vice versa in the southern hemisphere, the attributes “bright-dark” were also introduced, in addition, the attributes “white-black”, because they reflect the attributes “bright-dark” in a tangible way and repre-

sent two extremes in the spectrum of characteristics. Due to the fact that there has never been a geographical race separation in either Europe or Australia, the attribute “white-black” will not be associated with the race or skin color of the inhabitants of the different geographical regions.

For all of the experiments conducted with German-speaking students the equivalent attributes in German were used (e.g., “Nord Hotel”, “Süd Hill”).

Procedure. All participants were tested individually. The cover page informed them that the study concerned new brands and how they are perceived.

Results. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from the German-speaking northern hemisphere associate brands with “north” as a component to the attribute “cold”, and brands with the word “south” as a component to the attribute “hot”. The test was significant, $t(270) = 5.20, p < .001$. The brand name with “north” as a component is perceived as rather “cold” ($M = 4.36, SD = 1.59$) whereas the brand name with “South” as a component is experienced as rather “hot” ($M = 2.58, SD = 1.34$). Another independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from the German-speaking northern hemisphere associate brands with “north” as a component to the attribute “dark”, and brands with the word “South” as a component to the attribute “bright”. The test was significant, $t(270) = 3.65, p < .001$. German-speaking Europeans therefore perceive brand names with “north” as a component as being rather “dark” ($M = 3.21, SD = 1.27$) whereas brand names with “South” as a component are experienced as being rather “bright” ($M = 2.30, SD = 0.85$). A third independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from the German-speaking northern hemisphere associate brands with “north” as a component to the attribute “black”, and brands with the word “south” as a component to the attribute “white”. The test was significant, $t(270) = 3.07, p = .003$. The brand name with “north” as a component is perceived as rather “black” ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.46$) whereas the brand name with “south” as a component is experienced as rather “white” ($M = 2.33, SD = 0.79$).

Experiment 1B: NORTH versus SOUTH (southern hemisphere)

Method

Participants. Participants were 242 Australian university students (115 males, 127 females, $M = 20.38$) from an Australian university.

Design, materials and procedure. The design and procedure was identical to that in experiment 1A, with the exception that for the brand name components the English equivalents were used (e.g., “North Hotel”, “South Hill”).

Results. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from Australia (southern hemisphere) associate brands with “north” as a component to the attribute “bright”, and brands with the word “south” as a component to the attribute “dark”. The test was significant, $t(240) = 2.00, p = .049$. Australians perceive a brand name with “north” as a component as being rather bright” ($M = 2.77, SD = 1.50$) whereas brand names with “South” as a component are perceived as being rather “dark” ($M = 5.53, SD = 1.46$). Another independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from Australia (southern hemisphere) associate brands with “north” as a component to the attribute “white”, and brands with the word “south” as a component to the attribute “black”. The test was significant, $t(240) = 2.70, p = .009$. Therefore brand names with “north” as a component are perceived as being rather “white” ($M = 2.33, SD = 1.12$) whereas the brand name with “south” as a component are experienced as being rather “black” ($M = 3.23, SD = 1.43$).

Discussion. The findings from experiments 1A and 1B demonstrate that brands carry different connotations according to the brand name components with which they are comprised, both in German-speaking Europe and in Australia. Both of the experiments the component words “north” and “south” were used. In consideration of the fact, that the full words “north” and “south” may not be widely used in brand names, two more experiments were conducted to evaluate if even merely indicating the words “north” and “south” is enough to evoke – or prime – similarly dissociable associations.

Experiment 2A: NOR versus SOU (northern hemisphere)

Method

Participants, design, and procedure. See experiment 1A.

Materials. The design and procedure was identical to that in experiment 1A, with the exception that the independent variable only indicated the brand name component (e.g., “Nor Hotel”, “Sü Hill”).

Results. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from the German-speaking northern hemisphere associate brands with “nor” as a component to the attribute “cold”, and brands with the word “sou” as a component to the attribute “hot”. The test was significant, $t(270) = 2.49, p = .015$. The brand name

with “nor” as a component is perceived as being rather “cold” ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.28$) whereas the brand name with “Sou” as a component is experienced as being rather “hot” ($M = 2.53, SD = 1.18$). A further independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from the German-speaking northern hemisphere associate brands with “nor” as a component to the attribute “dark”, and brands with the word “sou” as a component to the attribute “bright”. The test was significant, $t(270) = 2.59, p = .011$. German-speaking Europeans therefore perceive brand names with “nor” as a component as being rather “dark” ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.51$) whereas brand names with “Sou” as a component are experienced as being rather “bright” ($M = 2.53, SD = 1.15$). A third independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from the German-speaking northern hemisphere associate brands with “nor” as a component to the attribute “black”, and brands with the word “sou” as a component to the attribute “white”. The test was significant, $t(270) = 1.87, p = .005$. The brand name with “nor” as a component is perceived as being rather “black” ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.30$) whereas the brand name with “sou” as a component is experienced as being rather “white” ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.07$).

Experiment 2B: NOR versus SOU (southern hemisphere)

Method

Participants, design and procedure. See experiment 1B.

Materials. The design and procedure was identical to that in experiment 1B, with the exception that the independent variable only indicated the brand name component (e.g., “Nor Hotel”, “Sou Hill”).

Results. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from Australia (southern hemisphere) associate brands with “nor” as a component to the attribute “hot”, and brands with the word “sou” as a component to the attribute “cold”. The test was significant, $t(240) = 2.12, p = .032$, but the results were counter to the research hypothesis. Australians perceive a brand name with “nor” as a component as being rather “cold” ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.38$) whereas brand names with “sou” as a component are seen as being rather “hot” ($M = 2.83, SD = 1.44$). A further independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from Australia (southern hemisphere) associate brands with “nor” as a component to the attribute “bright”, and brands with the word “sou” as a component to the attribute “dark”. The test was significant, $t(240) = 1.78, p = .009$, but the results were counter to the research hypothesis. Therefore brand names with “nor” as a component are perceived as being rather “dark” ($M =$

3.53, SD = 1.40) whereas the brand name with “sou” as a component is experienced as being rather “bright” ($M = 2.93$, SD = 1.20).

These findings accord with the anticipated perception of the northern hemisphere.

Experiment 3A: N versus S (northern hemisphere)

Method

Participants, design and procedure. See experiment 1A.

Materials. The design and procedure was identical to that in experiment 1A, with the exception that the independent variable only indicated the brand name component with the first letter (e.g., “N Hotel”, “S Hill”).

Results. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from the German-speaking northern hemisphere associate brands with “N” as a component to the attribute “cold”, and brands with the word “S” as a component to the attribute “hot”. The test was significant, $t(270) = 2.21$, $p = .031$. The brand name with “N” as a component is perceived as being rather “cold” ($M = 3.85$, SD = 1.21) whereas the brand name with “S” as a component is experienced as being rather “hot” ($M = 3.21$, SD = 1.17). Another independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from the German-speaking northern hemisphere associate brands with “N” as a component to the attribute “dark”, and brands with the word “S” as component to the attribute “bright”. The test was marginally significant, $t(270) = 1.89$, $p = .063$. German-speaking Europeans therefore perceive brand names with “N” as a component as being rather “dark” ($M = 3.22$, SD = 1.22) whereas the brand name with “S” as a component is experienced as being rather “bright” ($M = 2.68$, SD = 1.23).

Experiment 3B: N versus S (southern hemisphere)

Method

Participants, design and procedure. See experiment 1B.

Materials. The design and procedure was identical to that in experiment 1B, with the exception that the independent variable only indicated the brand name component with the first letter (e.g., “N Hotel”, “S Hill”).

Results. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from Australia (southern hemisphere) associate brands with “N” as a component to the attribute “hot”, and brands with the word “S” as a component to the attribute “cold”. The test was marginally significant, $t(240) = 1.86$, $p = .068$, but the results were counter to the research hypothesis. Australians perceive a brand name with “N” as a component as being rather “cold” ($M = 5.13$, SD = 1.22) whereas brand names with “S” as a component are seen as being rather “hot” ($M = 4.55$, SD = 1.23). Another independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that people from Australia (southern hemisphere) associate brands with “N” as a component to the attribute “bright”, and brands with the word “S” as a component to the attribute “dark”. The test was significant, $t(240) = 2.35$, $p = .022$, but again the results were counter to the research hypothesis. Therefore brand names with “N” as a component are perceived as being rather “dark” ($M = 3.07$, SD = 1.02) whereas brand names with “S” as a component is experienced as being rather “bright” ($M = 2.33$, SD = 1.37).

These findings highlight the perceptions of stereotypes of the north respectively the south, which were anticipated by the German-speaking Europeans.

General discussion and conclusion

The findings indicate that brands carry different connotations in accordance with the brand name components, both in German-speaking Europe and in Australia.

The results of all three experiments, summarized in Table 1, clearly show that German-speaking Europeans associate brand names containing “north”, “nor” or “N” as being cold, dark and black, in contrast to brand names featuring “south”, “sou” or “S” which are perceived as being hot, bright and white.

Table 1. Results of *t*-tests regarding the experiments 1-3 in the northern hemisphere

Northern hemisphere	NORTH versus SOUTH			NOR versus SOU			N versus S		
	NORTH <i>M</i> *	SOUTH <i>M</i> *	<i>p</i>	NOR <i>M</i> *	SOU <i>M</i> *	<i>p</i>	N <i>M</i> *	S <i>M</i> *	<i>p</i>
Hot-cold	4.36	2.58	< .001	3.24	2.53	.015	3.85	3.21	.031
Bright-dark	3.21	2.30	< .001	3.34	2.53	.011	3.22	2.68	.063
White-black	3.15	2.33	.003	3.58	2.78	.005			

Note: *1 = hot/bright/white, 6 = cold/dark/black.

As can be seen in Table 2, the implications of the Australian experiments, in contrast, are not so clearly ascertainable.

Table 2. Results of *t*-tests regarding the experiments 1-3 in the southern hemisphere

Southern hemisphere	NORTH versus SOUTH			NOR versus SOU			N versus S		
	NORTH <i>M</i> *	SOUTH <i>M</i> *	<i>p</i>	NOR <i>M</i> *	SOU <i>M</i> *	<i>p</i>	N <i>M</i> *	S <i>M</i> *	<i>p</i>
Hot-cold				3.63	2.83	.032	5.13	4.55	.068
Bright-dark	2.77	5.53	.049	3.53	2.93	.081	3.07	2.33	.022
White-black	2.33	3.23	.009						

Note: *1 = hot/bright/white, 6 = cold/dark/black.

Only the first experiment, pertaining to the words “north” and “south”, was significant and confirmatory of our hypothesis. The direction of significance for the weakened versions – “nor” versus “sou” and “N” versus “S” – instead coincide with the European perception of the north respectively south: brand names with “nor” or “N” as a component word are associated with the characteristics of coldness and darkness, whereas “sou” or “S” is associated with the characteristics of hotness and brightness. This could be explained on the basis of two of the three concepts proposed by Rentfrow, Gosling and Potter (2008), namely “selective migration” and “social influence”: Since Australians share a strong historical bond with England, this may explain the encountered north-south perception normally known from the northern hemisphere. Furthermore it is plausible to suggest that the third concept of Rentfrow et al. (2008) – “environmental influence” – also plays a crucial role, because the majority of the above-mentioned characteristics are influenced by the climate. One reason could be that the climatic zones in Australia are possibly not perceived as being particularly distinct from one another. According to the Bureau of Meteorology of the Australian Government (2014) and Eklima (2014) the climate in Australia is generally far milder than it is in Europe. In Australia the average temperature in January is around 35 degrees Celsius in the north and 25 degrees Celsius in the south. In comparison, the average temperatures in Europe are considerably more extreme: in January an average of minus nine degrees Celsius is expected in the north versus five degrees Celsius above zero in the south.

An additional independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to test if the north of the northern hemisphere differs from the north of the southern hemisphere, and also to see if the south of the northern hemisphere differs from the south of the southern hemisphere. Given that this article assumes that the north of Australia actually represents the south of Europe, and the south of Australia the north of Europe, the north of Europe was contrasted with the north of Australia respectively the south of Europe with the south of Australia.

The comparison of the data from both test locations shows that significant distinctions exist. German-speaking Europeans perceive brand names containing the word “north” (e.g., North Hotel) as being colder/darker/blacker, whereas the brand names with the word “south” (e.g., South Hill) are seen as hotter/brighter/whiter compared to Australians.

The results of the experiments also have managerial implications. In general, the findings are interesting for marketers in two particular ways. Firstly, this article clearly demonstrates that, in German-speaking Europe, northerly or southerly connotations have a strong influence on brand evaluation. Even the mere hint of the words “north” resp. “south” (“N” resp. “S”) evokes associations of cold/dark/black resp. hot/bright/white, which become more pronounced with increasing word accuracy (that is, for “North” versus “nor” versus “N”, for example). This implies that the brand name, if connected to the north or south, of a company situated in Europe should be chosen wisely. A company producing beach utilities should therefore avoid brand names with “N”, “nor” or “north” content.

Concerning Australia it is not possible to draw such clear conclusions. The results do not demonstrate the same significance as do the ones garnered from German-speaking Europe, but nevertheless distinctions can be observed, albeit that they run counter to the research hypothesis. Despite the somewhat northern hemisphere-conforming north-south associations seen in the Australian sample there do still exist significant differences with the German-speaking Europeans. This implies that, for companies operating on an international level, their brand name, if connected to the word “north” respectively “south”, “nor” respectively “sou” or “N” respectively “S” will evoke stronger associations in German-speaking Europeans as opposed to Australians. Consequently, German-speaking Europeans will form stronger associations with cold/dark/black when confronted, for example, with the brand “North Beach”, as compared to Australians.

This knowledge can help with the appropriate selection of a brand name, and even generate decisive competitive advantages where the associations that are evoked by a brand can be a key component of success for a company (Loughlin and Aaker, 2010).

By way of a caveat, the findings of these experiments should be considered in the light of certain limitations. The present research is limited in that the test area for the northern hemisphere solely consisted of German-speaking Europeans and the southern hemisphere solely of Australians. Also, the research did not address a particularly wide range of attributes, where only three contrastive pairs of

characteristics were employed. In future studies, it will therefore be important to examine whether any other attributes are associated with brand names with northerly or southerly connotations. Further research would also do well to widen the testing grounds for the northern and southern hemispheres so as to include, for example, Canada, Asia or certain of the South American countries.

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