All de Parfums, All de Toilettes: Why Uninformative Names Work Magnificently for Luxury Perfumes

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Abstract

This study explains the consistent product-naming trend in the luxury perfume industry and whether abstract product names better appeal to target consumers. In this study, adult participants (N = 280) were first asked to fill out a questionnaire with 20 questions. Each question suggested two imaginary perfumes and participants were asked which one they would buy. The two perfumes in each question were identical except for their names that vary in level of obscurity. For instance, Option A would be named Pure Lust while Option B would be named Bergamot, Ylang Ylang & Frankincense. In this case, Option A's name is less informative than that of Option B that enumerates the essential oils used for the perfume. Hence, the name of Option A is relatively abstract. In order to prevent response bias, no perfume was suggestive of any existing product. As a result, the 280 participants chose abstractly named perfumes for 14.74 questions on average ($\bar{x}$: 14.742). Additionally, 238 participants (85%) leaned to abstractly named perfumes by selecting them for more than 10 questions. In a subsequent survey asking what characteristic makes perfume names attractive, participants submitted short answers where keywords "brief", "impressive", and "dreamy" most frequently appeared. The result demonstrates that abstract perfume names elicit higher potential perfume sales and draw more consumer attention. This finding provides insight into consumer behavior specific to luxuries and unconscious obedience towards vague product names. Luxury perfume brands can apply the name-building guidelines included in this study to product development and marketing.

Keywords: consumer behavior; fragrance; high-end; marketing strategy; survey

1.   Introduction

We live in a world of heightened consumer consciousness and remarkable accessibility of advertisements and product reviews. Before physically going to a shop to test a product, modern consumers scroll down product information online before making the purchase decision (Kim & Krishnan, 2015). Many sectors in the luxury industry, including the luxury perfume industry, are busily preparing for the influx of new generations as a massive consumer class. As a consequence of the emergence of younger consumers, classic motivations to use perfume (covering body odor, to smell attractive, etc.) have been ousted by newer purposes. Now, younger consumers consider using perfume as borrowing the brand's image; it is more like wearing the brand than solely the fragrance. In other words, consumers have above basic intents in purchasing luxury perfumes, such as to give an impression or gain approval (Ferraro et al., 2013). These changes have provided the impetus for market expansion and diversification.

While scent, substance, and price remain essential, name has started to emerge as an element decisive to perfume sales. In the older perfume industry, it was the luxurious scent and packaging that altered a bottle of liquid into a marketable product. The newer perfume industry, however, is a harsher competition between apex laboratories at huge perfume brands. The sophistication of technology has prompted the high-quality equalization of fragrance. Correspondingly, the decisive role has moved on from quality of scent to names.

The purpose of this research is to recognize the importance of perfume names and determine whether there is a commonness between names that attract the general consumer class. Through an experiment encompassing two related questionnaires, which will be further discussed in the methodology section, this paper aims to verify the following hypothesis:

Consumers prefer uninformative perfume names to informative perfume names.

It is the research's objective to discern the traits that create a preferable name for luxury perfume products. Additionally, this paper will focus on whether the naming trend in the perfume industry, which will be explained shortly, actually attracts consumers to buy. Going a step further from previous researches, the paper will propose a multilateral analysis of product names, ultimately offering a guideline to product naming tailored to the uniqueness of the perfume industry.

1.1 Organization

As the introduction outlines the background, purpose, and hypothesis of the research, the main body will explicate the core content of this paper, starting with introductory research denoting the trend of product naming in the relatively recent perfume market. The main body will then explain the categorization of names essential to this research, two complementary surveys on the preference of perfume names among a selected sample, and further discussion on the results of the surveys and how they are pertinent to the general consumer class. The conclusion will wrap up the research by restating the key findings.

2.   Main Body

2.1 Introductory Research

Perfume, as a product, has relatively few barriers to creative naming. Perfumes are not electronic devices or digital services with versions, although each newly released product can be part of a series or line. It relies less on the content and more on the secondary, tertiary values generated via brand reputation, marketing, and consumer recognition. Hence, perfume producers have a vast array of names they can choose from.

However, the perfume industry has witnessed a conspicuous trend of product naming over a long period. It is noticeable that an absolute majority of perfume names follows one of the two predominant trends: abstract and indicative. To demonstrate this, this paper includes a brief analysis of the naming trend of perfume products based on the most widely known and widely available perfumes.

This paper selected 300 perfumes that were released from luxury brands from all over the world from 1980 and onwards. The perfumes were then assorted by the topic of the name. Perfume names with no implication of scent type or ingredient were put under Type I. Perfume names with any sort of explicit implication of scent type or ingredient were put under Type II. The process revealed that every one of the 300 perfumes could be sorted according to this standard. The following explains and contrasts Type I and Type II with examples. The number of examples for each type is random and does not affect the core of the research.

2.1.1   Type I

Type I includes perfumes with uninformative names, names that do not provide any explicit hint on scent type or ingredient. In order to be sorted under Type I, the consumer must be blocked from any brand-provided information focused on the scent type or ingredient. The table below presents the subdivisions of Type I based on the name's focus of topic.

Table 1: Type I and Subdivisions

Type I		
Subdivision #	Characteristic	Examples
Subdivision I	Abstract names	VIP Spécial Réserve Pour Homme, Giorgio Beverly Hills (1990) By, Dolce & Gabbana (1994) π, Parfums Givenchy (1998) Initial, Boucheron (2000) X, Clive Christian (2001) M7, YSL (2002)
Subdivision II	Brand-indicative names	L'Eau de Bulgari, Bulgari (1992) Jean-Paul Gaultier Classique, Jean-Paul Gaultier (1993) Kenzoki Énergisant, Kenzo (2001) Prada Tendre, Prada (2006) Bleu de Chanel, Chanel (2010)
Subdivision III	Image-indicative names	Mitsouko, Guerlain (1919) Dune, Christian Dior (1991) Angel Men, Thierry Mugler (1996) Baby Doll, YSL (1999) Chinatown, Bond No. 9 (2005) Ombre Leather, Tom Ford (2018)
Subdivision IV	Mood-indicative names	Envy, Gucci (1997) UOMO, Moschino (1998) J'Adore, Dior (1999) Winter Delice, Guerlain (2000) Be Delicious, Donna Karan (2004) Romantica, Anna Sui (2015)

Though all under one roof, the four subdivisions of Type I are similar in that it is hard to guess the fragrance just by name. Subdivision I (Abstract names) houses names that function like labels instead of proper titles. Oftentimes, they resemble numerical codes that conceal information directly related to the perfume, like M7 by YSL. Other times, they are extremely generalized names, such as VIP Spécial Réserve Pour Homme by Giorgio Beverly Hills. Subdivision II (Brand-indicative names) include names explicitly stating or hinting at the brand. L'Eau de Bulgari by Bulgari clearly tells the consumer that the product is presented by the brand Bulgari. Subdivision III (Image-indicative names) house names that consumers can use to imagine a visible image inside their head. Mitsouko by Guerlain earned its name from a female hero in the novel *La Bataille*. Mitsouko reminds consumers of a Japanese woman, as the name is well known as a female name originating from Japan. Similarly, perfume names like Angel Men by Thierry Mugler and Ombre[1] Leather by Tom Ford allows the consumers to visualize a certain image while the image does not hint at a fragrance. Subdivision IV suggests a mood instead of an image. These names evoke an emotion or atmosphere, relatively figureless than the vivid image a Subdivision III name would provide. Examples include UOMO by Moschino and Be Delicious by Donna Karan. The word *uomo* means manly in Italian, which

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[1] Shadow in French.

does give certain visible information but not as definite as "angel men" or "shadowed leather". Knowing that Type I names can take various forms is essential in understanding the method of this research.

2.1.2 Type II

Unlike the previous type, Type II includes perfumes with informative names, names that do provide any explicit hint on scent type or ingredient. In order to be sorted under Type II, the consumer must be able to receive information regarding the scent type or ingredient of the perfume product. Research revealed that names that fit into this category can be further divided into two sub-groups. The table below presents the subdivisions of Type II based on the name's focus of topic.

Table 2: Type II and Subdivisions

Type II		
Subdivision #	Characteristic	Examples
Subdivision I	Implicitly informative names	Cool Water, Davidoff (1988) Sweet, Courreges (1993) Flowerbomb, Viktor & Rolf (2004) Magnificent Blossom, YSL (2015)
Subdivision II	Explicitly informative names	Black Orchid, Tom Ford (2006) Lily & Spice, Penhaligon's (2006) Florentine Iris Essenze, Ermenegildo Zegna (2012) Jasmin Perle de Thé, Fragonard (2013)

The two subdivisions vary in level of exposure of information: whether the name slightly implies the type of scent or provides wholesome information. Perfumes with names that consumers can infer the scent from go under Subdivision I. For instance, Cool Water by Davidoff does not indicate what ingredients go into the perfume as main accords, but the consumer, prior to purchasing, can imply that the scent will be cool and refreshing. Subdivision II also allows the consumers to obtain an understanding of the fragrance, but very explicitly. As an example, Black Orchid by Tom Ford and Florentine Iris Essenze by Ermenegildo Zegna both state what the scent is clearly in its name. One can tell without hesitation that Black Orchid would have the fragrance of an orchid, Florentine Iris Essenze the fragrance of the iris.

2.2 Methodology

The main method of study in this paper is survey research. A survey was distributed to 280 adult participants with average-level preliminary knowledge on luxury perfumes throughout August of 2020. This requirement of having to possess average-level knowledge was set to reflect the democratization of luxury through heightened accessibility and affordability (Roberts & Armitage, 2016) and the spread of the luxury-buying class from the rich to the mass public. Through two associated questionnaires, the research provides data on which out of the two types of perfume names better appeals to consumers. The first survey observes the involuntary decision-making process by not enumerating the purpose of the survey. Contrastingly, the subsequent survey straightforwardly asks what trait in name makes perfume products attractive. Together, the two questionnaires allow us to notice a pre-existing criterion that steers consumer judgement when purchasing luxury perfumes.

Prior to conducting the survey, all participants that agreed to take the survey were given phone calls asking their level of familiarity with the perfume industry. To obtain sample statistics most representative of the population and general public, survey participant candidates who work in the perfume or cosmetics industry were excluded from the sample.

2.2.1 Survey I

The first survey aims to suggest an answer to the question, "Among uninformative and informative names, which type of perfume name do consumers prefer better?" This survey was designed to simulate the choices of potential customers if they were given a situation resembling the one they would be in when having to buy perfume. In the survey, there are 20 questions, all identical in format. For each question, respondents were given two options of imaginary perfumes. Then, they were asked to choose which one they would purchase. The two perfumes in each question were identical in every way, except for their names. One perfume would have an abstract name, a name categorized under Type I. The other perfume would have an informative name, a name categorized under Type II. In order to prevent prior knowledge on perfume brands from distracting the participants, all perfume names are original and were created specifically for this survey.

Furthermore, the options were mixed in order to accentuate the characteristics of the names. In other words, the two options for each question were randomly designated to either Option A or Option B, so that the respondents would not be lured into a response bias after noticing the common traits of Option A and Option B.

Below is Survey I as the participants received it. Detailed examination on the results from this survey will be noted in the Discussion section.

Table 3: Survey I

Survey I	
For the 20 questions below, mark the perfume you would prefer buying between the two given options. For every question, the two given options are identical except for product name. Rely on your opinions, and keep away from the internet during the survey.	
Option A	Option B
1 Mysteria	Yuzu
2 Pale Pomelo Water	Killer's Kiss
3 Crisp & Sweet	My Marionette
4 Uranus	Heavenly Iris
5 Blue Lily & Chocolate	Cruise
6 Love For Evermore	Hazel Blossom
7 Snowstorm	Night Blooming Cereus
8 Custard Pie	Mellow
9 Million Moons	Milk Mousse
10 Paperbark	Ambience
11 City Burns	Blood Orange
12 Nobility	Gentleman's Musk
13 Dewberry Bloom	Magenta Punch
14 Japanese Loquat	Temple
15 Deity	Flower Pond

16	Rich Papaya	Jungle Girl
17	4AM	Lady of the Night Flower
18	Retro Lilac	Château 1880
19	Wolf Child	Smoketree
20	Ginger Spice	Burnt Clouds

2.2.2 Survey II

The respondents were given a follow-up survey directly asking what types of perfume names seem most attractive. The survey comprises of one short-answer question designed to gain a profound understanding of the respondents' preference for luxury perfume names. Unlike Survey I, respondents were told to write down brief sentences or keywords instead of selecting out of multiple choices.

Below is Survey II as the participants received it. Detailed examination on the results from this survey will be noted in the Discussion section.

Table 4: Survey II

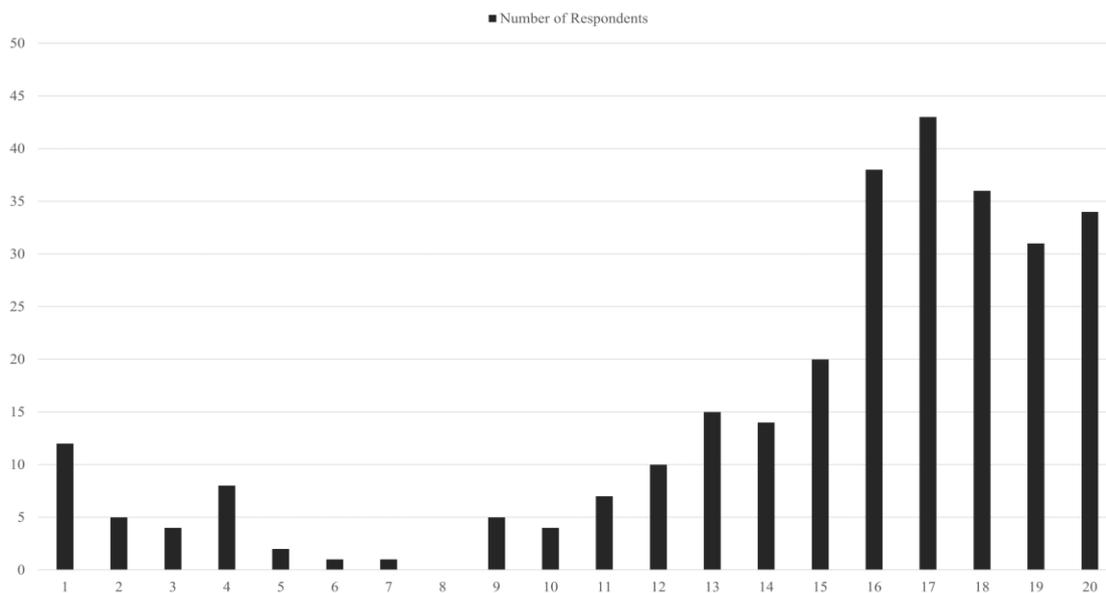| Survey II |
|-----------|
| What characteristics do you think make perfume names seem most attractive? This survey is a short-answer question. Please write your answer below in brief sentences or keywords. |
| _____
_____
_____
_____
_____ |
| Thank you for responding to this survey. After completing the survey, please save and send this file to this email address: xxxxxxxx@gmail.com |

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Survey I

Over a course of five days, respondents submitted their surveys via email. There were seven late submissions, but no missing responses. The responses were collected and categorized, followed by a process of statistical analysis. The following are a table and a figure demonstrating the results.

Table 5: Analysis of Results - Survey I

Number of Times Type I was Chosen	Number of Respondents (Frequency)
1	**12** (4.2857142857143%)
2	**5** (1.7857142857143%)
3	**4** (1.4285714285714%)
4	**8** (2.8571428571429%)
5	**2** (0.714285714285571%)
6	**1** (0.35714285714286%)
7	**1** (0.35714285714286%)
8	**0** (0.00%)
9	**5** (1.7857142857143%)
10	**4** (1.4285714285714%)
11	**7** (2.5%)
12	**10** (3.5714285714286%)
13	**15** (5.351428571429%)
14	**14** (5%)
15	**20** (7.1428571428571%)
16	**38** (13.571428571429%)
17	**43** (15.357142857143%)
18	**36** (12.857142857143%)
19	**21** (7.5%)
20	**34** (12142857142857%)
Total	**280**

Figure 1: Survey I Result Chart

The table and figure above illustrate the distribution of respondents according to the number of times they chose the Type I option for the survey questions. 12 respondents chose the Type I option for just 1 among 20 questions, 8 respondents chose the Type I option for just 2 among 20

questions, 4 respondents chose the Type I option for just 3 among 20 questions, and so on and so forth. The numbers in parentheses are representative of frequency. It is observable that the higher numbers of respondents are clustered in the latter part of the chart.

The mean of the number of times participants chose Type I is 14.742 ($\bar{x}$: 14.742857142857). In other words, the 280 respondents chose Type I, or the abstract name option, for 14.742 questions out of 20 questions on average. Sample variance equals 26.320737327189 (s^2 = 26.320737327189) and the standard deviation is 5.1303739948652 (s = 5.1303739948652). In addition to this data, 238 out of the 280 participants (85%) leaned to abstractly named perfumes by selecting the Type I option for more than 10 questions. Only 42 out of the 280 participants (15%) showed a tendency to prefer Type II over Type I. This statistic is noteworthy as the participants were not provided guidelines indicating the standard of categorization of the name options. In general, it can be said that the participants, a sample representing the general consumer population, prefer Type I (abstract) names over Type II (informative) names.

2.3.2 Survey II

Along with Survey I, the responses for Survey II were also gathered via email. Participants were given freedom to choose the form they would respond, in either keywords or a few concise sentences. The answers were then sorted according to content. Amongst all words included in the 280 answers, words that appeared most often were listed in order of frequency. Below are the 15 most prominent keywords with their ranking and number of appearance.

Table 6: Analysis of Results - Survey II

Ranking	Keyword	Number of Appearance
1	Brief	147
2	Impressive / Impactful	115
3	Dreamy / Dreamlike	98
4	Rich / Luxurious	60
5	Refined	32
6	Sexy / Sexual	31
7	Numerical	25
8	Powerful	23
9	Feminine	20
10	Celebrity Names	15
11	Masculine	11
12	Object Names	9
13	Fresh / Cool	8
14	Floral / Flower-related	6
15	Angelic / Heavenly	2

Words of identical or analogous meaning that can be used interchangeably were sorted into the same category. Among the 280 respondents, 147 mentioned the word "brief" in their responses. 115 participants, following closely, brought up the words "impressive and impactful". 98 respondents mentioned "dreamy" or "dreamlike", ranking these words in 3rd place. Other words respondents referred to include "rich", "luxurious", "refined", "sexy", "sexual", "numerical", "powerful", and "feminine". Against anticipations, there was a substantial disparity between the words ranking high on the list and the words ranking low on

the list above. It is salient that the keywords ranking from first to fourth have a noticeably high appearance rate. Other keywords such as "celebrity names", "masculine", "object names", "fresh", "cool", "floral", "flower-related", "angelic", and "heavenly" also made it to the list.

Below is the same list with the keywords identified as Type I or Type II names. Keywords that appertain to Type I names – names vague in that they do not suggest explicit hints on fragrance or ingredient – are in the color pale blue. Keywords that appertain to Type II names – names clearly giving hints on the components of the perfume such as fragrance or ingredient – are in the color jade blue. Keywords that are ambiguous to designate to one category are left as black. This list allows us to view the inclination of the surveyed consumer sample.

Table 7: Identification of Keywords - Survey II

Ranking	Keyword	Number of Appearance
1	Brief	147
2	Impressive / Impactful	115
3	Dreamy / Dreamlike	98
4	Rich / Luxurious	60
5	Refined	32
6	Sexy / Sexual	31
7	Numerical	25
8	Powerful	23
9	Feminine	20
10	Celebrity Names	15
11	Masculine	11
12	Object Names	9
13	Fresh / Cool	8
14	Floral / Flower-related	6
15	Angelic / Heavenly	2

Eight out of 15 categories are related to Type I names. Two out of fifteen categories are related to Type II names. In terms of number of appearance, Type I categories were mentioned 211 times in total, while Type II categories were mentioned 14 times in total. The five categories "brief", "impressive / impactful", "rich / luxurious", "refined", and "powerful" are adjectives relevant to both Type I and II, so were left in black. The distribution of color visualizes the popularity of Type I and II names amongst the 280 survey participants.

2.4 Discussion

Through Survey I, we could see that the 280 respondents chose the Type I option for an average of 14.742 questions. The result is recognizable in that the subject of testing was concealed so that the respondents could not distinguish the traits of the options and instead simply rely on their actual preferences. Even though the options were scattered irregularly to avoid a response bias, a U-shaped distribution is evident in the result graph (Figure I). This pinpoints that the respondents, while uninformed of what the survey is attempting to test, did

have a perfume name preference based on the volume of information the name provides. In addition, it is recognizable from the polarity of the graph that the respondents generally show preference in the order: strong preference for Type I, mild preference for Type I, strong preference for Type II, and mild preference for Type II.

Through Survey II, it became clearer that the respondents strongly favor Type I names over Type II. Unlike Survey I, in Survey II the participants were given complete freedom to describe their thoughts without any linguistic regulations. Among the keywords that stood out most among the responses from the survey, a majority was related to Type I. However, only two keywords relevant to Type II made the list. Moreover, it was revealed that participants prefer names that are brief, impactful, and have an aura suitable to that of luxury perfumes. This corresponds with the results from Survey I and provides a sketch of what kind of perfume product name can appeal to a larger consumer population.

What the results from this research imply is simple but vital. While researches on perfume marketing have been conducted previously, studies specifically on perfume names and how the inclusion of product-related information can affect consumer decision has been scarce. This research contributes to the understanding of the relationship between brands and its target consumers by suggesting the ideal approach to product branding in the luxury perfume industry. Furthermore, this study hints at other possibly effective marketing strategies by disclosing what element of perfume product names consumers prioritize. The research states that consumers focus on what mood and message the perfume can deliver as an articulation of status and identity, rather than just the fragrance. It is very clear from the choices the participants made for Survey I and the keywords dominant from Survey II that the perfume name, as an integral part of the perfume's identity, is the image and character the consumer wishes to convey.

It must be noted that a more inclusive sample could have yielded different results. For this research, people with too much or too little knowledge on luxury perfumes were excluded from the survey sample in order to reflect the general consumer level more appropriately. Therefore, people with no background information on luxury perfumes and no experience of purchasing them might have untouched viewpoints that could have altered the survey results. It is hence recommended that future researches building upon this area of study get together a larger sample or incorporate people that might not constitute the typical consumer level. This will hopefully suggest newer approaches to expand the target consumer cohort.

3.   Conclusion

With the purpose of detecting traits that make a luxury perfume name appealing to the general consumer class, this research has proven true the following hypothesis:

Consumers prefer uninformative perfume names to informative perfume names.

This study offers an extension of the research conducted on luxury perfume marketing strategies up to the present through:

A. Classifying types of perfume names based on focus of subject and amount of information regarding scent type and ingredients;

B. Conducting two correlated questionnaires, one implicit and one explicit, that test the preference of luxury perfume names via differing methods;

C. Applying the results of the questionnaires to demonstrating the inclination for luxury perfume names that are ambiguous and uninformative.

Perfumers and luxury perfume brands investing in the development of new products or seeking to rename current products can use the findings of this research to design names that are more effective. Furthermore, perfumers and luxury perfume brands can devise marketing strategies while putting the consumer preference traits found in this study into consideration. It is expected that further study on luxury perfume names and their significance in product identity will provide a solid guideline to assist those in the industry.

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