Commercial onomastics: humorous color names.
Are they appreciated and do they play a role in product purchase intention?

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Abstract

• Objectives / Research Questions
Commercial onomastics, the disciplinary field focusing on names in the commercial sphere, plays an increasingly important role in how brands communicate. It reflects a new trend in nominative logic that uses color naming combined with humor to cause an attraction effect through an offbeat or shifted vision (one pertinent example of this can be seen with the pun-based brand name “Maliblue”). The present article will examine the influence of humorous color-naming and the effects of different humor mechanisms (humor based on incongruity resolution or relief theory) on consumption behaviors.

• Methodology
The study used a sample of 1,432 individuals. Four lexical creativity workshops (N=100) generated 145 humorous color names for a refreshing non-alcoholic fruit drink. A first pretest (N=266) evaluated the humorous nature of these names, which allowed the most relevant ones to be selected. A second pretest (N=226) used the measurement scale developed by Spielmann (2014) to categorize the names according to one of the two humor mechanisms and tested the handling quality of the independent variables before the final experiment. The final study (N=840) involved a 4 x 3 between-subjects (four colors and three types of color denominations) and empirically tested the research hypotheses.

• Results
The results show that consumers have a more positive attitude towards a humorous color product name than towards a non-humorous color product name, regardless of the humor mechanism used. On the other hand, the only humor mechanism that has a significant impact on purchase intention is based on relief theory. In addition, the level of congruence of product color with original category color exerts a moderating effect on these results.

• Managerial implications
This study provides answers for companies wishing to give their products a color name based on a humorous pun, drawing their attention to the fact that not all humor mechanisms generate the same response as some have a negative effect on purchase intention. Moreover, this naming strategy is mainly used when placing an unusual product color on the market.

• Originality
Although humorous color-naming is increasingly being used in the field of commercial onomastics, a lot more research still needs to be carried out to identify the full extent of its impact on consumer behavior.

• Keywords: Color-naming, Product naming, Commercial onomastics, Humor mechanisms, Puns, Congruence, Attitude, Purchase intention.

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