

## Associations in German Brand Names: Current Trends

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### Abstract

German brand names for cosmetics and cleaning agents (class 3 of the Nice classification), pharmaceutical products (class 5), and food and drink (classes 29-33) published in the German *Markenblatt* in 2004 and 2008 are analysed with respect to associations from various domains. The results are compared, on the one hand, with a parallel study on Italian brand names (cf. Paola Cotticelli Kurras, this volume), and on the other hand, with previous investigations on German brand names registered throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ronneberger-Sibold 2007a and 2007b). In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, certain shifts in the distribution of the associations became visible: a decrease of the important domains RELIABILITY and TRADITION, temporarily compensated by an increase of CURIOSITY and LEISURE AND FUN, and above all a considerable and stable increase of the domain SENSORY PERCEPTIONS. This development is in line with the current trend of multisensory marketing, which advertises brands via sensual experiences. This preference for SENSORY PERCEPTIONS is stronger in German than in Italian brand names. Moreover, Italian brand names appeal preferably to the senses of sight and taste, whereas German ones exhibit an increasing preference for the haptic sense.

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### 1. Introduction: Aim of the Study and Previous Investigations

This paper investigates current trends in the associations conveyed by German brand names registered in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century compared with names from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The results were obtained in a joint project on German and Italian brand names, carried out by the authors of this paper and by Paola Cotticelli Kurras at the universities of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt and Verona, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Like all other names, brand names have to identify their referents, and – like many other names – they should also to a certain degree characterize them. But unlike other names, a brand name should also create the desire in its hearers and readers to possess the branded product, i.e. it should advertise its referent. A proven strategy is to evoke associations with positive values of the society in which the product is to be sold. This strategy is especially important in times of saturated markets, with advertisers attempting to differentiate almost identical products by creating additional, mostly emotional benefits. What counts as a positive value in a society depends on social, cultural, economic and even political factors. Therefore, by taking into account the values of a society, brand names indirectly reflect historical developments with regard to this society.

In a previous large-scale study,<sup>2</sup> historical German brand names registered between 1894 and 1994 were investigated with respect to their associations in the domains of RELIABILITY, POWER AND MIGHT, and TRADITION. In fact, clear reflections of historical developments were found in the fields of politics, economics, and sociocultural trends (Ronneberger-Sibold 2007a and 2007b). 1994 was characterized by the emergence of certain new trends. In the

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study presented here, we continue this investigation from 1994 in order to verify whether these trends are sustainable and to explain how they are motivated. This requires the inclusion of associations of further domains in addition to RELIABILITY, POWER AND MIGHT, and TRADITION.

## 2. Definition of *brand name*, Material and Method

The definition of *brand name* used in this paper is a purely legal one: We consider as brand names all product names which have been registered by the German Patent Office and published in the *Markenblatt*,<sup>3</sup> formerly *Warenzeichenblatt*, irrespective of the success and even of the presence of the respective product on the market. This choice has several advantages, compared to the frequently practiced alternative of collecting product names in shops or advertisements or on the internet (e.g., Zilg 2006 and Muselmann 2010).

Firstly, the *Markenblatt* allows for the compilation of a large corpus from an even larger number of chronologically ordered items. Thus, we can be (almost) sure about the year in which a name was invented. This is important for an investigation of historical developments.

Secondly, by selecting, e.g., every third or fourth name from the *Markenblatt* in a completely random manner, we can avoid any bias which might be due to the previous selection of certain products by individual shopkeepers, marketing experts, editors etc., whose criteria are unknown to us.

Thirdly, by investigating the associations by which the creators of brand names **think** that they will induce their contemporaries to buy the product in question, without asking whether this product really sells, we exclude possible influences of marketing strategies concerning the price, distribution etc., and – of course – the quality of the product. We explore, so to speak, a communicative strategy irrespective of its possible success.

Our corpus consists of approximately 1000 brand names published in the last three issues of the *Markenblatt* of 2004 and 2008. Our investigation is limited to seven classes of the international Nice classification, namely cleaning agents and cosmetics (class 3), pharmaceutical products (class 5), and the five classes containing food and drink (classes 29-33). These classes are represented in our corpus in the same proportion as in the source. The findings for 2004 and 2008 are compared to data from the same classes taken from the above mentioned corpus of historical German brand names.

For each name, at least one, but mostly two or three association domains were chosen from a set to be presented below. For each association the percentage of names evoking it was calculated in relation to the total number of brand names of the respective year.

## 3. Selected Association Domains

The domains of associations were adapted from a list of basic human needs and desires (Reiss 2000) going back to the well-known pyramid designed by Maslow (Maslow 1970). It was necessary to go back to these very fundamental and probably universal human needs to assure a common basis with the associations in Italian brand names.

<sup>3</sup> <http://register.dpma.de/DPMAregister/blattdownload/marken>.

For this paper, the following domains were selected:

RELIABILITY as an association domain refers to the constant quality, effectiveness, endurance and authenticity of the product. It can be evoked by underlining the scientific character of the product (e.g., in German through the typical sound shape of Latinisms – comprising two or more syllables with full vowels and final stress on a long vowel followed by one consonant – such as in *Inhalsan* /inhal'za:n/, name of a medical product, 2004, class 5), or by alluding to its high quality, (e.g., through the addition of *premium* as in *Premium Slim Solution* for a diet product, 2004, class 29) or its security in *ZahnSicherungsKonzept* ‘concept for the security of teeth’ for products for dental laboratories (2004, class 5).

The association domain TRADITION can be evoked by allusions to German or general history (e.g., in the name *Hansegold* for a beer (2004, class 32), which mentions the medieval Hanseatic League) or to local traditions and customs such as in *Münchner-Kindl-Stollen* for a typical Christmas cake named after a heraldic motif of Munich (2004, class 30). For modern German brand names, we also classified RELIGION with TRADITION.

RELIABILITY and TRADITION used to be by far the dominating association domains in the history of German brand names. As in the name *Hansegold* (2004, class 32), they frequently go together, *Hanse* conveying TRADITION and RELIABILITY due to the specific ethos of this organisation.. As demonstrated below, their importance has considerably diminished in recent years.

CURIOSITY is a typical human need called non-materialistic (in the sense of Inglehard 1977), because it is not directed to the fundamental material necessities of life. CURIOSITY is evoked by anything unknown. In brand names, this is done by the associations of EXOTICISM or at least INTERNATIONALITY. The name *SKIN SHUI* (2004, class 3), a blend of Chinese *feng shui* and *skin*, evokes both: EXOTICISM through its reference to the Chinese language and culture, and INTERNATIONALITY through the use of English as the international language.

LEISURE AND FUN are non-materialistic needs as well. In German brand names, they are frequently evoked by alluding to holidays in Mediterranean countries. FUN is also evoked by playful and witty names. Both associations are present in the name *Grandiso* for a custard powder (2004, class 30), probably a contraction of Sp. *grandioso* ‘gorgeous’ or a blend of It. *paradiso* ‘paradise’ and It. or Sp. *grande* ‘great’. Even hearers or readers who do not recognize these words in the name are reminded of typical Italian or Spanish names or loans such as *Caruso*, *Valentino*, *cappuccino* etc. by its rhythmical shape, consisting of three syllables with full vowels and penultimate stress and by its ending in *-o*. For those who understand the word-play, the name is in addition playful and witty because they are reminded of playing riddles.

A high SOCIAL STATUS is an important non-materialistic desire of many people. It can be evoked by alluding to LUXURY, BEAUTY and ELEGANCE (e.g., in the name *nightglamour* for a cosmetic product, 2004, class 3), but also by mentioning the arts (as a matter of particular interest for highly educated people) and a modern lifestyle of trendy people. Both associations are represented in *WeinArt* (2004, class 33), a wordplay meaning either ‘a kind of wine’ (with German *Art* ‘kind’) or ‘the art of wine’ (with the English word *art*).

REST AND SAFETY as human needs are in some way the counterpart of SOCIAL STATUS. Whereas the striving for a high social status is competitive (you want to be better than the others), REST AND SAFETY are based on social harmony and solidarity: You want to be supported by others. This support is – ideally – experienced in childhood in the family. Therefore, these concepts are often alluded to, e.g., in the name *MarmeladenLiebe* (2008, class 29), literally ‘jam love’, for fine jams. With respect to its denotative meaning, this name is strange: What does it mean? ‘Love for jam’ or ‘love due to jam’ or something else? But with respect to its connotations, this name is extremely evocative: It directly mentions love, and strongly alludes to family and childhood by the word *Marmelade*, for jam is a typical ingredient of a German family breakfast, especially for children, who normally like sweet things. Moreover, it sounds soft and harmonious due to its composition of vowels, resonants, and voiced obstruents, thereby following a recent trend described for modern German company names in Fahlbusch (2011). The need for REST is also fulfilled by the modern trend for WELLNESS, which is alluded to in names such as *FEELNESS* for beverages (2008, class 32), a blend of *wellness* and *to feel*.

There is one domain which, at first sight, does not quite seem to go with the others. These are the SENSORY PERCEPTIONS in names such as *Blauer Wind* ‘blue wind’ for a cosmetic product (2004, class 3) or *Snowsecco* for a sparkling wine (2008, class 33), a blend of *prosecco* and *snow*. The fact that products are blue or white, hard or soft, sweet or sour, make a noise or not, etc., seems to be a purely descriptive piece of information, not alluding to any basic human need or desire. Nevertheless, such elements play an increasing part in modern brand names. This is shown in Figure 1:

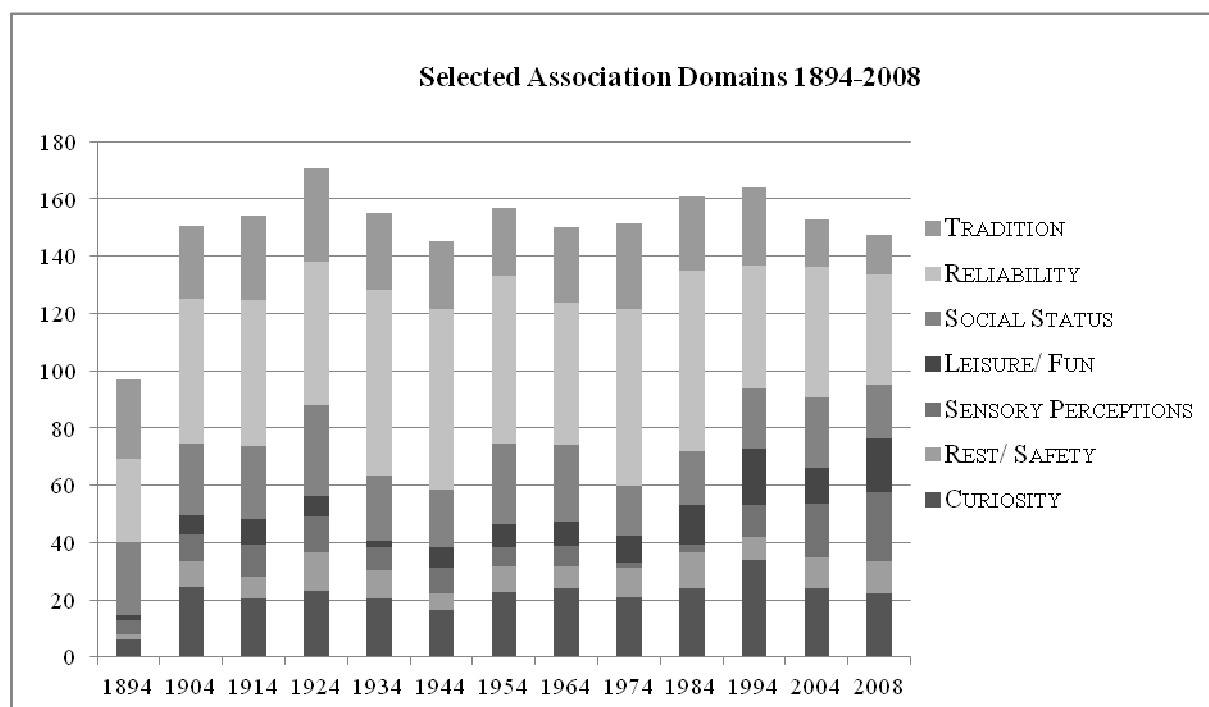


Figure 1: Selected Association Domains 1894-2008<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Percentages above 100 are due to the fact that for each name, at least one, but mostly two or three associations were chosen.

Figure 1 shows the percentages of the association domains from 1894 to 2008 in steps of 10 years each with the exception of 2008, which was the most recent year of the *Markenblatt* completely published at the time of the compilation of the corpus.

In our first large-scale study on German brand names (1894-1994), certain shifts in the relative importance of the association domains became visible in the last two years analyzed, i.e., in 1984 and 1994. Some of these shifts turned out to be rather short-lived or unstable in the following years. Others, on the contrary, seem to reflect more sustainable trends in marketing and society.

An example of a short-lived shift in importance concerns the association domain CURIOSITY. It experienced a considerable increase from approximately 24% in 1984 to approximately 34% in 1994. However, this trend was not continued in the data for 2004 and 2008. In fact, the figures for CURIOSITY decrease by about 10% in 2004 and 2008 so that this trend proves to be rather short-lived. A similar development can be described for the domain LEISURE AND FUN. With the emergence of a specific sociocultural trend of our time, the famous fun generation, attested among others by sociological surveys of the so-called Sinus-Milieus,<sup>5</sup> the association LEISURE AND FUN gained in importance for the creation of brand names from 1984 (14%) to 1994 (20%). Already in 2004, however, this figure dropped again (13%), but regained influence in 2008 (19%). This is why the development of the domain LEISURE AND FUN can be described as a rather instable trend in brand names. Both cases stress the importance of long-term studies in order to get a larger picture concerning the development of associations in brand names in the course of time.

The most salient and at the same time most sustainable trend, however, is a considerable decrease of the association domain RELIABILITY from 63% in 1984 to 38% in 2008. In 2004 and 2008, this trend is joined by TRADITION (1994: 24%, 2008: 14%), which reaches the lowest level of the whole survey. As explained above, these losses were temporarily compensated in part by an increase of the non-materialistic association domains LEISURE AND FUN and CURIOSITY. However, the most salient and steady increase (at least until the end of our investigation) concerns the domain of SENSORY PERCEPTIONS. Why should this be the case?

#### 4. Interpretation

The reason for the increase of the domain SENSORY PERCEPTIONS may be that this category serves as a kind of vehicle for other associations. To test this hypothesis, we have analyzed which associations go together most frequently with the category of SENSORY PERCEPTIONS in our database. The results of this test are presented in Figure 2:

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sinus-institut.de/loesungen/sinus-milieus.html>.

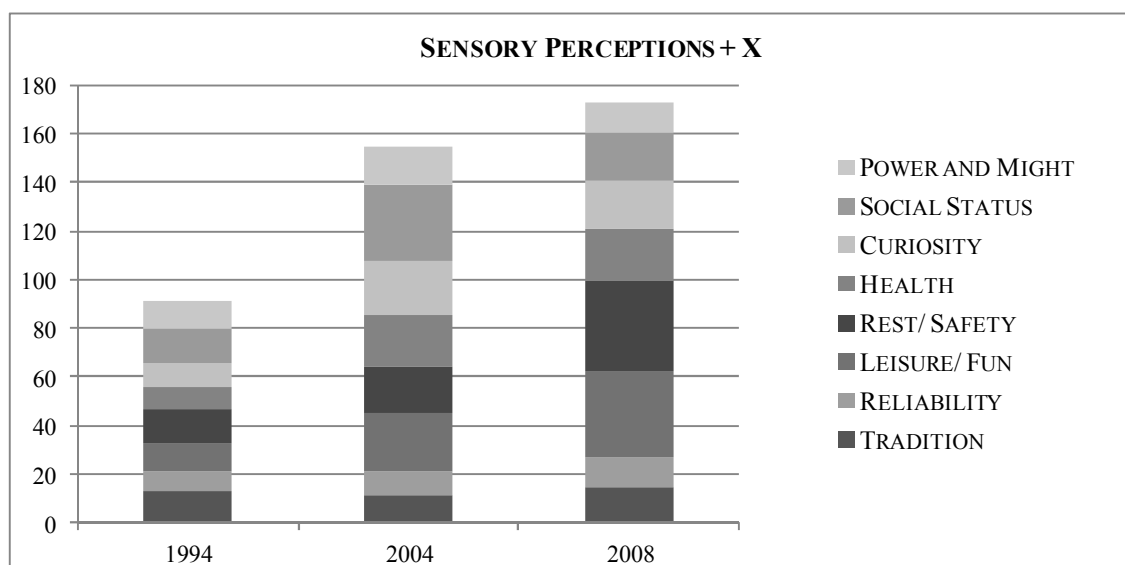


Figure 2: SENSORY PERCEPTIONS + X<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2 indicates that SENSORY PERCEPTIONS occur most frequently together with the following domains:

**SOCIAL STATUS (LUXURY):** The brand name *Flüssiges Gold* ‘liquid gold’ for food (2004, class 29) highlights the product’s liquid quality (haptic) and allows for the imagination of a bright, golden glamour of gold (visual). At the same time gold, being a precious metal, evokes the association LUXURY.

The association domain LEISURE AND FUN is evoked, e.g., in *nimm2 Lachgummi sauer* ‘take2 laugh gum sour’ (2008, class 30; Engl.: *nimm2 smile gummi*) for a kind of soft and sour jelly babies. Here, the verb *lachen* ‘to laugh’, creating the association FUN is bound up in a compound with the noun *Gummi* ‘rubber; gum’ evoking the soft and elastic haptic quality of the sweets bearing this name. In addition, their sour taste is expressed in the adjunct *sauer*.

CURIOSITY as a domain is represented – as explained above – by the associations EXOTICISM and INTERNATIONALITY. These are often realized by highly evocative lexical elements in brand names, conjuring up the sensations of far-away, paradisiacal parts of the world. For instance, *Fa Tropical*, a brand name for cosmetic products (2004, class 3), evokes mental images of a warm (haptic), fragrant (olfactory), and colourful (visual) tropical island where exotic, sweet (taste) fruits grow. Most probably, the product has an intense, sweet fragrance and a colourful packaging. The same strategy is employed in the brand names *Cocktail Caraiba* (2008, class 32) and *Caribea* (2008, class 32) for beverages. In both names, the same sensations as in *Fa Tropical* plus perhaps “hot” rhythms are evoked by mentioning the Caribbean. The association EXOTICISM is enhanced by making use of the Italian (and Neoclassical) form of the adjective *caraiba* ‘Caribbean’ and of the Neoclassical form *Caribea*, because their stressed hiatuses -a'i- and -'ea sound particularly exotic and beautiful to German ears.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Percentages above 100 are due to the fact that for each name, at least one, but mostly two or three associations were chosen.

<sup>7</sup> The scientific Latin forms are used in botanic names such as *Tabebuia Caraiba* ([http://hort.ufl.edu/database/documents/pdf/tree\\_fact\\_sheets/tabcara.pdf](http://hort.ufl.edu/database/documents/pdf/tree_fact_sheets/tabcara.pdf), <http://pantanalportal.de/flora-pantanal/paratudo-oder-ipe-amarelo-tabebuia-caraiba/>) and *Heliconia Caribaea* ([http://www.ntbg.org/plants/plant\\_details.php?plantid=5839](http://www.ntbg.org/plants/plant_details.php?plantid=5839)) with an orthographic alienation respectively.

The domain REST AND SAFETY is represented by the associations CHILDHOOD and HARMONY, e.g., in *Cremosino* (2004, class 29, a small, soft and creamy cheese; It. *cremoso* ‘creamy’ + the Italian diminutive suffix *-ino*). In this name, the soft, creamy, and small haptic qualities of the cheese are indicated by the suffix *-ino* as well as by the lexical meaning and the overall soft sound shape of the word *cremoso*.

Another association not included in Figure 1 but frequently occurring together with SENSORY PERCEPTIONS is the domain HEALTH. There are various brand names for cleaning agents and washing powders which allude to the fresh scent of the product as its olfactory quality, e.g., in *Fräsh* (2008, class 3), an orthographic alienation which is pronounced like the English adjective *fresh*, for a washing powder, or *Freshmatic* (2004, class 3), a blend of *fresh* and *automatic*, for an air freshener. The fresh scent mentioned in these brand names is attributed to the referents because they are designed to keep the consumers’ homes hygienically clean and healthy.

Thus, the associations of modern brand names are evoked via the visual, acoustic, haptic or olfactory properties and via the typical taste of the products. For instance, by the name *Flüssiges Gold LUXURY* is offered to the readers or hearers not only as an abstract association, but as a sensual experience through the visual and haptic qualities of the product itself. Consumers are individually invited, so to speak, to experience the product themselves, with their own senses.

These findings on SENSORY PERCEPTIONS in brand names seem to be perfectly in line with the results of a parallel study on print advertisements (Wahl 2011). This study investigates the use of imperative verb forms in German, English and Spanish print advertisements which were published in 2008.

Using the imperative in communication and telling somebody directly to do something can be a rather face-threatening act (Brown/Levinson, 1996, 65-66). In order to avoid this negative effect while still addressing the customer personally, advertisers use verbs such as *entdecken* ‘to discover’ and *erleben* ‘to experience’ in imperative forms that make the sales appeal sound like a suggestion, a recommendation or even an invitation to discover new product worlds.

An example is the following first sentence of the body copy of a print advertisement by the German car manufacturer *Opel*:

*Entdecken Sie die kraftvollen Motoren [...], die dem Opel Zafira den Charakter eines echten Sportwagens geben. (Stern No. 21, 15.05.2008, 131)*

(‘Discover the powerful engines that give the Opel Zafira the character of a real sports car.’)

By the verb *entdecken* ‘to discover’, consumers are invited to experience the qualities of the advertised car themselves in a test drive with all their senses. They hear the sound of the powerful engines, they feel the speed-up, their eyes enjoy the elegant design and they smell the characteristic “new-car-scent”.

The verbs that occur most frequently in imperative forms in the German corpus are *entdecken* ‘to discover’ (18%), *erleben* ‘to experience’ (10%), *testen* ‘to test’ (10%) and *probieren* ‘to try out’ (4%). In Spanish advertisements, recipients are also requested to discover (*descubrir*,

13.8%) and to enjoy (*disfrutar*, 4.6%) products; however, they should gather more information about a product (*informarse*, 7.7%) and therefore call (*llamar*, 4.6%) a certain telephone number in addition. In English advertisements, these two requests are expressed most frequently as well: Consumers should *visit* (12.5%) a website, *text* ('send a text message', 7.8%) or *call* (7.8%) a telephone number, but they should also *discover* (3%) the new products.

The use of verbs like *entdecken* 'to discover' and *erleben* 'to experience' in advertisements, which appeal more to potential consumers' emotions than express a direct sales appeal, reflects the advertisers' striving for the creation of distinct, emotionally loaded brand images. These emotional brand images are thought to be the key factor in achieving a good positioning even in saturated markets where the top quality of products is taken for granted and is therefore no longer sufficient to guarantee success (Diel/Terlutter, 2009, 593). A neurological study indicates that strong brands activate brain regions in which positive emotions are evoked, whereas weak or unknown brands both activate regions that are connected with negative emotions (Esch/Möll, 2009, 28).

The design of a brand image with suitable emotional values is the goal of emotional branding and of the new branch of multisensory marketing. Multisensory marketing can be defined as a consistently choreographed strategy intending to represent the different sensory characteristics of a product or brand in a multisensory, positive-trustworthy experience that appeals to all senses of the (potential) customer – at every point of customer contact, including the point of sale (Nölke/Gierke, 2011, 23). Multisensory marketing draws especially on the following neuroeconomic findings: Firstly, messages that reach the brain via several relevant sensory channels are processed faster and more intensely than a signal transmitted via a single channel only (multisensory enhancement) (Nölke/Gierke, 2011, 23). Secondly, a message that has been learned in a holistic, multisensory way can be recalled holistically by a relevant stimulus that is transmitted via a single channel only (Nölke/Gierke, 2011, 23). For instance, the colour and shape of a logo can function as a trigger for the respective sound logo of the brand and thus, consumers are able to recall an orchestrated unit even if only one stimulus is presented (Nölke/Gierke, 2011, 81). The results of a global study on the role of customers' sensory experience of brands in creating brand loyalty "confirms that the more positive the synergy that's established between our senses, the stronger the connection made between sender and receiver" (Lindstrom, 2010, 114). The future direction of marketing and advertising might therefore be multisensory.

A means of implementing multisensory experiences in a brand's marketing strategy is the creation of so-called "Erlebniswelten" ('worlds of experiences'; Diel/Terlutter 2009). Some brands already provide these multisensory experiences which are designed to offer (potential) customers first-hand sensual and emotional brand experiences. As in the case of the German car manufacturer *Audi*,<sup>8</sup> these "Erlebniswelten" can be either virtual offers (social web) or anchored in "real life" as, e.g., the *Audi driving experience*. Another example is the new *Chocoversum*<sup>9</sup> (a blend of *chocolate* and G. *Universum* 'universe') opened on December 3 2011 in Hamburg by the German chocolate manufacturer *Hachez*. With the slogan "entdecken erleben mitmachen" ('discover experience participate'), *Hachez* promises to appeal to all senses in a tour "von der Kakaobohne zum süßen Genuss" ('from the cocoa bean to sweet indulgence').

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.audi.de/de/brand/de/erlebniswelt.html>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.hachez-chocoversum.de/>.



A brand name should ideally comprise the brand's essence with all the emotional and multisensory experiences offered. The increase of the domain SENSORY PERCEPTIONS, especially in 2004 and 2008, indicates that advertisers intend to follow these principles and to implement multisensory marketing strategies by stimulating the customers' senses even in brand names.

### 5. The Domain SENSORY PERCEPTIONS in German and Italian Brand Names: a Comparison

A brief, preliminary survey of the domain SENSORY PERCEPTIONS in Italian brand names has revealed considerably lower percentages compared to German brand names. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

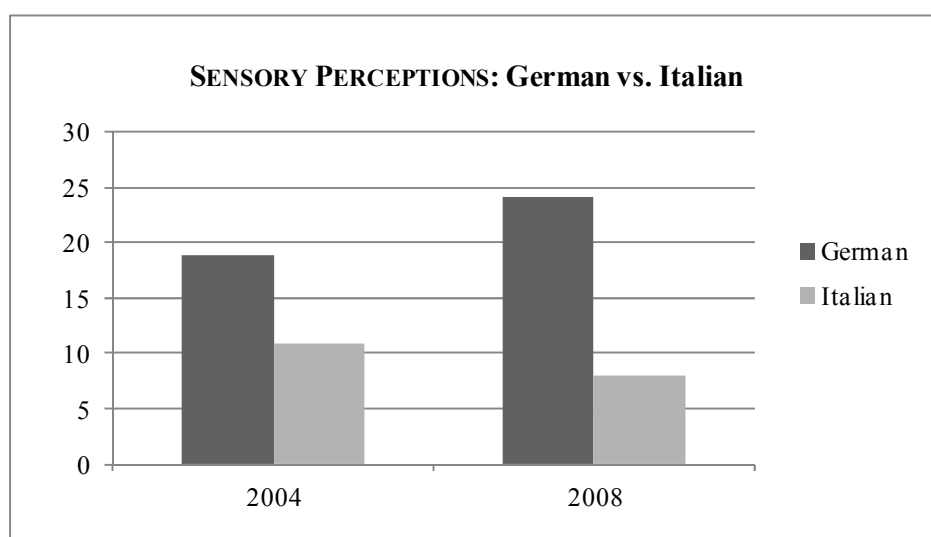


Figure 3: SENSORY PERCEPTIONS in German and Italian brand names

Whereas the percentage of German brand names appealing to sensory perceptions increased considerably from 2004 (approximately 19%) to 2008 (approximately 24%), the respective percentage in Italian brand names not only started from a lower level in 2004 (approximately 11%), but even decreased in 2008 (8%). The reason might be a general preference for rather conservative, descriptive brand names in Italy, focusing on the regional origin, the producer, and the function of the product. On the contrary, in Germany the new trend of multisensory marketing has already gained an impact on the creation of brand names.

Another difference between German and Italian brand names with respect to SENSORY PERCEPTIONS concerns the relative importance of the different senses. This is revealed in Figure 4.

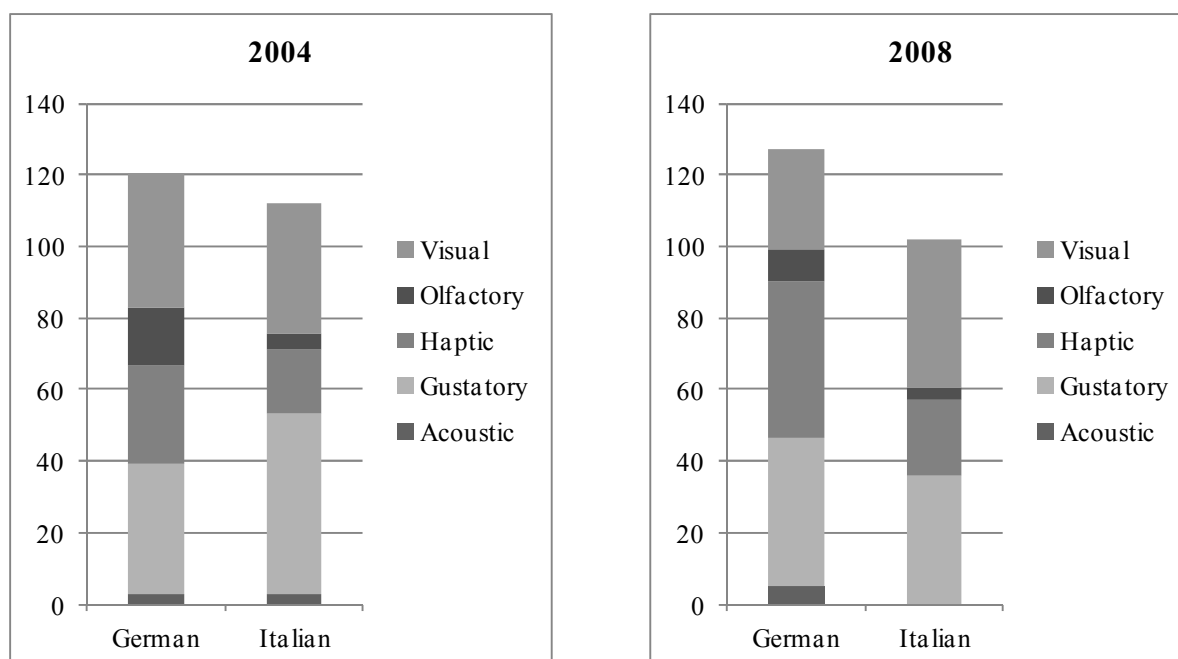


Figure 4: Reference to different senses in German and Italian brand names

In Figure 4, the visual, haptic, and gustatory senses dominate in both languages, though in different proportions. Whereas in Italian brand names the visual and gustatory senses clearly dominate in 2004 and 2008, German brand names exhibit an increasing preference for the haptic sense, which even slightly tops the gustatory sense in 2008 (44% vs. 42%).

This growing preference for the haptic sense in German brand names follows a recommendation in the current literature on marketing. “For some reason, though, the advertising industry communicates almost exclusively in a world consisting of only one, sometimes two senses – the visual and the auditory. [...] In order to successfully conquer future horizons, brands will have to find ways of appealing to the other three neglected senses [smell, touch, and taste].” (Lindstrom, 2010, 42-43). Here again, German brand name creators follow a new marketing trend more readily than their Italian colleagues.

## 6. Conclusion

Our survey of different association domains evoked in German brand names from 1894 to 2008 has revealed several new trends in recent years. First of all, the domain RELIABILITY – the number one for decades in German brand names – has been decreasing in importance since 1994. In this development it is joined by the association TRADITION. This decrease was at first compensated by other association domains, some of which, e.g., LEISURE AND FUN and CURIOSITY, were rather short-lived or unstable.

The most sustainable trend making up for the decrease of RELIABILITY and TRADITION is a stable and continuous increase of the domain SENSORY PERCEPTIONS. A comparison of the German data with Italian brand names shows that the domain SENSORY PERCEPTIONS is much more prominent in the creation of German brand names. Moreover, it seems that in Italian

brand names, the appeal to the consumers' sensory perceptions focuses above all on the gustatory and visual senses, whereas German brand name creators increasingly prefer the haptic sense, thereby following a recommendation of the current literature on marketing.

In our German data, SENSORY PERCEPTIONS often co-occur with other domains such as SOCIAL STATUS (LUXURY), LEISURE AND FUN, CURIOSITY as well as REST AND SAFETY and HEALTH. A possible interpretation of this result may be that advertisers use the appeal to the customers' senses as a vehicle to evoke other associations so that consumers can discover and experience the qualities of the advertised products themselves. The appeal to the consumers' senses in brand names captures the advertising principles of emotional and multisensory marketing – the striving for the creation of new product worlds that should be discovered and experienced by the target audience – in just one single name.

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