

# A Rose by Any Other Name . . . : Color-Naming Influences on Decision Making

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## ABSTRACT

**Companies dealing in colors (e.g., paint companies, the cosmetic industry) spend enormous amounts of time and money selecting names to accompany their various product lines in an attempt to maximally appeal to and lure in consumers. In two experiments, the current research examines the extent to which such naming strategies have an impact on consumer behavior. Across both experiments, participants rated either color swatches (Experiment 1) or products (Experiment 2) that had either generic names (e.g., *brown*) or fancy names (e.g., *mocha*) attached to them. The results of each experiment revealed that names significantly influence how colors are perceived, and that fancy names result in significantly more favorable ratings than do generic names. Both theoretical and applied implications of this phenomenon are discussed. © 2006 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.**

That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet . . .

William Shakespeare's (1595) *Romeo and Juliet*,  
Act II, Scene 2, Rows 47–48

Shakespeare was wrong. A rose by any other name would not smell as sweet . . . which is why the single most important decision in the marketing of perfume is the name.

Al Ries and Jack Trout as quoted in  
David Aaker's (1991) *Managing Brand Equity*, p. 181

These quotes reveal contrary views on how influential a name can be. Shakespeare's quote suggests that the positive characteristics and appeal of an object (i.e., a *rose*) would exist even if it were called something else (i.e., a *thorn*). However, the quote by Ries and Trout suggests that the appeal of an object can emerge from the name itself. Certainly, the billion-dollar enterprise of marketing and advertising confers with the latter belief—brand naming is a big business and Coca-Cola, Kleenex, and McDonalds are exemplars of success (e.g., see Aaker, 1991; Jones, 1986; Keller, 1998; Stobart, 1994).

Although one body of research has focused on the importance of brand and product names and another body of research has examined the importance and complexity of color, little empirical research has put the two together in an attempt to investigate if the name of a color (of a product) influences the consumer's decision-making process. Thus, this article examines, in three experiments, whether the name given to the color of a product influences liking the product. If color naming works similarly to brand and product naming, then a more appealing name (e.g., a fancy name like *mocha*) should increase liking a color and product more than would a neutral or unappealing name (e.g., a generic name like *brown*). However, colors are very complex stimuli and it is also possible that the color itself is what influences decisions.

## The Naming Practice

Advertising works by making a product recognizable to the public, by persuading consumers to buy the product, and by enhancing recall of the product (Kumar, Aaker, & Day, 1999). Advertisers try to create an ad that will not only make consumers want to buy the endorsed product, but will make consumers choose it over the competitor's product (Plous, 1993). Therefore, companies frame the presentation of their products in order to persuade the consumer that their products relate to the consumer's goals, are superior to other brands, and are the best product for the money (Foxall & Goldsmith, 1996). One part of accomplishing this goal is to choose the *perfect* name for the brand and product being promoted (Kohli & LaBahn, 1997).

Once the name has been chosen, then advertising often works its magic through repetition to familiarize the consumer with the product (Baker,

1999). The repeated ads strengthen the associations that the consumer draws between the brand name and the product. Ultimately, then, the consumer chooses the more likable and common brand (or product) name (Aaker, 1991; Jones, 1986; Keller, 1998). An example of the power behind a simple name can be demonstrated by the fact that a glass of a dark bubbly beverage is often referred to as *coke*, regardless of whether it is Coca-Cola, Pepsi-cola, a generic brand of cola, and/or sometimes even a non-cola (e.g., root beer). As a society, individuals have become so familiar with advertisements for Coca-Cola, and the brand name itself, that it effectively has become an association for any beverage similar in appearance. The same applies when someone asks for a Kleenex.

As evidenced in the Coca-Cola and Kleenex examples, the name (at least a brand or product name) is important and influences consumers' decisions. Part of the reason that consumers are captivated by a brand name is that the advertisements strengthen the associations between the brand name and the product; once the consumer has developed perceived qualities between the product and its name, it is difficult to break these associations. In fact, Aaker (1991) stated that "a package, price, or advertising theme usually can be changed much more easily than a name" (p. 188). Consumer psychologists have found that not only do marketers create brands (and names) that appeal to consumers' *actual self-image* (the way one actually sees oneself), *ideal self-image* (the way one personally wishes to be), and *social self-concept* (the way one wants others to view oneself) (e.g., Green, Maheshwari, & Rao, 1969; Grubb & Stern, 1971; Hughes & Guerrero, 1971; Hughes & Naert, 1970; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1980), but the consumers often link their self-perceptions (e.g., "I have sexy legs") with products and reject those that do not fit their self-image (e.g., "These jeans make my legs look unsexy") (Sirgy, 1980, 1982). Thus, the brand, the name, the feelings of familiarity, and the link to a consumer's self-image are all important factors when creating a new product.

## Why Does the Name Matter?

Past research on the framing effect and categorization help to illuminate why something as simple as a name can be such an important influence on thoughts and behaviors. The decision-making research of Kahneman and Tversky has consistently shown that people's decision-making processes are often illogical or nonrational. The framing effect is of particular relevance to naming because the way in which something is presented (e.g., a sentence, or an underlying context to a something—like a situation) influences the decisions that are made (see also Matlin, 1998). In one study, Tversky and Kahneman (1981) altered the wording of a scenario to see if this change (suggesting a gain or a loss) might affect decision making. They found that people opted for scenarios framed in terms of gains rather than losses even though they were objectively equal. Other researchers have extended the framing concept to consumer

decision making and found that the framing affects influence decisions toward health care products and behaviors (Detweiler, Bedell, Salovey, Pronin, & Rothman, 1999; Rothman, Martino, Bedell, Detweiler, & Salovey, 1999; Schneider, Salovey, Apanovitch et al., 2001a; Schneider, Salovey, Pallonen et al., 2001b) and choices of food products (see Donovan & Jalleh, 1999; Levin & Gaeth, 1988; Levin, Schnittjer, & Thee, 1988). If this research is applied to the naming phenomenon, a product with a name that alludes to something positive or appealing will influence consumers to choose the positively framed product over another product with a name that alludes to something negative or less appealing. In fact, affect has been shown to be an important factor of advertising (Chaudhuri & Buck, 1995) and people make decisions in order to avoid feeling regret and disappointment (Schwarz, 2000).

Another line of research that may help to explain why names make a difference involves the process of categorization. If something is presented as positive or appealing, then this should activate a positive/appealing category and the end result should be a positive evaluation. However, if something is presented as being negative or unappealing, then a negative/unappealing category should be activated and the end result should be a negative/unfavorable evaluation. Past research on categorization contends that people typically and normally use categorization for almost everything in their lives (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), and people only step away from the categorization heuristic and use individuating information if the object does not fit any categories previously created/stored.

## **Color Perception**

Color perception is complex (Garber & Hyatt, 2003; Gleitman, 1995; Hardin & Maffi, 1997). Some researchers have found evidence that colors have “attention-attracting properties” (Myer-Levy & Peracchio, 1995, p. 122), and these properties can be distracting and consume needed cognitive resources (Anand & Sternthal, 1989; Cahill & Carter, 1976; Doolley & Harkins, 1970; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Schontz, Trumm, & Williams, 1971), especially when processing persuasive information like advertisements. Researchers also have demonstrated that color can be unconsciously perceived (Schmidt, 2000) and may likewise unconsciously influence people. For instance, colors elicit specific moods (e.g., red leads to more anxiety; blue makes people feel depressed) and affects work ability (e.g., people make fewer errors in a red office) (see Knez, 2001; Kwalleck, 1996; Kwalleck & Lewis, 1990; Kwalleck, Lewis, Lin-Hsiao, & Woodson, 1996; Kwalleck, Lewis, & Robbins, 1998; Kwalleck, Woodson, Lewis, & Sales, 1997; Stone, 2001).

In addition, certain aspects of a color are universally preferred more readily, and these preferences occur even when a given language does not have a special term (or name) for the particular color. More specifically,

three main color preferences exist: 1) light colors are remembered more and chosen as the best example of a particular color over dark colors, 2) bright colors are remembered more and chosen as the best example of a particular color over dull colors, and 3) focal (or primary) colors (e.g., red, yellow, and blue) are remembered more and chosen as the best example of a color over secondary colors (see Clark and Clark, 1978, citing research on basic color terms by Berlin and Kay, 1969, pp. 231–235). Additional research on primary colors has shown a strong preference (or liking) for the color blue and a trend to dislike the color yellow (see Dittmar, 2001; Lind, 1994; Silver & Ferrante, 1995; Silver et al., 1988; Walsh et al., 1990). Thus, color seems to be very influential in people's memories and preferences.

Related to consumer decision making, previous research has found that color is an important aspect in persuasion (Garber & Hyatt, 2003). For instance, an advertisement in color is preferred to one that is solely black and white (Lohse & Rosen, 2001). However, other research suggests that color is persuasive to consumers only when the consumer is motivated to process the advertisement (Myers-Levy & Peracchio, 1995).

Based on the sum of this research, it is clear that color itself can be powerful, distracting, and influential (e.g., causing a person to like an advertisement more). Therefore, it is possible that the name attached to a color will not make a difference because the color itself will influence people the most.

## Present Research

The current research is interested in examining whether the names associated with colors really make a difference in consumers' behavior. In the current study, this question was tested not with brand naming but, rather, with respect to color naming. This technique is adopted regularly by cosmetic industries (e.g., Covergirl, Clinique, Estee Lauder,) and house paint industries (e.g., Sherwin Williams, Glidden, Behr). For instance, a standard lipstick color wheel contains each lipstick's shade with its individual name. The lipstick colors are rarely given their generic names, such as *pink* or *red*, nor are they given nomenclature describing the colors, such as *light pink* or *dark red*, nor are they numbered from light to dark (e.g., *red12*, *red13*). Rather, they are given fancy names that should have positive associations with emotions, sometimes suggesting a particular hue (e.g., *caramel* or *passion fruit*) and sometimes not necessarily suggesting any hue (e.g., *moonlight*, *tenderheart*, or *luscious evening*) (see also Miller & Kahn, 2005).

This naming practice suggests that the names themselves influence consumers' decisions, but past research also suggests that the color itself is a very important determining factor influencing consumers' decisions. Therefore, the question remains as to how a fancy name attached to a lipstick container or a paint swatch influences consumers. This question is addressed with two experiments.

## METHOD

### Pretest for Experiment 1

In the pretest, 24 college students (out of 30 people invited via e-mail) voluntarily visited a Web page that contained the pretest. The purpose of this pretest was to determine which names people felt matched the different shades (light, medium, dark, darkest) for each of three color swatches (brown, blue, and green). A pretest was conducted to guarantee that a light-green color was not labeled as something incongruent, such as the dark-green color of *pine*.

To avoid the color preferences (e.g., light colors over dark colors; bright colors over dull colors) discussed by Clark and Clark (1978), the colors brown and green were chosen because they are less standard, nonprimary colors. The color blue was also chosen because past research shows preferences for primary colors and a preference for the color blue in particular (Dittmar, 2001; Silver et al., 1988).

### Pretest Materials

First, paint samples were obtained from a local hardware store. These samples were scanned into the computer and the names were altered with the use of the graphic editing software program Adobe Photoshop. Each color swatch (brown, blue, and green) consisted of four color-shaded blocks (for the specific color) depicted vertically from lightest to darkest (see Figure 1 for an example). A list of potential fancy names was compiled for each color swatch.

### Pretest Procedure and Results

Participants in the pretest viewed one color swatch (either brown, blue, or green). Their task was to match the fancy name with the shade that they felt best matched the shade (these shades would ultimately be used in the actual study). For the brown color swatch, the names chosen (from light to dark) were Desert Sand, Chocolate, Mocha Almond Fudge, and Dark Coffee. For the blue swatch, the names chosen were Robin Egg, Indigo, Sapphire, and Royal. For the green swatch, the names chosen were Granny Smith Apple, Avocado, Meadow, and Forest.

### Participants

A total of 200 participants (29 males, 69 females, and 102 unknown<sup>1</sup>) were recruited to participate and received experimental credit in a psychology class for their participation. Seven participants' data were not used (five did not fully complete the experiment and two failed a manip-

<sup>1</sup> An error in the program during the initial stages of data collection did not report the gender of the first 110 participants. Once the error was detected, gender was then recorded.



**Figure 1.** Example color swatch used in Experiment 1.

ulation check and suspected that the name made a difference); thus, the results are based on 193 participants. Most participants indicated that they were between 18 and 25 years of age (age was collected in ranges, e.g., 18–25, 26–30).

## **Procedure**

The scanned color samples were converted into Web-safe colors and gif files. The experiment was conducted over the Internet. Each subject viewed only one of the three colors (blue, brown, or green), and they saw all four shades (light, medium, dark, very dark) of that one color. The four shades were presented simultaneously in a vertical arrangement, as shown in Figure 1, with the lightest shade being the first (or top) and the darkest shade being the last (or bottom). In the control condition, all four of the shades were accompanied by fancy names. In the experimental condition, one of the fancy names was replaced by a generic name. The order of the generic name was counterbalanced so that each shade block (lightest, second, third, darkest) was labeled with the generic name once (for each color). A Javascript code randomly assigned participants to a condition and a counterbalanced order.

Participants taking part in this study logged onto a Web site and learned that they would be taking part in a study designed to “examine personal color preferences.” Participants gave informed consent by clicking on the “next” button. This button randomly assigned the participant to a specific color (brown, blue, or green) and condition (the type of names given). Participants were instructed to view the color shades and then rate the extent to which they liked each color shade on a 7-point Likert-type scale (anchored by 1 = *not at all*, and 7 = *very much*). After rating each of the four color shades, participants clicked a “continue” button. Next, participants were presented with a single color shade with the same name attached to it from the entire color swatch they just viewed. Looking at this single shade, participants rated how much they liked the target shade as a color for a *sweater* that they might wear, for a piece of *upholstery* to be placed on a couch or chair, for the color of a *wall*, and for the color of a *rug*. This was repeated for each color shade, and each shade was always presented by itself after clicking the “continue” button. These questions pertaining to the different items (sweater, upholstery, wall, and rug) were asked in an attempt to gain insight as to whether fancy names influence decision making not only about any initial color preferences, but also about preferences in buying consumer products.

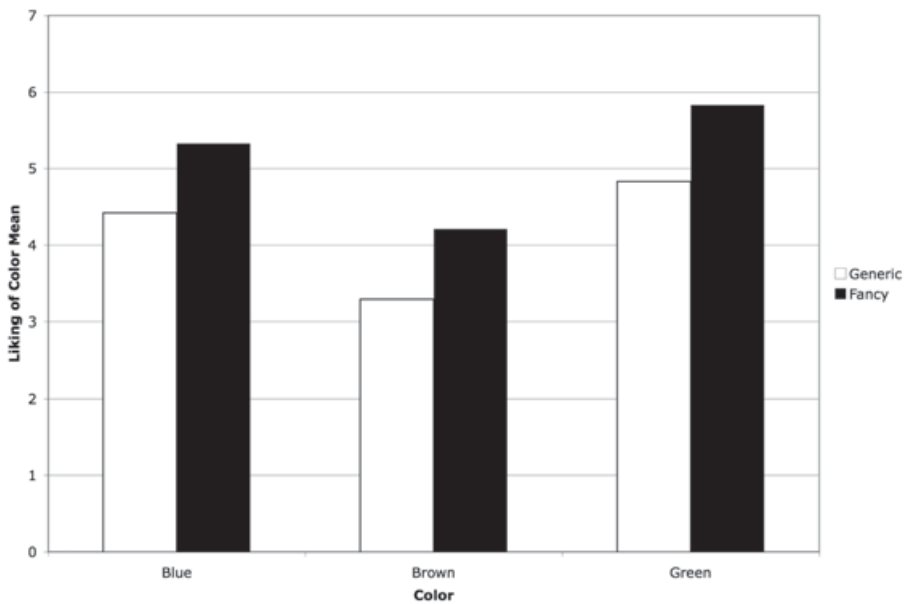
Finally, participants were again presented with the same four-color shade swatch they saw at the beginning (e.g., brown) and were instructed to rank order their favorite color (from 1 = *Favorite* to 4 = *Least Favorite*). Following this, participants were given an open-ended writing space in which they could elaborate on why they preferred the color that they chose. Participants indicated their gender, age, and what they thought the study was about. Finally, they were directed to a debriefing screen that described the actual purpose of the study and thanked them for participating.

## RESULTS

### Fancy-Name Effect

As seen in Figure 2, participants preferred fancy names over generic names, regardless of the actual color that they saw. Considering just the fancy names ( $M = 4.61$ ) versus the generic names ( $M = 4.13$ ), a  $t$  test revealed a significant difference in the ratings,  $t(192) = 3.92, p < .001$ . With a 3 (color: brown, green, blue)  $\times$  2 (name: fancy, generic) repeated-measures ANOVA with Color as the between factor and the Name as the within factor, there was a significant main effect for the name of the color (generic or fancy) on liking,  $F(1,190) = 15.20, p < .001$ . Thus, the generic names for blue ( $M = 4.68$ ), brown ( $M = 3.63$ ), and green ( $M = 4.11$ ) were rated significantly lower than the average of the three fancy names for blue ( $M = 4.88$ ), brown ( $M = 4.4$ ), and green ( $M = 4.58$ ; see Figure 2). There was a main effect for the liking of colors (blue, brown,





**Figure 2.** Fancy-name effect and blue preference in Experiment 1.

and green) themselves  $F(2, 190) = 9.72, p < .001$ . A Tukey test showed that blue ( $M = 4.9$ ) was liked more than both green ( $M = 4.5, p = .03$ ) and brown ( $M = 4.2; p < .001$ ). There was no significant difference in liking of green and brown,  $p = .114$ . This main effect replicates the overall preference for the color blue demonstrated by past research (Dittmar, 2001; Lind, 1994; Silver & Ferrante, 1995; Silver et al., 1988; Walsh et al., 1990). There was no interaction between the name given (generic or fancy) and the color (blue, brown, and green) itself  $F(2, 190) = 1.72, p = .18$ .

This pattern of results was consistent with results when participants were asked to rank order the four color shades from *Best* (1) to *Worst* (4). The generic name ( $M = 2.78$ ), no matter what color (brown, blue, or green) or shade (light, medium, dark, darkest), was consistently ranked as one of the least favorite colors,  $t(192) = 3.59, p < .001$ , in comparison to the fancy-named colors ( $M = 2.50$ ). Thus, these analyses indicate that fancy names were rated more positively than generic names (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

When comparing the colors in relation to an item or product (i.e., sweater, upholstery, wall, and rug), the name also had a significant influence on their ratings, in that the generic names ( $M = 2.98$ ) were rated lower than the fancy names ( $M = 3.33$ ),  $t(192) = 3.98, p < .001$ . Thus, these results confirm the prediction that products with fancy-named colors would be rated more positively than would those with generically named colors.

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Rated Colors in Experiment 1.**

Name	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Generic	4.13	1.57	193
Fancy	4.61	1.01	193
Gender			
Male			
Generic	4.07	1.67	29
Fancy	4.60	1.11	29
Female			
Generic	4.14	1.65	69
Fancy	4.59	1.02	69
Color			
Blue			
Combined	4.85	.83	60
Generic	4.68	1.52	60
Fancy	4.88	.99	60
Brown			
Combined	4.20	1.04	63
Generic	3.63	1.42	63
Fancy	4.39	1.09	63
Green			
Combined	4.46	.75	70
Generic	4.11	1.59	70
Fancy	4.58	.89	70

## Gender Differences

An exploratory MANOVA analysis of gender and name ratings found no gender differences. In addition, no significant differences were obtained between gender and color ratings.

## Discussion

The results of this experiment demonstrate that fancy color names influence decision-making processes, such that colors attached to fancy names are rated more positively than colors attached to generic names. The same pattern emerged when people rank ordered their favorite color—products were rated as more desirable if the fancy names were attached to them than if the generic names were attached. This phenomenon occurred regardless of the color (e.g., brown, blue, or green) tested. Thus, fancy color names do seem to influence consumer behavior.

## EXPERIMENT 2

Although Experiment 1 demonstrated an overall preference for the fancy name, it did not examine consumer choice of actual products. Thus, in

Experiment 2, two comparable products were put next to each other to examine if the fancy-color-named product would be preferred and purchased more than the equivalent generic-color-named product. To accomplish this, Experiment 2 implemented a within-subjects design in which participants had to choose between two products (towels) that were of the same color (but a different shade)—one had the fancy name and the other had the generic name. Color of the product was a between-subjects factor.

## METHOD

### Pretest for Experiment 2

As in Experiment 1, participants voluntarily visited a Web page that contained the pretest. The purpose of this pretest was to determine which names people felt matched the color of the product (bath towels). As before, this was done to guarantee that a fancy name was congruent with the colors of the products.

### Pretest Procedure and Results

Participants in the pretest viewed a total of six towels (two brown [light and dark shade], two blue [light and dark shade], and two green [light and dark shade] towels). Their task was to choose one fancy name for each towel color (blue, brown, and green) that best matched both shades of that particular color (light and dark). The fancy names chosen the most for each color were used in the actual study. *Mocha* was chosen for the brown product, *Ocean* was chosen for the blue product, and *Sage* was chosen for the green product.

### Participants

A total of 33 participants (10 males, 17 females, and 6 who did not report their gender) were recruited to participate in the study and received experimental credit in a psychology class for their participation. One participant failed the manipulation check and these data were not used; thus, the results are based on 32 participants. Most participants indicated that they were between 18 and 25 years of age (age was collected in ranges, e.g., 18—25, 26—30).

### Materials

Products were chosen from popular home decorating stores (e.g., Bed, Bath, and Beyond). The same style towel was available in all three colors (brown, blue, and green) and shades (light and dark). The name of the color was manipulated below the product (e.g., *In Blue*).

## Design

The experiment was a within- and between-subjects design and was conducted over the Internet. Each subject viewed only one color of towel (either brown, blue, or green) but viewed two shades (e.g., the light and dark blue towels). One towel was given the generic color name below it (e.g., *blue*, *brown*, or *green*), and the other towel was given the pretested fancy color name below it (e.g., *mocha*, *ocean*, or *sage*). The names were counterbalanced for both shades of towels, so that half the participants saw the light-shaded towel with a fancy name and half the participants saw the dark-shaded towel with the fancy name.

## Procedure

Participants came into the laboratory, logged onto a Web site, and were informed that they would be taking part in a study designed to examine personal product choice. Participants gave their informed consent by clicking on the “next” button. This button, using a Javascript code, randomly assigned the participant to a specific color (brown, blue, or green).

Participants then viewed the products and answered a series of questions about the product. First, they indicated which towel they preferred (the left or right option), and then they answered questions that assessed the extent to which they “would considered purchasing each product,” and “liked the color of the each product.” Participants also answered a filler question regarding the extent that they “liked the style of the each product.” Each of these three questions were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much* (and 7 = *certainly* for the purchase question). Participants also indicated the maximum dollar amount they would pay for each product (using an open-ended format) and indicated their gender and age. After completing the questionnaire, participants clicked the “submit” button and were debriefed.

## RESULTS

### Fancy-Name Effect

As can be seen in Table 2, participants preferred the products with the fancy names more than generic names, regardless of the actual color of the product. Replicating the findings in Experiment 1, participants had preferential color attitudes toward the fancy-named products such that participants reported liking the color of the fancy-named towel ( $M = 4.9$ ;  $SD = 1.46$ ) more than the generic-named towel ( $M = 4.0$ ;  $SD = 1.63$ ),  $t(31) = -2.57$ ,  $p = .02$  (see Figure 3).

This fancy-name effect also translated into purchasing preferences. Fancy-named products ( $N = 23$ ) were preferred over the generic-named product ( $N = 9$ ) regardless of the shade or color of the product (towels),

**Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Liking and Purchasing Ratings in Experiment 2.**

Name	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
<b>Consider Purchasing</b>			
Overall			
Generic	3.63	1.66	32
Fancy	4.53	1.76	32
Color			
Blue			
Combined	4.21	1.59	12
Generic	3.67	1.83	12
Fancy	4.75	2.05	12
Brown			
Combined	3.89	1.07	14
Generic	3.43	1.83	14
Fancy	4.36	1.65	14
Green			
Combined	4.25	.99	6
Generic	4.00	.89	6
Fancy	4.50	1.64	6
<b>Liking of the Color</b>			
Overall			
Generic	4.00	1.63	32
Fancy	4.94	1.46	32
Color			
Blue			
Combined	4.88	1.25	12
Generic	4.42	1.52	12
Fancy	5.33	1.56	12
Brown			
Combined	3.75	.83	14
Generic	3.29	1.59	14
Fancy	4.21	1.25	14
Green			
Combined	5.33	.52	6
Generic	4.83	1.47	6
Fancy	5.83	.98	6
<b>Maximum Amount Would Pay (Square Root)</b>			
Overall			
Generic	3.83	2.15	32
Fancy	4.36	1.89	32
Color			
Blue			
Combined	4.21	1.59	12
Generic	3.55	2.29	12
Fancy	4.07	1.96	12
Brown			
Combined	4.09	2.04	14
Generic	3.73	2.32	14
Fancy	4.45	2.07	14
Green			
Combined	4.69	1.40	6
Generic	4.64	1.45	6
Fancy	4.74	1.42	6

$\chi^2 (N = 32) = 6.13, p = .01$  (see Figure 4). Participants considered purchasing the fancy-named towel ( $M = 4.5; SD = 1.76$ ) over the generic-named towel ( $M = 3.6; SD = 1.67$ ) regardless of color or shade,  $t(31) = -2.197, p = .04$  (see Figure 3). In addition, fancy-named products command higher prices, such that, after accounting for a positive skew in the data by taking the square root, a paired-samples  $t$  test showed that participants indicated they would pay more for the fancy-named towel ( $M = 4.4; SD = 1.89$ ) than the generic-named towel ( $M = 3.8; SD = 2.15$ ) regardless of color or shade,  $t(31) = -2.04, p = .05$  (see Figure 3).

### **Gender Preference**

An exploratory analysis to examine gender differences in color and name preferences showed no significant differences based on gender. Thus, males and females both prefer the fancy-named product over the generic-named product.

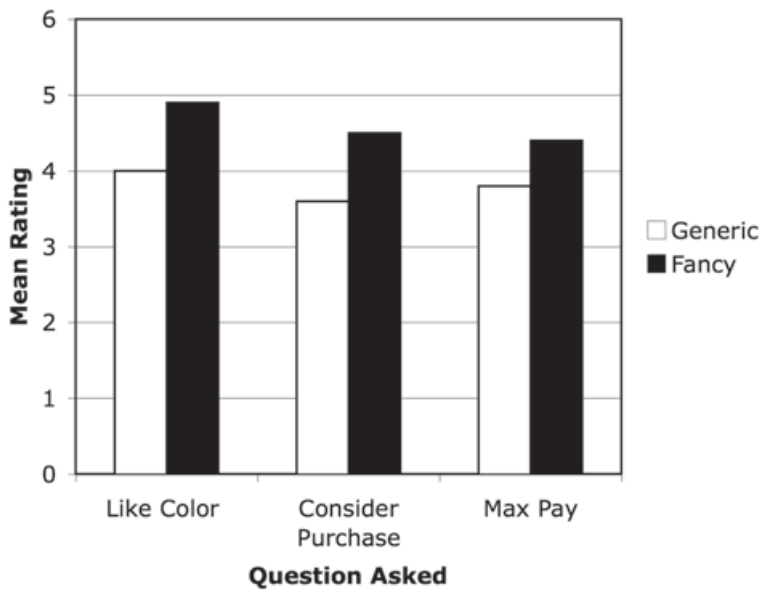
## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study demonstrate that the fancy-named color was liked more than the generic-named product. Moreover, the fancy-color-named product was chosen as the preferred product more, was more likely to be purchased, and participants were willing to pay more for this product than they were for the same product with a generic color name.

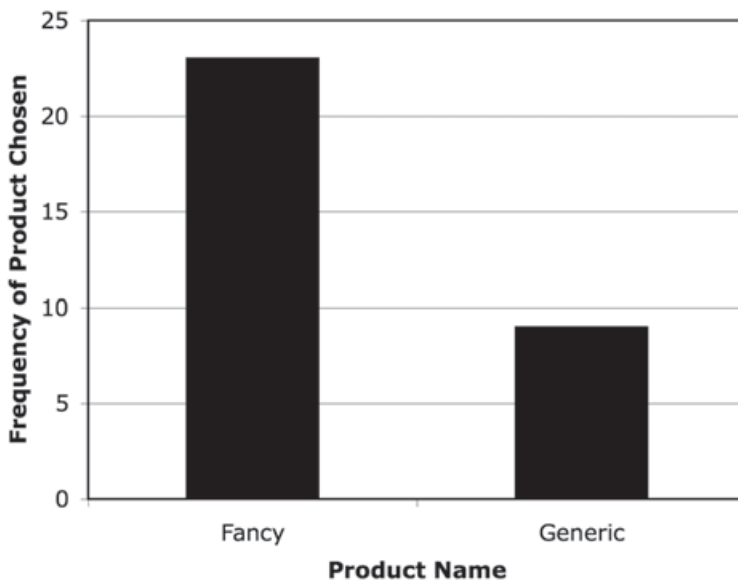
### **General Discussion**

The current research explores the fancy-color-naming phenomenon and documents empirical support for this marketing practice. The results reveal that fancy color names influence consumers' preferences, such that colors attached to fancy names are rated more positively than are colors attached to generic names. The fancy-name effect also influences perceptions of what people might buy (as in Experiment 1), purchasing decisions, and the price they are willing to pay (Experiment 2). The fancy-name phenomenon occurred regardless of the color (e.g., brown, blue, or green) that was tested. Thus, as a whole, these studies provide strong evidence that fancy color names do influence consumer preferences and can influence consumer purchasing decisions.

It is still unclear which theory best accounts for the data—the framing theory or categorization. Tversky and Kahneman (1981) found that people reliably opted for those scenarios framed in terms of gains instead of losses. In the current study, people's choices may reflect the fact that the fancy words were positive frames, whereas the generic words were just that—generic. The positive frame by the fancy name may have suggested a potential gain to participants in choosing that option.



**Figure 3.** Fancy-name effect on how likeable the color was, how likely to purchase the product, and the maximum amount participants were willing to spend on the product in Experiment 2.



**Figure 4.** Frequency that a product was chosen based on its name in Experiment 2.

In addition, the fancy names used carried a neutral to positive association with them, suggesting that categorization may also explain the pattern of results. Fiske and Neuberg (1990) argue that people use categorization when forming impressions of others as a default. Regarding

the current study, the fancy name activates a positive category, and this category positively influences impression formation of the product. If given a negative name, different results would be predicted. For instance, if a lipstick color were given the name *Blood Red* instead of *Ruby*, one might anticipate more liking for *Ruby* because it activates a positive category, as opposed to *Blood Red*, which activates a negative category. Because marketers appear to use more positive fancy names, the current research used more neutral to positive fancy names. Future research might assess how negatively framed names influence consumers' choices. Moreover, recent research has found that people prefer flavors and products that have an ambiguous name (e.g., Millenium Orange, Friendly Green) (Miller & Kahn, 2005). Future research might also assess how and why people chose products based on the type of name (positive, ambiguous, negative, and generic) and the type of choice (positive vs. ambiguous, positive vs. negative, ambiguous vs. negative, etc.).

The current set of results is important from a marketing and a consumer perspective. The current experiments provide marketers with empirical evidence that the fancy-color-naming phenomenon is advantageous, the consequences of which are already highly visible in a simple visit to a paint or furniture store, or to a makeup counter. In short, fancy names sell. The results further suggest the possibility that if products are not selling well, it may be time to change their names. For instance, a *brown* towel (or other items) that is not selling well might be renamed to *mocha* because this name change, as the current research shows, may result in increased attraction for the product, may lead the consumer to buy the *mocha* towel (or other item) over the same exact towel (or other item) named *brown*, and may even entice the consumer to pay more for the fancy-named product. Indeed, the judgment of "that which we call a rose" seems to be influenced by its name (Shakespeare, 1595)!

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