Grounding creative processes

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Unlocking the full potential of brands across international markets has become an ever-growing requirement for present-day companies. Lack of negative connotations, distinctiveness, and pronounceability of the brand name in all languages and dialects is a must and not the most difficult task in the process. Coining a new brand name that also manages to communicate the product or service key attributes with equal success in all countries and cultures is a much trickier objective. Names are arbitrary, language-specific constructs and are often enough semantically obscure to members of different speech communities. This has led branding designers to explore alternative means for conveying their target messages across a compelling spectrum of brand audiences. The inventory of such strategies is to date, however, fairly limited. In this connection, there has been extensive consideration of cross-linguistic sound symbolism (Shrum et al. 2012), and visual symbolism (Thurlow and Aiello, 2007; Koller, 2008).

This paper makes a further contribution to the inventory of strategies for the design of globally-valid brands by exploring the role of *image schemas* in this type of creative process. In his 1987 programmatic work *The Body in the Mind*, Mark Johnson drew attention to a collection of experiential gestalts derived from recurrent bodily activities of sense perception and movement. Because of their embodied nature, image schemas are widely pervasive across cultures, a trait that turns them especially appealing for the purpose of creating new global trademarks. Theoretical studies have already established a connection between the use of embodied schemata and the semantics of some product categories (Pérez Hernández, 2011), as well as the role of image schemata in the building of corporate image (Koller 2009). Empirical confirmation, however, is still lacking. In order to assess the degree of cross-cultural validity of those brands including image-schematic elements in their make-up, we have carried out two case studies. Each of these examines the understanding of a number of visual inputs and logos based on image schemas by speakers of different origins and of diverse mother tongues. The analysis of the resulting data suggests that those logos and brands including some sort of embodied schemata are readily associated with the basic semantics of the corresponding schema by consumers with different languages and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, if the schemata used in the design of a new trademark are chosen in such a way that their basic logic and semantics coincide with the key attributes of the target product, the semantic core of the resulting brand will be more readily apprehended worldwide. This paper unfolds as follows. Section 2 introduces the notion of image schema and establishes the general and specific research hypotheses. Section 3 describes the data collection method, the nature of the informants, procedures and measures and, finally, the results of the case studies. We conclude by setting new grounds for further investigation.

References

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