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Running head: Brand preference in context of service failure

**Brand Preference in the face of Control Loss and Service Failure: The Role of the Sound of
Brands**

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Brand Preference in the face of Control Loss and Service Failure: The Role of the Sound of Brands

Abstract

This research shows that consumers compensate for a loss of perceived control inherent to service failure by extracting sensory information from brand names, and specifically from plosive consonants. Across three experimental studies, we show that in contexts of reduced control, which characterizes service failure, consumers prefer brand names containing plosives (versus fricatives) as a way of reasserting personal control because plosive sounds elicit a disposition to act. In doing so, we highlight the use of brand name innovation to anticipate low control state, and thus, the psychological discomfort experienced by customers following service failure.

Word count: 94

Keywords: control loss; service failure; sensory marketing

Brand Preference in the face of Control Loss and Service Failure: The Role of the Sound of Brands

1. Introduction

Late deliveries, wrong orders, stockouts, cancelled flights... Failing to meet customer expectations is a contingency known to happen in the service industry. Service failure can translate into dissatisfaction and negativity toward the brand, which may in turn lead to disloyalty and switching behavior (Pacheco, Geuens, & Pizzutti, 2018; McCollough, Berry, & Yadav, 2000; Vaerenbergh et al, 2014). This host of adverse consequences can be seen as the result of shattering customers' expectations, and therefore, introducing chaos and unpredictability into their life. Yet, people yearn for the feeling that they live in an orderly and predictable world allowing them to make positive things happen while avoiding negative outcomes (Landau, Kay, & Whitson, 2015). When this feeling is threatened, people's inner desire for control drives their behaviors to restore perceived control to baseline levels.

In this research, we uncover a compensatory strategy to restore control that involves the phonetic appeal of certain brand names. Specifically, we investigate consumers' attraction for brand names containing plosive consonants (i.e., "b", "d", "p", and "t") in the context of perceived control loss. Past research suggests that executing articulatory movements in the mouth to produce sounds can bear sensory information (Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988; Topolinski, 2017). Here, we propose that plosives entail a physical action that reflects one's readiness for action because of the abrupt popping sound made by a stoppage of air in the mouth followed by a sudden explosive release. Based on past research suggesting that individuals exert greater effort immediately following a loss of control as a way of regaining control (Greenaway et al., 2015a), we propose that perceived control loss increases the appeal of plosive-based brand names because

articulating plosive consonants elicit the feeling of doing something. This paper describes thus how to solve customers' perceived control loss by using brand linguistics. Understanding how brand names articulation can affect consumers' perceptions is important because service providers could use this knowledge to automatically reduce their customers' perceived control loss in the context of service failure. This reduction is beneficial for service providers because it means that they wouldn't need to put much effort to help their customers compensate for perceived control loss. As such, using plosive consonants within brand names could automatically decrease customers' negative affective and behavioral reactions towards the service providers that occur in the case of service failure (Hui & Toffoli, 2002).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Dealing with perceived control loss and service failure

Personal control, which refers to the belief that one is capable of obtaining desired outcomes and achieving goals (Landau et al., 2015), arises from the perception of clear contingencies between actions and outcomes. That is, people experience perceived control loss when they perceive that their actions do/will not have a reliable chance of success (Landau et al., 2015). The belief that people can exert control over their environment is a basic psychological need (Rothbaum et al., 1982). In addition to providing people with numerous benefits such as health and happiness (Greenaway et al., 2015b), feeling in control averts the anxiety-inducing fear of perceiving the world as random and chaotic (Landau et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, consumers must often deal with situations that threaten their feelings of personal control. This is particularly relevant concerning services. Although service organizations often aspire to deliver outstanding customer service, most—if not all—of them have had moments where they find themselves unable to meet a customer's expectations. These

discrepancies constitute service failures (McCullough et al., 2000). When such failures are non-consumer related, that is, when the problem cannot be attributed to their involvement in the service delivery process, consumers can react quite negatively, going as far as questioning their loyalty to the brand (Choi & Mattila, 2008; McCullough et al., 2000).

2.2. The sound of brands as a compensatory control strategy

People respond to situations that threaten their sense of personal control using a variety of socio-cognitive strategies designed to restore perceived control to baseline levels. Individuals can first compensate for low control states by bolstering their perceived control over the domain of reduced control. That is, people may try to convince themselves that they possess the skills and abilities to successfully deal with a situation regardless of the reality of how controllable or uncontrollable the situation actually is (Langer, 1975). Alternatively, people may seek environmental cues that the world is orderly and predictable to fight against feelings of randomness. As such, they may rely on corporate institutions (Khenfer et al., 2017), find patterns in random noise (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008), or utilitarian products (Chen, Lee, & Yap, 2017).

Moreover, people may cope with perceived control loss by bolstering the perception that themselves possess the abilities and resources to pursue their goals in domains unrelated to the source of control loss. Greenaway and colleagues (2015a) showed that when people feel a lack of control over their physical environment, they report greater willingness to engage in motivated action to pursue unspecified goals. That is, they compensate for their loss of control in one domain by reasserting their control in another domain. This boost in motivation is immediate and short-lived but allows individuals to combat the frustration of control deprivation through compensatory action. Hence, when people perceive a loss of control, they seek to act to reassert personal control, even in a domain unrelated to the source of control loss. In this research, we propose that consumers may do so through sensory information extracted from brand names.

2.3. The effects of consonants in brand names

Consumer research has known a surge of interest in recent years for the phonetic effect of brand names with the emergence of brand linguistics, or the study of how language influences the way consumers interact with brands (Carnevale, Luna, & Lerman, 2017). The sound-meaning relationship of brand names has been mostly investigated by building on sound symbolism, that is, the phenomenon where an arbitrary sound implicitly conveys characteristics such as shape or size (see review by Spence, 2012). For instance, high-frequency vowels such as “i” (in *eel*) have been shown to evoke smallness and lightness, whereas low-frequency vowels such as “o” (in *old*) elicit perceptions of largeness and heaviness (Klink, 2000; Lowrey & Shrum, 2007).

Accordingly, marketers have been advised to use sounds in brand name creation that are congruent with products’ attributes to form relevant brand associations—e.g. signaling smallness via the “i” sound.

Although research has devoted less attention to consonants, a similar reasoning based on the frequency of sounds has been applied (Coulter & Coulter, 2010; Klink, 2000). Consonants are most often classified as plosives and fricatives. Plosives—which include “d” (in *dune*), and “t” (in *tool*)—are abrupt popping sounds made by the complete closure of the articulators (e.g., lips or tongue against palate) followed by a sudden explosive release of air from the mouth. In contrast, fricatives— which include “l” (in *loan*), and “s” (in *sun*)—are sounds made by restricting, but not stopping, airflow through the mouth (Schwartz et al., 2012; Spence, 2012). Similar to low (high)-frequency vowels, plosives (fricatives) have been shown to elicit perceptions of largeness and heaviness (smallness and lightness) (Klink, 2000).

2.4. The present research

The symbolic meaning of plosives (versus fricatives) could explain the effect of plosive sounds when consumers experience a loss of perceived control through the comforting appeal of large/heavy-sounding brands. However, the association between plosives and perceptions of largeness and heaviness has only been demonstrated in one study using explicit measures (Klink, 2000). Recent research hints that there is more to the phonetic effect of brand names than the frequency of sounds (e.g., Topolinski, 2017). In line with such work suggesting that consonantal articulations in brand names can bear sensory information, we propose that plosives can elicit a disposition to act. For consumers, the brand name is recognized as being an important indicator of products and services perceived quality (Maheswaran, Mackie and Chaiken, 1992). As such, analyzing the impact of the presence of plosives consonants within brand names on consumers' perceptions represents a novel and interesting solution for new brands.

Research has well-established that bodily experiences constitute a source of information that affect consumers' perception, judgment, and behavior (see reviews by Barsalou, 2008; Krishna & Schwarz, 2014). For instance, Strack and colleagues (1988) demonstrated that words containing the "i" sound simulated a smile, and thus, encouraged positivity. Importantly, research has showed that sensorimotor simulations based on mouth movements could drive consumer preference independent of semantic meaning. As such, Topolinski (2017) suggested that words requiring consonantal articulations starting in the front of the mouth and finishing in the rear (e.g., Bodika) elicited positive attitudes because such words simulated ingestion. Conversely, words requiring consonantal articulations starting in the rear of the mouth and finishing in the front (e.g., Kodiba) elicited avoidance because of the similarity with the sequence of articulatory places involved in coughing.

Moreover, research in phonetics has long shown that plosives require active maneuvers to achieve complete closure and subsequent release of the vocal track such that one must first

pressed articulators together, accumulate air at the point of pressure, and then release that pressure (Schwartz et al., 2012). That is, plosives alternate silence and burst whereas fricatives entail a single monotonic articulatory movement consisting in releasing air through the mouth. Pulvermüller and colleagues (2006) demonstrated that hearing syllables containing the plosives “p” and “t” activated motor regions in the brain because of the articulatory movements associated with producing them (lips and tongue, respectively). Hence, the motor component characterizing plosives suggests a dynamic sensory experience which may be closer to eliciting action than the more static sensory experience involved in fricatives.

Importantly, our effect should occur even during silent reading since articulatory movements—as other bodily states—are stored in memory and integrated in multimodal representations (Barsalou, 2008; Topolinski, 2017). As such, sounds, the articulatory movements to produce them, and their phonetic transcription as visual signs (i.e., letters) are all connected in the brain. Once the knowledge exists and experience builds connections to create a semantic memory system, activating one representation within this system stimulates all relevant representations (Barsalou, 2008; Krishna & Schwartz, 2014). Hence, it is not necessarily a bodily state that triggers the path from perception to cognition, but any relevant memory associated to said bodily state. For instance, imagine reading a word containing the letter *b* such as “boat.” Simply reading the letter “b” evoked the related sound and the memory of ejecting air through pressed lips without having to produce the sound out loud.

Building on this literature, we hypothesized the following:

H1: Plosive (vs. fricative)-based brand names elicit the semantic concept of action.

H2: Perceived control loss increases the appeal of plosive-based brand names as a way of regaining control.

Our hypotheses were tested across three experiments.

3. Pilot study

We first provide empirical evidence for the hypothesis H1 which proposes that, compared to fricatives, plosives elicit a disposition to act. British residents completed a study online ($N=130$, 65.4% female, $M_{age}=40.4$, $SD=11.2$; provider: Prolific). This experiment was a two-condition (plosives vs. fricatives) within-subjects design in which participants were asked to complete a computerized lexical decision task (LDT), programmed in Implicit-Studio. The LDT is designed to provide an implicit measure of automatic semantic associations based on reaction time following a prime (Lepore & Brown, 2002). It has originally been designed by Meyer and Schvaneveldt (1971) who showed that people more quickly and accurately decide if a string of letters is a real word (rather than a pronounceable word without any meaning) if it has been preceded by a semantically related word. We predicted that the more plosives elicited a disposition to act, the faster (slower) participants would be at recognizing the action- (inaction-) related words after being exposed to words containing plosives (versus fricatives). Participants were told that their job was to categorize as quickly and accurately as possible the letter strings as real words by pressing the “L” key or non-existing word by pressing the “S” key. Following a trial test, they were presented two action-related words (i.e., action, effort), two inaction-related words (i.e., calmness, passivity), two largeness-related words (i.e., largeness, heaviness), one neutral word (i.e., furniture) and seven pronounceable pseudo-words based on anagrams of the real words (e.g., anctio). The fifty-six sequences included: (1) a fixation point in the center of the screen; (2) a prime word (plosives: Dotdot, Todtod; fricatives: Loslos, Solsol); (3) a target letter string that represented a word or a pseudo-word. Presentation order was randomized. Three multivariate outliers were removed based on Mahalanobis distance, leaving a final sample of 127 participants.

A repeated-measures ANOVA on speed of recognition (in milliseconds) revealed that when participants were exposed to plosive-based prime words, they were faster (slower) to recognize the action (inaction)-related words as real words (action: $M=629.86$, $SD=117.85$; inaction: $M=687.55$, $SD=151.23$) than when they were exposed to fricative-based prime words (action: $M=648.54$, $SD=123.90$; $F(1, 126)=4.77$, $p=.031$; inaction: $M=651.89$, $SD=116.96$; $F(1, 126)=15.08$, $p<.001$). However, we found no effect for the largeness-related words ($F(1, 126)=.10$, $p=.757$) or the neutral word ($F(1, 126)=.91$, $p=.342$). These findings suggest that brand names containing plosives (versus fricatives) are more likely to elicit a disposition to act; thus supporting H1. Furthermore, they allow us to discard the possibility that the forthcoming results could be explained by the association between plosives and perceptions of largeness and heaviness.

4. Study 1

Study 1 tests our hypothesis H2 that perceived control loss increases the appeal of plosive-based brand names as a way of regaining control in the context of a service failure at a restaurant. Experiencing a service failure—that is, a non-customer related unsatisfactory performance has been shown to alter customer perceived control as it leads them to question their ability to achieve the desired outcomes (Choi & Mattila, 2008).

4.1. Method

British residents ($N=206$, 68.4% female, $M_{age}=35.9$, $SD_{age}=12.55$) completed a study online (provider: Prolific). This experiment was a 2 between-subjects variable (perceived control: high control vs. low control) \times 2 within-subject variable (brand name: plosives-based vs. fricatives-

based) design. All participants were instructed to read a text presenting a scenario of experiencing a new restaurant with their friends and imagine they were the customer the story talked about.

Low-control participants read that their choice of starter was not available twice (a scenario adapted from Smith, Bolton & Wagner, 1999), which represents an experience of service failure.

High-control participants imagined that their order was immediately taken by the waiter.

Then, participants were informed that they had to choose the name of this new restaurant among

two options. They had systematically to choose among a name containing plosives and a name

containing fricatives. The possible plosives and fricatives paired brand names were all made up

following the same pattern (consonant-vowel-consonant- consonant-vowel-consonant) and

involved either plosives (“t”-“d”) or fricatives (“f”-“s”) to form the following brand names

“Tadtad” and “Laslas”. Presentation order of the two different blocks depending on perceived

control manipulation was randomized. Participants were asked to provide their responses by

typing in their preferred brand for each choice among the displayed two (one plosive-based brand

name and one fricative-based brand name). Then, they were asked to answer a self-reported

questionnaire containing manipulation checks: two items measuring their perceived control in the

context of their experience at the restaurant ($r=.49$): “How much control do you think you had

over the issue you faced at the restaurant?” and “Was there anything you could have done to

avoid the issue you had at the restaurant?”; and six items designed to evaluate feelings of

personal control ($\alpha=.68$): “I feel in control,” “I feel that the events in my life are mainly

determined by my own actions,” “I feel that my efforts are worthwhile,” “I feel that I am in

charge of my life,” “I do not feel in control of most things that occur around me [reversed],” and

“I feel that I have no control over what’s happening around me [reversed].” Finally, participants

were asked to fill in questions about age, gender, device used to complete the study and aim of the study.

4.2. Results

Manipulation checks demonstrated that our manipulation was successful in producing a lower perceived control in the restaurant context in low control condition than in high control condition ($F(1, 205)=113.48, p<.0001; M_{High}=4.13; M_{Low\ Control}=2.30$); and a lower general perceived control in low control condition than in high control condition ($F(1, 205)=5.25, p<.05; M_{High}=3.69; M_{Low\ Control}=3.50$).

We conducted a repeated measures logistic regression analysis to test our hypothesis. The predictor was our manipulation (0=baseline 1=low control). The dependent variable was the choice of plosive versus fricative-based brand names for the two pairs. The results revealed a simple main effect of condition where perceived control loss resulted in a higher choice of brand names containing plosives compared to the high control condition ($b = 0.86, SE = 0.32, Z = 7.35, p = 0.007; M_{Baseline}=20.48\%; M_{Low\ Control}=37.64\%$).

Thus, we found support for H2 hypothesis that perceived control loss increases the appeal for plosive-based brand names.

5. Study 2

First, Study 2 examines the mechanism underlying our effect. Because we suspected that measuring the mediating process would have made an implicit process explicit, and thus, interfered with how the process occurred, we used a moderation-of-process approach whereby mechanism is investigated using a moderator thought capable of blocking the path from the main independent variable to the dependent variable (Vancouver & Carlson, 2015). If consumers find

pluses more appealing when they experience perceived control loss, this effect should disappear when their sense of control is restored. Thus, Study 2 included a manipulation of control restoration and placed the locus of control restoration on the service provider. In doing so, we highlight a boundary condition to our effect, that is, the intervention of a context-relevant external agent (i.e., the service provider). Second, Study 2 uses a plausible scenario where customers who experienced service failure would further decide to change their service provider. Indeed, it is crucial both for existing brands to anticipate consequences following a service failure experience, and for new brands on the market to get an idea about how to attract disappointed customers from existing brands.

5.1. Method

British residents ($N=244$, 67.1% female, $M_{age}=38.9$, $SD_{age}=10.86$) completed a study online (provider: Prolific). This experiment was a 2 (perceived control: high control vs. low control) \times 2 (control restoration: baseline vs. control restoration) between-subjects design. All participants were instructed to imagine they were about to go to the Caribbean for an eight-day vacation. High-control participants imagined that, as they arrived at the airport, they found their way to a screen indicating the time and location of the departing flights and read that their flight was “on time.” Low-control participants read that their flight was “cancelled”, an experience of service failure.

Next, participants imagined that they decided to go to customer care service. They were randomly assigned to the control-restoration or baseline condition. In the control-restoration condition, participants read that customer care service would provide them with alternatives to best address their situation so that they could arrive at their destination as initially planned. In the

baseline condition, participants read that there was no other alternative as the flight they booked was the only one available that would let them arrive at their destination as initially planned. (We reasoned that both scenarios would be believable regardless of the perceived-control condition because participants were told early on that their flight would include a five-hour-long connection). Next, participants were instructed to take a moment to consider their situation and write a paragraph to describe how they felt.

We pretested both manipulations with a separate sample ($N=99$). Following the writing task, participants were asked to complete six items designed to evaluate feelings of personal control on a 7-point scale (1=Totally disagree; 7=Totally agree; $\alpha=.89$): “I feel in control,” “I feel that the events in my life are mainly determined by my own actions,” “I feel that my efforts are worthwhile,” “I feel that I am in charge of my life,” “I do not feel in control of most things that occur around me [reversed],” and “I feel that I have no control over what’s happening around me [reversed].” An ANOVA on personal control revealed a nonsignificant interaction ($F(1, 95)=.02$, $p=.885$) but significant main effects of our two manipulations (perceived control: $F(1, 95)=55.44$, $p<.001$; control restoration: $F(1, 95)=4.61$, $p=.034$). Simple effects revealed that participants in the control-restoration condition reported higher levels of personal control in both the low-control condition ($F(1, 95)=7.67$, $p=.007$; $M_{Control\ restoration}=4.67$, $SD=1.27$; $M_{Baseline}=3.69$, $SD=1.65$) and the high-control condition ($F(1, 95)=10.58$, $p=.002$; $M_{Control\ restoration}=4.32$, $SD=1.41$; $M_{Baseline}=4.16$, $SD=1.32$). This explains the absence of significant interaction. Our manipulation of perceived control lowered participants’ personal control regardless of whether control was subsequently restored, while our manipulation of control restoration increased participants’ personal control regardless of the manipulation of perceived control. ANOVAs on positive and negative mood revealed no significant interaction or main effects ($ps>.10$).

Finally, participants were asked to consider two fictitious airlines Pettobia (plosive-based) and Fessovia (fricative-based). The order of the place of consonantal articulation was the same across brand names (i.e., labial-alveolar-labial). Each name was presented on a single web page (presentation order was randomized) and participants were asked to type in the name before proceeding further. Next, participants were asked “had the choice been offered to you, which one of the two airlines would you pick to get to your destination?” and to select their preferred airline. We pretested ($N=50$) that there was no significant difference between brand names in terms of baseline preference ($\chi^2(1)=1.98, p=.159$), familiarity ($t(49)=-1.18, p=.242$), difficulty of pronunciation ($t(49)=-.66, p=.513$), and attitude ($t(49)=-1.66, p=.103$).

5.2. Results

We conducted a logistic regression analysis to test the effect of our manipulation of perceived control (high control=-.5, low control=.5), our manipulation of control restoration (baseline=-.5, control restoration=.5), and their interaction. The dependent variable was the choice of the plosive (versus fricative)-based brand name. The analysis yielded a marginally significant interaction ($b=-.86, SE=.52, Z=1.66, p=.097$), but no significant main effect (perceived control: $b=.33, SE=.26, Z=1.28, p=.201$; control restoration: $b=-.13, SE=.26, Z=-.51, p=.609$). Importantly, spotlight analyses (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013) aligned with our predictions. We predicted that if perceived control loss enhanced preference for plosive-based brand names as a way of reasserting personal control, then providing consumers with the opportunity to restore control over the pursued outcome by the intervention of an external agent (i.e., the service provider) would reduce the appeal of plosive-based brand names. Accordingly, we found a significant simple effect of perceived control loss when an external agent did not

intervene to restore control ($b=.76$, $SE=.36$, $Z=2.06$, $p=.039$; $M_{High\ control}=40.3\%$; $M_{Low\ control}=59.0\%$). However, this effect became nonsignificant when an external agent intervened to restore control, $b=-.10$, $SE=.36$, $Z=-.28$, $p=.779$ ($M_{High\ control}=47.5\%$; $M_{Low\ control}=45.0\%$; see Fig. 2).

To conclude, Study 2 provides additional support for our hypothesis in a marketing-relevant context where disappointed customers could decide to change their service provider. Furthermore, using a moderation-of-process approach, Study 2 provides evidence of mechanism by showing that people's desire to restore a sense of control was underlying the effect of perceived control loss on the appeal of plosive sounds. Finally, Study 2 identifies an important boundary condition—i.e., the presence of a context-relevant interventionist external agent—that illustrates when plosives are likely to lose their appeal in contexts of reduced control.

FIGURE_1_ABOUT_HERE

6. General discussion

Our studies provided support for the hypothesis that perceived control loss can drive preferences solely based on brand names because of consumers' attraction for plosives when their personal control is threatened. We proposed that reading plosives allowed consumers to reassert personal control in the face of perceived control loss—a state inherent to service failure—because plosives, compared to fricatives, tend to be associated with a disposition to act (as demonstrated in the pilot study). Study 1 showed that low-control participants reported a higher preference for brand names containing plosives compared to high-control condition. Studies 2 shed light on mechanism by showing that participants whose sense of control was restored after being altered no longer found plosive-based brand names more appealing. Specifically, Study 2 showed that

after service failure, participants preferred to deal with a service provider whose name contained plosives (versus fricatives), unless recovery efforts restored a sense of control. Overall, these results provide evidence that the (silent) reading of brand names containing plosives can participate in compensating for low control states inherent to service failure.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

The findings from this research contribute to at least three existing literatures. First, this research highlights the role of perceived control loss in contexts of service failure. Research have shown that service failure could trigger negative emotional responses such as disappointment, anger, and resentment (Pacheco et al., 2018; Vaerenbergh et al., 2014). Our research emphasizes the role of threatened feelings of personal control as a catalyst for customers to express negativity toward the service provider. Past research has established a causal relationship between altered feelings of personal control and alleviated anxiety (Laurin, Kay, & Moscovitch, 2008). Thus, if altered feelings of personal control are the reason why consumers experience negativity following service failure, providing consumers with a sense that the world is orderly and predictable—for instance, by using plosives in brand names to compensate for perceived control loss—may help service organizations attract customers who encountered a failed service experience by competitors. This could be especially true for new brand service providers that could benefit from having plosives in their names to drive the choice of disappointed customers from other providers.

Second, this research adds to the budding literature on the dynamics of compensatory control in consumer settings (e.g., Chen et al., 2017; Khenfer et al., 2017). In this research, we highlighted a new strategy consisting in bolstering one's personal stock of resources to deal with

an uncontrollable environment in domains unrelated to the source of reduced control. Landau and colleagues' (2015) inventory accounts for strengthening personal control in the domain of reduced control, beliefs in powerful others (e.g., government, deities), and a sense that the world is orderly and predictable by seeking out structured environments. Although Greenaway and colleagues (2015) showed that threats to feelings to personal control increased motivation to pursue general, unspecified goals, we showed here that such a threat can trigger people's disposition to act in a *specific* domain regardless of the nature of the control threat.

Third, our research adds to the literature on brand linguistics. Our findings call for an approach of the phonetic effect of brand names that goes beyond sound symbolism. This research joins recent works in consumer behavior (e.g., Topolinski, 2017) and speech perception (Pulvermüller et al., 2006) which indicate that perception of speech sounds activates specific motor circuits in the brain, and that these are the same motor circuits that also contribute to articulatory processes invoked when the muscles generating the speech sounds are being moved. It explored a new route to examine brand preferences by building on the notion that consumers extract sensory information from brand names, and specifically from the articulatory movements involved in their pronunciation. Importantly, we do not refute the possibility that sound symbolism may explain to some extent our results. We merely point out that other explanations—such as the one we developed in the present research—exist and should be considered to explain the phonetic effect of brand names.

6.2. Managerial implications

Service organizations have at their disposal proven solutions on how to address service failure such as prompt handling and compensation. Yet, some have suggested that doing nothing

can be in some circumstances the best course of action because the cost of doing something (recovery efforts or striving for providing high quality service to prevent failures) may not be worth the financial cost of losing some unsatisfied customers (Halbheer, Gärtner, Gerstner, & Koenigsberg, 2017). Nevertheless, doing nothing does not mean that the firm cannot minimize customer's discomfort related to threatened feelings of personal control. As such, when launching a new brand, adopting and putting forth a plosive-based brand name can be a cost-effective method to anticipate low control state, and thus, the psychological discomfort experienced by customers following service failure. Service organizations may also rely on plosive-based brand names in addition to addressing customers' complaints through recovery efforts to optimize damage control.

Moreover, the present research recommends using plosive-based brand names as a cost-effective way of obtaining an edge over competitors in the consideration set when consumers seek an alternative following service failure. Although we can find examples of product and service failures that do not prevent consumers from staying loyal to the brand involved, building strong and lasting relationships can be a costly and slow-moving process. By using initiatives in brand name innovation such as the one we propose here, a firm can increase its chances to draw consumers' attention if their expectations were not met with the original provider (all things being equal). This is particularly relevant in industries where failures are likely to occur and where consumer involvement is too low to help build brand loyalty.

Finally, this research suggests that using plosives in a brand name may facilitate the formation of mental associations related to action or help a company project dynamism. In the same vein, brands positioned on relaxation, calmness may want to avoid using plosives in their names. In other words, brands may strengthen their positioning by matching the mental

associations they cultivate through marketing communication with the sensory information that consumers may extract from their names. Of course, we do not mean that brands that have managed to cultivate favorable and unique associations change their name to be consistent with an image denoting action. The results of this research are mainly aimed at brand directors, managers and business developers about to launch a new brand and looking for a name. Given that a new brand can hardly claim to activate favorable associations without significant marketing communication efforts, choosing names including plosives can be an asset if it is to convey an image associated with action.

6.3. Limitations and directions for further research

Although our findings were replicated across several studies, our methodology and results raise several questions.

First, participants were systematically exposed to fictitious and meaningless brand names. This lays ground for further research regarding a potential moderating effect of a match (mismatch) between the semantic meaning of a word and the consonantal articulations to pronounce that word. In Pulvermüller (2005), reading action-related words such as lick, pick, and kick activated regions of the brain associated with the corresponding motor functions, that is, tongue, finger, and foot movements, respectively. As such, questions arise: Shouldn't a plosive-based brand name semantically evoking action (inaction) have a stronger (weaker) appeal under control threat? Can we expect consumers to prefer semantically neutral plosive-based brand names over fricative-based brand names that semantically evoke action? While the consistency of mental representations may boost our effect, a mismatch involving plosives and inaction-related words might hinder it.

Second, the current research did not test the effect of plosives within the brand name of the service provider which failed on further customers' behavior towards the brand. Thus, to prove that using plosives in brand names to compensate for perceived control loss may help service organizations limit the adverse consequences of service failure in terms of satisfaction and loyalty for example, future research should seek to investigate whether brand names containing plosives better resist to negative consequences from their service failure.

In conclusion, when making decisions regarding brand names, managers need to consider the sensory information that consumers may extract from them, and specifically the use of plosives to anticipate low control states inherent to service failure.

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Fig. 1. Effect of perceived control on preference for a plosive-based brand name moderated by control restoration (Study 2).

