



## **Department of Management**

Course of **Retail and Service Experience Marketing**

**“Is the ‘s worth it? Analysing the effect of the genitive form in a brand’s name and text-based logo on consumers.”**

Prof. Stefania Farace

**Supervisor**

Prof. Marco Querini

**Co-Supervisor**

ID 741351 Natasha Canedo Aldave

**Candidate**

**Academic Year 2021/2022**



## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Research Question.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature review .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>Data Collection.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Experimental Design .....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Stimuli.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Questionnaire .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<b>Chapter 4: Results .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>Study 1.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Study 2.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Study 3.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Theoretical Contributions .....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Managerial Implications.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Limitations and future research .....</i>	<i>29</i>
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>49</b>



**Table of elements (Tables)**

Table 1: Stimuli	19
Table 2: Questionnaire	20
Table 3: ANOVA Results Study 1	22
Table 4: Regressions & Sobel Test Study 2	23
Table 5: ANOVA Test Study 3	24
Table 6: ANOVA Test Study 3.1	25

**Table of figures**

Figure 1: Conceptual framework	8
Figure 2: Psychological Ownership vs. Consumer response Study	24



## Abstract

As competition and market saturation rises in today's economy, companies are ever more aware of the importance of intangibles assets and the impact they have on consumers, such as the company's brand name. This phenomenon has resulted in the rise of the multi-millionaire industry of name agencies in the past decade and companies paying thousands of dollars to select the appropriate name for their brand (Gabler 2015). Baring this in mind, an important question rises: If names have become such an important part of a company's branding strategy, are subtle modifications such as including the genitive or not affecting consumer response? After all, some of the most famous brands in the world have this small characteristic in common: McDonald's, Kellogg's and Jack Daniel's. To answer this question, the present study explored the effect this subtle modification had on consumers' purchase intention, brand attitude and word of mouth, revealing the genitive is an effective tool that positively impacts consumer response. In addition, since the genitive is used to convey possession, the present investigation revealed psychological ownership is one factor that enhances the effect the genitive has on consumer response, unlike previous literature this study applied a holistic approach to evaluate this construct including the relevant dimensions of self-investment, intimate knowledge and control. Lastly the study filled a gap in previous research by analysing the role product nature plays in the relationship between the genitive and consumer response. The distinction was made between products belonging to the sharing economy from traditional ones, since psychological ownership is a highly debated subject that has shaped the sharing economy theory. This study revealed that consumers' brand attitude was positively impacted by the presence of the genitive in a brand name when products belonged to the sharing economy. The results of this research offers guidance to managers and sustains the positive effects including the genitive has in consumers to better inform strategic decisions in name selection.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

What do Hershey's, McDonald's, and Victoria's Secret have in common? The similarity is in the configuration of their brand name. These are a few examples of brands that choose to include a genitive in their text-based logo. A genitive is a grammatical case used to denote possession or close association (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). This grammatical form is not limited to English, it is also present in Slavic, Finnic, and Arabic languages (Language Humanities, 2022). Some companies choose to integrate the genitive in their text-based logo (e.g., Kohl's, Tod's) while others don't (e.g., Walmart, Zara). Should this small modification be a concern for companies? Firms that wish to change their branding elements should be aware of the potentially negative consequences logo and name modifications could have on consumers; users with a higher degree of brand loyalty tend to negatively respond to branding modifications such as logo re-designs (Walsh et al., 2012). After all the brand's name and logo are the consumer's first introduction to a product and they affect their first associations, and expectations (Aaker and Keller 1990). Organizations spend large amounts of resources to create and redesign their names and logos (Rubel, 1994). An example is the case of Wegmans, the American supermarket chain. It was originally named Wegman's when founded in 1916, the genitive was dropped a few decades later to simplify their logo. The company calculated that going back to include the genitive in their branding will be accompanied by a large investment, changing the sign on the front of each store would cost \$500,000 alone (Business Insider, 2012). Since the main purpose of the genitive form is to convey possession, it transmits a message that might have a potential impact on the consumer's perceived psychological ownership. Psychological ownership is defined as the feelings of possession that can occur even without the presence of legal ownership (Pierce, et al, 2003). In previous research, psychological ownership has been proven to act as a trigger in consumers for greater product benefit expectations and a positive attachment to brands (Li et al., 2020) However, with the rise of access-based products and markets such as the sharing economy, the way consumers respond to ownership has drastically changed (Xiao et al., 2019). A sharing economy is characterized by the exchange of assets that are collectively shared through platforms, allowing users to have access to, instead of owning products for traditional use (PWC, 2014). In a world where "access" is more valued than "ownership", is it beneficial for companies to pursue psychological ownership? Enhancing psychological ownership in individuals may be detrimental in this scenario, since the main motives users engage in the sharing economy, besides economic incentives, include a sense of community, interaction among individuals and knowledge sharing (Gazzola et al., 2018).

In the following research we will analyse how does the use of the genitive form (present vs. absent) in a company's name and text-based logo affect the consumers' purchase intention, brand



attitude and word of mouth and to what extent this relationship is affected by psychological ownership. Lastly, the research will determine if the product nature (present in the sharing economy vs. absent in the sharing economy) acts as a moderator between the use of the genitive and positive consumer response. This study will focus on the English form of the genitive, which is used by adding an apostrophe and the letter “s” after a noun or name.

### **Research questions:**

- Q1:** How does the use of the genitive form (present vs. absent) in a company’s name and text-based logo affect consumers’ response in terms of purchase intention, brand attitude and word of mouth?
- Q2:** To what extent is the relationship between consumer response and the use of the genitive in a brand name affected by psychological ownership?
- Q3:** Is the nature of the product (present in the sharing economy vs. absent in the sharing economy) a relevant moderator between the use of the genitive and positive consumer response?

The study of this construct is relevant because brands that use the genitive form in their brand name have a significant presence in today’s market. Amongst the brands included in the “Amazon Best Sellers List” in ten different product categories, the use of the genitive form was present in up to 22% of the brands’ names in some categories, a case in point being the brands Hunt’s and Rao’s present in the jarred tomatoes category (Amazon Best Sellers, 2021). Moreover, the use of the genitive has a potential effect on consumer response since possessive cues in linguistics have affective implications in individuals such as higher product recall and preference (Shi et al. 2011). Increasingly, companies have developed tactics and products directed to enhance psychological ownership in consumers (Hair, Barth, 2018). An example is the sweets manufacturer Mars Incorporated, giving consumers the chance to choose some features of their products, such as the M&M’s colour, to increase perceived ownership, resulting in an increase of customer demand (Forbes, 2022). Regardless of this positive precedent, in some markets the role of psychological ownership and its potential benefits are a source of debate, such is the case of the sharing economy. This market configuration has disrupted several industries and it’s ever-growing, its estimated value for 2025 is expected to rise to 335 billion dollars (PWC, 2014). Is it smart for players in this market structure to ignite psychological ownership in consumers? A study made to compare consumer attitude towards car-sharing services vs. privately owned cars, demonstrated that individuals with a lower perceived psychological ownership presented a higher preference for shared-car services. In contrast, individuals with a higher degree of psychological ownership preferred to use privately owned cars



regardless of the practical benefits of the sharing economy (Paundra et al., 2017). With these antecedents it's only natural to wonder if a change as small as the genitive may cause a ripple effect in the consumer's behaviour and perceived psychological ownership.

There is a vast amount of research devoted to analysing the effects of subtle differences in name and logo configurations have on consumers' psychological and behavioural response. An example being the demonstration that a wider interstitial dimension between letters in text-based logos negatively affects consumers safety perceptions of a product (Hagtvedt, 2021). Another example is a study that revealed that linguistically feminine generates in consumers higher brand performance perceptions compared to linguistically masculine names (Pogacar et al., 2021). Despite the thorough material available dedicated to the relationship between brand names and consumer response, the research specifically devoted to the effect of the inclusion of the genitive form in a brand name and consumer behaviour is rather narrow.

One relevant contribution to this subject (Khamitov, and Puzakova, 2018) explores the impact possessive cues and identity markers on anthropomorphized brand names (e.g., "Charlie's" and "Michael's") have on consumer perception. It shows that the presence of possessive cues in human-like brand names leads to more positive brand evaluations and a higher purchase intention in consumers. Although these results encourage the use of the genitive, the study only considers the use of first names, leaving out the analysis of brands using the genitive in non-individual names and surnames, which are prevalent in the market such as Hershey's and Women's Wear Daily.

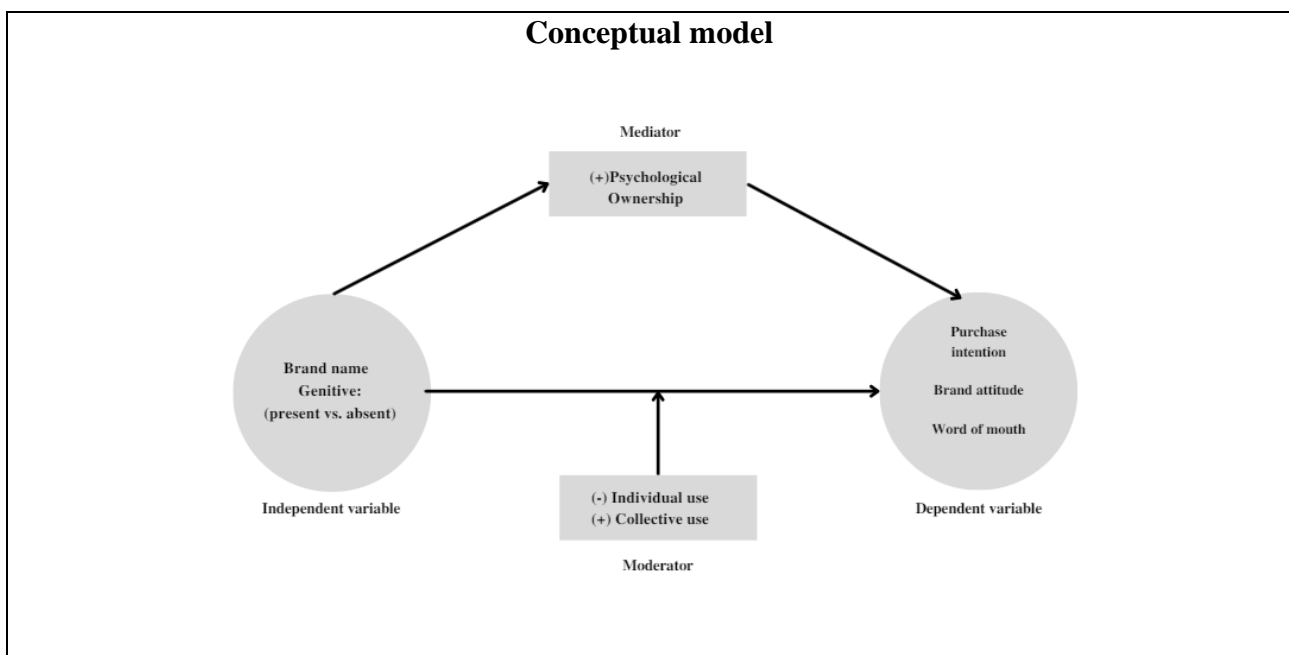
Most relevant to the present investigation, there is a study based on how the dynamic between the presence of the genitive form in a brand name affects the consumer's inferred control towards the brand and product choice. This paper (Khamitov, 2022). determined that the presence of the genitive in a brand name signals a significant level of control and involvement of the company's owner in the organizational activities. The perception of a higher control by the owner in the company positively impacts consumer evaluations of brand quality. This sense of owner's control increases consumers' perception of brand quality resulting in higher quality expectations and an increased purchase intention This study gives us helpful insights on the effects the genitive has on the consumer. However, the author narrows perceived ownership as a response to the consumer's evaluation of actual individual ownership and control within a company's structure, disregarding other dimensions that could affect psychological ownership including efficacy, self-identity, and belongingness (Dawkins et al. 2017). Building from this prior work, the current study will identify the relevant implications the presence of the genitive in a brand name and text-based logo has on perceived psychological ownership and consumer behaviour.

The aim of this study is to increase the scope of possibilities of name configurations whilst



expanding the factors considered to determine psychological ownership. In no previous studies, the nature of the product was considered to evaluate the interplay between the genitive form in a brand name and consumers' purchase intention. To evaluate this, the distinction in product nature will be based on products and services that are present in the sharing economy vs. not present in the sharing economy. From this point onwards, the former category will be referred to as “collectively used products”, defined as products and services that are temporarily used by a set of different consumers with the aid of a platform that connects users and providers, these products belong to the access-based market structure (Deloitte, 2016). The latter product range would be referred to as “individually used products”, defined as products and services that are not collectively shared amongst users and are legally owned by one consumer for their individual use with non-temporary access. These products belong to ownership-based market structures (Deloitte, 2016). The following figure represents the conceptual model of this study:

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**





## Chapter 2: Literature review

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" is a famous quote from William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. With this phrase the protagonist, Juliet, argues that Romeo's name is not relevant or representative of his character or value, understating the importance of names in our culture and society. Although this metaphor might have worked perfectly in a tragic love story of the 16th century, the same cannot be said for today's marketplace. Much to Juliet's chagrin, names are a fundamental part of our existence, they are a representative part of our identity and allow people to form assumptions and draw conclusions without actively trying to, about someone or something (Dyer, 2021). This phenomenon does not apply to individuals exclusively, it also applies to the products we consume. Shakespeare's allegory is impossible to apply in today's commercial arena. Brand names can create initial expectations about product's efficacy and provide a guarantee of quality, letting consumers know what they can expect from product performance (Nielsen, 2021). This statement poses the question: "If it is true that brand names play such a key role in a firm's identity, are changes as small as adding an "s" to a brand's name and text-based logo a determining factor of product performance and financial success?"

A brand's name serves the purpose of identifying certain goods, services or entities. They create distinctive images and associations in the minds of stakeholders, generating brand equity and economical value for companies (ISO, 2021). Brand equity is defined as the marketing and financial value consumers associate to a brand in the market regardless of the intrinsic benefits or functional performance a product may have (Wood, 2000). Brand equity is composed of four different factors, brand loyalty, perceived brand quality, brand associations and most relevant to this study: brand name (Xiao et al., 2014). Brand equity answers the question: What makes customers want to pay more for some brands than others? Developing brand equity helps companies increase their financial performance and their perceived value in the eyes of customers (Forbes, 2022). In a nutshell, the possession of an appropriate brand name can influence positively brand equity, impacting the outcomes of a company's marketing efforts in a way that would not occur with a different brand name (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010).

A product's name inevitably creates in potential consumers initial associations, expectations, and impressions about the product's performance and benefits, affecting their purchasing decision (Aaker and Keller 1990). Brand names are not isolated elements of the marketing strategy of firms; names combined with logo shape, type font and colour constitute the brand's image and should be chosen carefully (Batra et al., 1993) In addition, brand names are considered the branding element that consumers are most exposed to, making it the fundamental part of brand image (De Chernatony, 2010). The concept of brand image and its visual identity is relevant because they foster competitive



advantage for firms, capturing a larger market share, plus, a positive brand image means consumers associate a product with both tangible and intangible benefits (Phillips, 2014). Bearing this in mind, name selection should not be a secondary task for managers, even the smallest change can affect consumer response, since names are the first touchpoint between a user and a company, just as with humans, users involuntarily form assumptions and evaluations of a product, just from its name (Aaker and Keller 1990).

There exists a vast body of literature dedicated to analysing consumer response to subtle changes in name and logo configurations. When it comes to visual elements, according to a study (Bottomley, 2006) subtle changes including the choice of certain colours can affect the users' perception of a brand, for example the use of the colour black in logos signals to consumers expensiveness, while red is associated with high quality products. Another subtle visual modification that affects consumer response is the interstitial space between text-based logos (the distance between individual logo elements, particularly text). A study revealed that consumers perceive a product as "safer" when the text-based logo has a lower interstitial space (Hagtvedt, 2021). The last example is a study (Lieven et al., 2015) that explores how shape and font type affect perceived masculinity and femininity of a brand and ultimately increase or diminish brand equity in the eyes of consumers depending on the nature of the product.

Another branch of studies in the field of subtle name and text-based logo modifications that has been repeated in literature are linguistic modifications. Linguistic techniques have become powerful devices used to create successful brand names and persuade the consumers' purchasing decision. Some popular techniques include the use of semantic metaphors, which are used to transmit evident product benefits or values through the brand name. An example of this is the luxury automobile company, Jaguar, which aims to convey values of speed, elegance and power through its brand name generating positive associations in the consumer's mind towards the product and ultimately increasing brand equity (Piller, 1999). Another example is the use of morphological elements in brand names to persuade consumer behaviour. To exemplify this concept literature points out the bed company Craftmatic, by adding the suffix "-matic" to its brand name, it recalls the adjective pragmatic, which hints the consumer one of the product attributes of practicality the brand wishes to convey, affecting positively consumer response (Luu, 2015).

Another study (Xu & Liu, 2017) focusing on linguistic devices, more specifically orthographic elements, describes the impact the use of upper case vs. lower case in text-based logos have on consumer response. The evidence of this study demonstrated that using lower case letters in text-based logos, compared to uppercase letters, increase consumer perception of brand friendliness and accessibility; on the contrary when upper case letters are present in a brand's name and text-based



logo, users perceive products with a higher degree of brand authority and strength. This phenomenon is even more visible with simple logo designs and name configurations, since complexity deludes the effect of upper vs. lower case implementation. The study (Xu & Liu, 2017) suggest that firms can convey specific values in consumers through the adjustment of letter selection, regardless of correct or incorrect spelling, recommending brands that are present in industries where authority and safety are desirable attributes, for example airlines, to positively impact brand awareness and perception in consumers.

The literature review shows that phonetic symbolism is also a relevant area of linguistics to take into consideration when constructing a brand name. A case in point being phonetic alliterations, which occur when two initial word sounds (also known as phonemes) are similar, present in brand names like Coca-Cola are applied to create easier brand names that contribute to higher brand recall (e.g., Pogacar, et al., 2007). Prior research suggests that the inclusion of specific vowels and consonants carry symbolic meanings, making specific sounds more favourable compared to others, meaning different vowels and sounds are responsible for transmitting different product qualities and benefits. This phenomenon was demonstrated in a study dedicated to exploring the effect of vowel sounds by a front versus back vowel distinction in user response. This vowel distinction refers to where the tongue is positioned when pronouncing a word, using the words mal (back vowel sound) vs. mil (front vowel sound). The study proved that front vowel sounds tend to be associated with products with smaller and faster dimensions and the back-vowel sound with products with larger and slower dimensions (Sapir, 1929). The previous examples are an effort by the author to highlight the evidence that sustains the importance of linguistic elements as factors to be considered when creating and modifying brand names and text-based logos, whilst demonstrating their effect on consumer response and behaviour.

The last example of linguistic elements to be modified in name configuration is the centrepiece of this research, the use of the genitive, a grammatical cue under the umbrella of possessive nouns. Genitives are linguistic elements that belong to syntax, the set of rules needed to ensure a sentence is grammatically correct, and semantics, how lexicon, grammatical structure and tone are used to convey a specific meaning (Shumaker, 1975). This grammatical form is used to show possession in several languages, including Slavic, Finnic, German and Arabic (Language Humanities, 2022). For the purpose of this research, the author will focus on the English form of the genitive. which is constructed by adding an “’s” to the end of a singular noun or name or simply by adding an apostrophe at the end of the word in the case of plural nouns. Adding a genitive to a brand name is nothing new, it is a widely used naming configuration that has a significant presence in today’s marketplace. A previous study conducted to analyse 1,657 brand names present in the YouGov Brand Index data set



shows 8% of brand names included a genitive (YouGov, 2019). In addition, some of the most popular brand names in the world include this grammatical cue. This was demonstrated by Interbrand in 2021, where three out of 100 brands listed in the “Best Global Brands Index” (McDonald’s, Kellogg’s and Jack Daniel’s) include the genitive form in their name and text-based logo (Interbrand, 2021) this Index leaves out countless globally successful brands including Victoria’s Secret, Hershey’s and Levi’s. Despite the prevalence of this name configuration in today’s market, the field of study that explores the potential effect the presence of linguistic elements that convey possession, including the use of the genitive (present vs. not present), in a brand name and text-based logo have on consumers is rather narrow. It has been demonstrated in literature that the use of linguistic elements that convey possession in product names generate affective responses in consumers (Shi et al. 2011); according to this study when a product’s name includes possessive pronouns users have different responses towards them. Participants in these studies presented a higher preference and product recall towards the items that included the possessive pronoun “my” in their name. In contrast when products lack possessive pronouns in their names, or they use other possessive pronouns such as “his” the positive response is attenuated. This study makes it clear that including linguistic techniques that convey possession affect consumer behaviour. However, it leaves two questions open: How exactly does it affect specific responses such as purchase intention, brand attitude and word of mouth? And most relevant to this study, how do other possessive linguistic cues such as the presence of the genitive in a brand name (vs. not present) affect consumer behaviour?

To answer these questions the most significant body of literature has been led by Professor Mansur Khamitov. His first study on this subject explores the role that the genitive (present vs. not present) in a brand name has in consumers. The investigation consisted of three studies in which participants were exposed to publicity of different products and services with anthropomorphized brand names alternating the presence of the genitive. The stream of studies revealed that the inclusion of the genitive in anthropomorphized brand names leads to a more positive consumer response. In addition, this research demonstrated that the presence of a positive identity marker acts as a mediator in the relationship between the inclusion of the genitive (vs. not present) in a brand name and positive consumer response. The author attributes this response to psychological ownership and linguistic theories that include self-identity and self-control. In conclusion, users presented a higher purchase intention, positive brand evaluation and word-of-mouth when exposed to products that included the genitive in their brand name vs. when it was absent (ex. Charlie’s vs. Charlie). This effect is enhanced when the brand names include a positive identity marker (ex. Elegant Charlie’s vs. Elegant Charlie).

A more recent investigation that presents further evidence on the effects the presence of the genitive has in specific consumer responses (Khamitov, 2022) analyses how the genitive (present vs.



not present) in brand names affects consumer brand preference and choice from the perspective of one psychological ownership ramification: perceived control. For this investigation, eight experimental studies were made to evaluate the effect the presence of the genitive in a brand name had in the consumer's purchase intention, perceived brand quality and inferred owner control. The results of this studies demonstrated that consumers respond positively to the genitive (present vs. not present) in human-like brand names, leading to a higher product expenditure and purchasing intention. According to the author, this occurs because the presence of the genitive in a brand name generates in consumers a higher inferred control and involvement from the business owner in the company's operations, which translates into a higher perceived quality, and an overall positive brand attitude in consumers. The study also mentions this effect is attenuated by a higher brand longevity, meaning brands that have a longer presence in the market are not equally benefited from the inclusion of the genitive in their name. In a nutshell, the presence of the genitive in a brand name signals a higher involvement by the company owner compared to when it is absent, this leads consumers to a higher quality perception, which in turn, generates a higher willingness to buy the product and it increases the amount of money they are willing to pay for it. These studies shed a light on the effects the genitive has on consumer response, however by focusing on anthropomorphized they are not truly representative of the market today. Even if several brand names include human-like names or surnames (ex. "Trader Joe's" and "Victoria's Secret") they don't fully encompass the spectrum of brand names with the genitive present in the market today, which include fictional names, adjectives or nouns plus a genitive (ex. Children's place and Women's Wear Daily).

Even with this limitation, the previous evidence suggests that the inclusion of linguistic elements that convey possession, more specifically, the genitive, in a brand name have positive results in consumers. They can be a useful tool for companies to enhance brand quality perceptions in users, as well as signalling positive attributes such as higher quality and better performance, leading to a positive brand attitude, higher purchase intention and word of mouth, supporting our first hypothesis:

**H1: The presence of the genitive form in a brand name (vs. not present) leads to a positive brand attitude, a higher purchase intention and positive word of mouth.**

Since the primary function of the genitive is to signal ownership towards a product, an interesting take on this topic is exploring the role psychological ownership plays in the relationship between the genitive (present vs. not present in a brand name) and consumer response. Before further analysing this construct it's imperative to properly define psychological ownership, which refers to "the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is 'theirs'. Psychological ownership tries to answer the question "What do consumers identify as being theirs or part of who they are?". Consumers that experience psychological ownership think, believe and are



aware of their target of ownership as part of an extension of themselves, this is also accompanied by emotional and affective attachments (Pierce, et al., 2001). Legal ownership is not necessarily a prerequisite for psychological ownership, in fact, some individuals experience this phenomenon for abstract goods such as sports teams and ideas (Verkuyten and Martinovic 2017). The elements that form psychological ownership include perceived control, self-investment, and intimate knowledge; meaning that people develop feelings of ownership in three main paths: perceived control over a target, investing themselves in a target, and coming to intimately know a target (Pierce et al., 2003). Psychological ownership is an asset that can lead to benefits in consumer response, such as higher value perception; this happens because when consumers “psychologically own” a product they transfer traits of their identity to a specific good, this phenomenon coupled with emotional attachment towards the product, results in an increased perceived value of the products (Weiss and Johar 2016). In line with the reported literature, fostering psychological ownership in consumers is a successful tool to persuade consumers to acquire more products, at premium prices, and even increase positive word of mouth among their friends (Peck & Shu, 2018). Prior research suggests that overall, when consumers experience psychological ownership towards a good it translates into higher consumer demand, willingness to pay, customer satisfaction, relationships, positive word of mouth, and competitive resistance (Morewedge, et al., (2020).

Previous studies (Khamitov 2018, 2022), attempt to explain the reason why psychological ownership plays a key role in the dynamics between the use of the genitive in a brand name (present vs. not present) and consumer response. The first study (Khamitov 2018) shows evidence of consumers preferring brand names that include the genitive and an identity market (a positive adjective that hints consumers about the company owner’s identity (Elegant Charlie’s vs. Elegant Charlie). This phenomenon can be explained through an analogy using the common saying “everything looks like its owner” meaning that individuals are likely to view others’ owned items as extensions of their owner’s identity. In addition, when users see brands with or without a genitive (“Charlie’s” vs “Charlie”), the former signals to them a higher sense of control by the company owner. This sense of control “spills” to the user; meaning they perceive the actual company owner is more involved in the company operations which intuitively translates in higher product quality and positive associations.

A second study (Khamitov, 2022) illustrates the role psychological ownership plays in the dynamics between the inclusion of the genitive in a brand name and the consumer’s inferred control. The evidence of this study reveals that inferred control is the main factor that enhances the positive effect the presence of genitive in a brand name has on consumers. According to the author this happens because combining the use of human-like names and the genitive in brand names signal



individual or collective ownership of a specific entity. This ownership is perceived by individuals as companies presenting a high level of control by their owners due to the perception that people seek ownership to increase the influence and control, they exert on a particular entity (Dittmar, 1992). This sense of owner's control enhances consumers' inferences of brand quality and, thus, brand preferences, which results in higher quality expectations and an increased purchase intention (Khamitov, 2022). The previously mentioned studies support our hypothesis that perceived psychological ownership increases the intensity of the relationship between the presence of the genitive in a brand's name and text-based logo and positive consumer response. Which leads the author to generate the second hypothesis of this research.

One limitation of these past studies is that the variables affecting the intensity of the relationship between the use of the genitive and consumer response were constrained to individual elements of psychological ownership such as perceived control, instead of the holistic construct. Particularly, the second research narrows down perceived control to the consumer's evaluation of actual individual control by the company's owner within the firms' operations, disregarding other dimensions that could affect other psychological ownership elements such as self-investment, and intimate knowledge (Pierce et al., 2003).

**H2: A higher presence of psychological ownership towards a product, enhances the effect the genitive form in a brand name (present vs. not present) has on consumer's brand attitude, purchase intention and willingness to share with others.**

There are key questions and notions that are still not discussed in the literature regarding the effect the genitive has on consumer response. In previous research (Khamitov 2018, & 2022), although the effect of possessive cues held across multiple product and service categories in the studies, future work may examine the variations in the phenomenon dependent upon product category to reveal further insights. An example suggested by the author include luxury brands, that have few exceptions of names including the genitive (ex. TOD'S and Christie's). One market practice or type of product mentioned briefly in the literature is co-creation, which is a product or service design process in which input from consumers plays a central role from start to finish. Although this is a relevant trend present in the market today, it is only a practice utilized by some companies, not necessarily a business model, market configuration or disruption in the current marketplace. Even if the effect using the genitive has on the context of co-creation is an interesting topic to analyse from the psychological ownership perspective, there are market trends with a wider presence and scope where psychological mechanisms, particularly ownership, play a key role to understand the underlying motivations of consumers to engage in a specific market dynamic, no other market exemplifies this more than the sharing economy (Graul et al. 2022). Based on these limitations, the



author constructed the last hypothesis of the current research, whilst linking the relevant streams of knowledge for this study: name configuration, psychological ownership and our next field of study, the sharing economy.

Technological innovations are abruptly changing consumption habits, especially because consumption is evolving from a market structure where people have legal ownership of goods and services to access-based models such as the sharing economy (Eckhardt et al. 2019). In fact, the theory of psychological ownership has shaped the sharing economy literature, since this market configuration disrupts all previous conceptions of ownership in traditional markets (Pasimeni, 2020). Sharing economy is defined as: “An economic system that is based on people sharing possessions and services, either for free or for payment, usually through the use of online platforms” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). The sharing economy has multiple benefits and has addressed market failures to improve market efficiency, such as the exploitation of unused assets, lowering transaction costs between users and providers and strengthening trust through collective feedback systems (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). However, for all the benefits sharing economy brings, it poses several threats to building psychological ownership. According to previous research, users engaging in sharing economies experience a lower sense of psychological ownership compared to market structures based on legal ownership (Demirdag and Shu, 2020). This phenomenon can be explained by two main factors, the underlying fractional ownership that is prevalent in the sharing economy makes consumer feel unattached to the products they consume, since they perceive they are “borrowing” products that many users will use instead of owning them. A study revealed that consumers feel equal levels of psychological ownership for goods they are solely evaluating for purchase and collectively used goods (Bagga, et al., 2019). Another factor that diminishes psychological ownership in this market configuration is the temporality of consumption, the possible window of use of a product or service directly impacts if consumers perceive a product as “theirs”. When engaging in the sharing economy consumers obviously expect their ownership rights and possession of goods to be temporary, which threatens their perceived psychological ownership towards collectively used products (Demirdag and Shu, 2020).

The previous literature might make the reader wonder: In the world where “sharing” is more important than “owning”, is it worth it for firms to pursue psychological ownership? Contrary to what the reader may believe, the body of literature regarding this topic states that creating psychological ownership in consumers is beneficial for players in the sharing economy. One of the benefits include the protection of the shared goods, individuals that present a lower psychological ownership towards a product tend to care less about them compared to when they legally own them. This can be seen on a quotidian example, shared bikes are vandalized, thrown into rivers and incorrectly parked, while





legally owned bikes receive a higher care by users. To fight against this issue, managers can highlight the benefits consumer acquire when engaging in the sharing economy, including lower monetary and non-monetary costs or increase using periods to counterbalance the detrimental effects of low psychological ownership. (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Another benefit that scholars have identified is increased customer satisfaction. A previous study analysed user experience for Uber rides and Airbnb stays; it revealed that consumers perceived the service as less enjoyable due to a lower presence of psychological ownership. To revert this effect, one element of psychological ownership, intimate knowledge, was manipulated by informing consumers more about the product benefits and service modalities to increase intimate knowledge and ultimately enhancing perceived psychological ownership in users. After this, users evaluated the experience as more satisfactory and even gave higher tips and better reviews to hosts and drivers using the platform (Demirdag and Shu, 2020). The previously mentioned stream of research is fundamental to the formulation of the third and last hypothesis of this investigation:

**H3: The impact the presence of the genitive in the brand's name has in consumer's purchase intention is affected by the nature of the product (collective vs. individual use), such that products meant to be collectively used are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to individually used products.**



## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Data Collection

An online survey was the instrument chosen to test the hypothesis mentioned in this study. Respondents were recruited from social media posts and live scouting in the cities of Rome and Milan. The program utilized to create and distribute the surveys was the software Qualtrics. The survey was launched during August 2022. Only participants who had an English proficiency above B1 (Intermediate level) were considered in the data collection due to the importance of the correct understanding of the function of the genitive. A control question regarding the colour of the background of the stimuli was included to exclude bots and passive participants from the data collection. No participants were excluded from the sample since they fulfilled the requirements.

### Experimental design

The following hypothesis were tested in a set of three studies (n=200 English-speakers) The experiment had a between-subjects design in which participants were equally divided and were shown a different randomly assigned stimuli of a staged advertisement for a clothing company:

**H1: The presence of the genitive form in a brand name (vs. not present) leads to positive brand attitude, a higher purchase intention and positive word of mouth in consumers.**

**H2: A higher presence of psychological ownership towards a product, enhances the effect the genitive form in a brand name (present vs. not present) has on consumer's brand attitude, purchase intention and willingness to share with others.**

**H3: The impact the presence of the genitive in the brand's name has in consumer's purchase intention, brand attitude and word of mouth is affected by the nature of the product (collective vs. individual use), such that products meant to be collectively used are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to individually used products.**

### Stimuli





Participants were randomly assigned one of four images alternating between the configuration of the name of the company in terms of the genitive ("Cinderella's Closet" vs Cinderella Closet) and the nature of the product (collective vs. individual use) which was displayed in a small description of the brand within the advertisement.

The name of the staged company was chosen because it represents a wider scope of names compared to extensive studies focusing on anthropomorphized names of companies that include the



genitive (Khamitov, 2022). Attempting to build a compromise between anthropomorphized names, which represent most of the cases of company names presenting a genitive in the current market (Amazon Best Sellers, 2021), and other variations of name and logo configuration including the use of the genitive with nouns, adjectives and abstract constructs such as nouns, fictional characters and places to better represent the conditions of the real-life market (i.e. Domino’s Pizza, Mini Moo’s and Lands’ End). To differentiate the stimuli between individual vs. collective use in the stimuli this investigation drew inspiration from marketing techniques applied in products and services that belong to sharing economies. A small phrase in the advertisement was included to briefly describe the characteristics of the company, its products and operations. The stimuli designed for collective use highlighted important characteristics of this market structure, such as temporary access, transfer of economic value, platform mediation, expanded consumer role, and crowdsourced supply (Rindfleisch, 2019); while the individual use advertisement resembled a more traditional market structure without a platform mediation and the exclusion of temporary access. The following table shows the set of advertisement shown to participants in this experiment:

**Table 1: Stimuli**

Genitive/Product Nature	Collective	Individual
<b>Present</b>		
<b>Not Present</b>		



## Questionnaire

The survey contained three blocks of questions using a five-item Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) to evaluate (1) level of psychological ownership towards the brand, (2) brand attitude, (3) purchase intention, and (4) willingness to give a positive word of mouth. This study used as example previous investigations that measured the above-mentioned dimensions; slightly adapting them to the context of the current investigation. The elements that form psychological ownership include perceived control, self-investment, and intimate knowledge (Pierce et al., 2018). To design the questions regarding self-investment a scale (Wetherbe, 2006) was employed to evaluate the level of willingness to invest both monetary and non-monetary resources, such as money, time, feelings, among others, to develop a bond with the brand, modifying the scale to adapt to both traditional brick & mortar companies and online platforms, unlike the original scale that is based solely on websites. Perceived control was assessed combining previous research (Kwon, 2020) and (Khamitov, 2022) to include perspectives of both individual sense of control and inferred owner control towards products and companies; slightly adapting the wording to the context of sharing platforms. Intimate knowledge was measured drawing inspiration from previous research (Harvard Business Review, 2018) that defines intimate knowledge as customers believing they know every facet of a product or brand so well that they have a special, unique relationship with it. Adapting the questions to evaluate the participants' "perceived knowledge" of the brand (Harvard Business Review, 2018).

To analyse participants' brand attitude and purchase intention, questions applied in previous studies (Spears et. al., 2004) were used to evaluate these dimensions, focusing mainly on brand desirability, preference and willingness to buy. Lastly, to evaluate contestants' word of mouth questions were applied based on parameters suggested on previous research (Andrei, 2012) focusing on experiential word of mouth questions such as reviews after purchase. The following table shows the set of questions asked to consumers to evaluate the above-mentioned criterion.

**Table 2: Questionnaire**

<p><b>Summary of the measured items</b></p> <p><b>Constructs</b></p> <p><b>Self-investment (Wetherbe, 2006)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you feel personally connected to this brand?</li> <li>2. Do you believe this brand could closely attend to your needs?</li> <li>3. Do you believe this brand could you personal attention?</li> <li>4. Would you be willing to spend time and effort to visit this store?</li> </ol>
---



5. Would you be interested in belonging to the community of users of this brand?

**Control**

**Individual control (Kwon, 2020)**

6. If you had the chance to visit this store, do you believe you could choose freely which items to buy?
7. If you had the chance to visit this store, do you believe you could have a great deal of control on your visiting experience? (ex. browse freely around the store, try on products, talk to customer service)

**Inferred control (Khamitov, 2022)**

8. Do you believe all decisions regarding the business of this brand are under high control?
9. To what extent do you believe that the person who owns this brand seems to be competent?

**Intimate knowledge (Harvard Business Review, 2018)**

10. Would you say this brand properly communicates its purpose to potential consumers?
11. Are you able to perceive the brand identity of this company?
12. Would you be interested in learning more about this brand?
13. Are you able to identify some values this brand has? (ex. contemporary, convenience, trendy)

**Brand attitude (Spears et. al., 2004)**

14. Would you describe this as a desirable brand?
15. Would you say this brand has positive attributes?
16. Would you prefer buying products from this brand instead of other clothing brands?

**Purchase intention (Spears et. al., 2004)**

17. I intend to purchase products from this brand in the future.
18. I will be willing to spend more on products from this brand than products from other clothing brands.

**Word of mouth (Andrei, 2012)**

19. I will be willing to recommend this brand to other people.
20. My feedback and reviews of this brand would be positive



## Chapter 4: Results

### Study one

**H1: The presence of the genitive form in a brand name (vs. not present) leads to a positive brand attitude, a higher purchase intention and positive word of mouth in consumers. (n=200)**

The participants' results were submitted to a one-way ANOVA to test the effect the presence of the genitive in a brand name has in consumers' brand attitude, purchase intention and word of mouth. The following table summarizes the results of the test:

**Table 3: ANOVA Test Results Study 1**

ANOVA Test Results Study 1			
Means			
<i>Groups</i>	Brand attitude	Purchase intention	Word of mouth
Genitive	3,87	3,71	3,85
No genitive	2,15	1,85	2,17
<i>P-value Between groups</i>		<i>Significance</i>	
Brand Attitude	8,1392E-26	Yes	
Purchase Intention	4,55808E-27	Yes	
Word of mouth	2,80508E-22	Yes	

With a perspective of [ $p_{\text{brandattitude}} = 8.1392\text{E-}26$ ], [ $p_{\text{purchaseintention}} = 4.55808\text{E-}27$ ] and [ $p_{\text{wom}} = 2.80508\text{E-}22$ ] all results of  $p < \alpha = 0.05$  which signals significance to accept an effect of the genitive in consumer response. It is concluded that participants responded in a more positive way to the advertisement that included the genitive, since the average for the three measures of consumer response were higher in the presence of the genitive ( $\mu_{\text{brandattitude}}=3.87$ ,  $\mu_{\text{purchaseintention}}=3.71$  and  $\mu_{\text{wom}}=3.85$ ) vs not present ( $\mu_{\text{brandattitude}}=2.15$ ,  $\mu_{\text{purchaseintention}}=1.85$  and  $\mu_{\text{wom}}=2.17$ ) therefore, hypothesis one is accepted.

### Study two

**H2: A higher presence of psychological ownership towards a product, enhances the effect the genitive form in a brand name (present vs. not present) has on consumer's brand attitude, purchase intention and willingness to share with others. (n=200)**

Since the first hypothesis of this research demonstrated that the presence of the genitive in a brand name has a positive effect in consumers, the second hypothesis aims to analyse if psychological ownership is a mediating variable in this relationship. In order to do this, a regression analysis paired



with a Sobel test to test mediation was applied to participants' response. The average responses of participants were grouped in blocks of psychological ownership (self-investment, control and intimate knowledge) and consumer response (brand attitude, purchase intention and word of mouth) to apply a regression analysis. In order to represent the independent variable (presence or absence of the genitive in a brand name) binary coding was used to represent the categorical values of the presence of the genitive (represented by 1) and the absence of the genitive (represented by 0) in the database used.

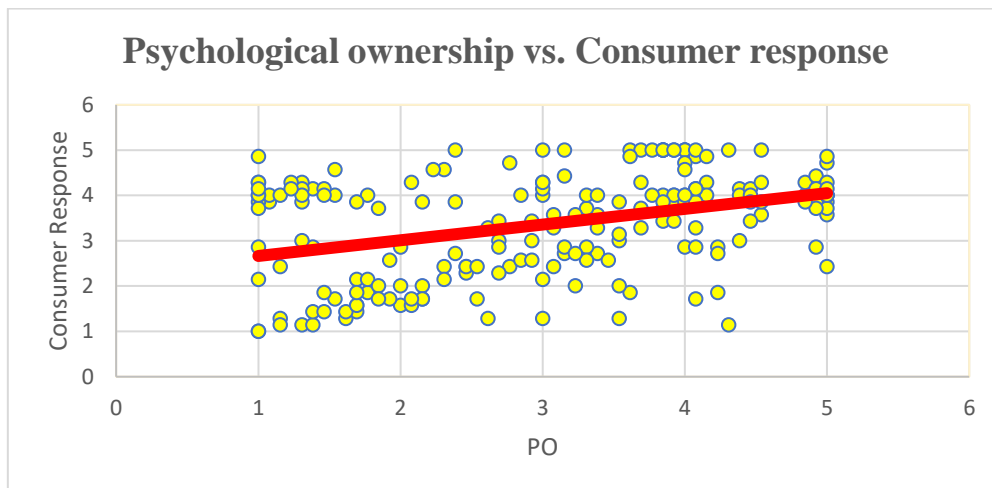
The first regression was conducted to investigate the effect between the independent (presence or absence of the genitive in a brand name) and the mediator variable (psychological ownership). The second regression investigated the effects of both the independent (genitive) and the mediator variable (psychological ownership) on the dependent variable (consumer response). After conducting both regression analysis, results were submitted to a Sobel test to determine whether the mediating effect is significant. The following table shows the results of both regressions (input for the Sobel test) and the Sobel test result for p value:

**Table 4: Regressions and Sobel Test Results Study 2**

Regressions and Sobel Test Results Study 2			
<i>Analysis</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Regression 1	1,63608669	0,132659041	2,6652E-26
Regression 2	0,19877114	0,077985834	0,0115709
Sobel Test			0.012558

With a value of  $p = 0.013$ ,  $p < \alpha = 0.05$ . We can determine that the presence of the genitive had a significant effect on psychological ownership, in turn, psychological ownership presented a significant effect on consumer response and there is a significant mediating effect of the presence of the genitive in a brand name and consumer response via psychological ownership. With this results our third hypothesis is accepted. The following scatter plot presents the mediating effect psychological ownership has on consumer response, clearly depicting a growing trend between the two variables further confirming our hypothesis:



**Figure 2: Psychological Ownership vs. Consumer response Study 2****Study three**

**H3: The impact the presence of the genitive in the brand's name has in consumer's purchase intention is affected by the nature of the product (collective vs. individual use), such that products meant to be collectively used are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to individually used products. (n=200)**

To test our third hypothesis, results were submitted to a two-factor ANOVA test (genitive: present vs. not present) & (individual products vs. collective products). The following table summarizes the results of the test:

**Table 5: ANOVA Test Study 3**

ANOVA Test Study 3						
Means						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Brand attitude</i>		<i>Purchase intention</i>		<i>Word of mouth</i>	
	<i>Collective</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Collective</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Collective</i>	<i>Individual</i>
Genitive	4,09	3,64	3,77	3,65	4,00	3,69
No genitive	2,03	2,27	1,75	2,04	2,06	2,28
<i>P-value Interaction</i>						
	<i>Significance</i>					
Brand Attitude	0,01349941	Yes				
Purchase Intention	0,16621991	No				
Word of mouth	0,08244123	No				





The two-factor analysis of the relationship between the variables of the genitive (present vs. not present) and the nature of the product (collective and individual) with consumer response presented no interaction, in the levers of purchase intention and word of mouth, [ $p_{\text{purchaseintention}} = 0.16$ ] and [ $p_{\text{wom}} = 0.082$ ] since  $p > \alpha = 0.05$ . However, for brand attitude, the interaction was present [ $p_{\text{brandattitude}} = 0.013$ ] since  $p < \alpha = 0.05$ . To go further in detail, in the case of brand attitude participants responded more favourably to collective products with the presence of the genitive ( $\mu_{\text{collective}}=4.093$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Individual}}=3.64$ ) vs not present ( $\mu_{\text{collective}}=2.03$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Individual}}=2.27$ ).

In addition, the level of psychological ownership was measured through a two-factor ANOVA test to deepen the analysis of this study and discover if this variable was affected by product nature, the results are shown in the following table:

**Table 6: ANOVA Test Study 3.1**

ANOVA Test Results Study 3.1							
Means							
Groups	Self-investment		Control		Intimate knowledge		
	Collective	Individual	Collective	Individual	Collective	Individual	
Genitive	3,99	3,46	4,25	3,82	4,14	3,61	
No genitive	1,91	2,08	2,28	2,60	2,11	2,27	
<i>P-value Interaction</i>		<i>Significance</i>					
Self-investment	0,013279695	Yes					
Control	0,005603177	Yes					
Intimate knowledge	0,019216894	Yes					

There existed an interaction in all levers of psychological ownership [ $p_{\text{selfinvestment}} = 0.01$ ], [ $p_{\text{control}} = 0.01$ ], [ $p_{\text{intimateknowledg}} = 0.02$ ]. In the three dimensions, the results were more favourable in the presence of the genitive for collectively used products [self-investment genitive present ( $\mu_{\text{collective}}=3.99$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Individual}}=3.46$ ) vs not present ( $\mu_{\text{collective}}=1.98$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Individual}}=2.08$ ), control (genitive present ( $\mu_{\text{collective}}=4.25$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Individual}}=3.82$ ) vs not present ( $\mu_{\text{collective}}=2.28$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Individual}}=2.6$ ) and intimate knowledge (genitive present ( $\mu_{\text{collective}}=4.14$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Individual}}=3.61$ ) vs not present ( $\mu_{\text{collective}}=2.11$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Individual}}=2.27$ ). These results reveal that psychological ownership is present when the genitive is included, and is also higher when the product is of collective use.

With the previous results the null hypothesis is accepted for the levers of purchase intention and word of mouth; and the study concludes that the effect the genitive has on consumers' brand



attitude is affected by the products' nature, such that products meant to be collectively used are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to the effect caused in individually used products. In addition, psychological ownership is higher in the presence of the genitive, especially when the products' nature is of collective use.



## Chapter 5: Discussion

Based on the results of the experiment, we can conclude from Study 1 and Study 2, that the inclusion of the genitive in a brand name systematically affects participants' brand attitude, purchase intention and word of mouth in a positive way. These results are consistent with previous literature that demonstrate a positive impact from the genitive in consumer response, such as brand ratings, when including possessive cues in brand names (Khamitov, 2022) & (Kachersky & Carnevale, 2015). The genitive also affects positively psychological ownership in consumers, which acts as a mediating variable between the presence of the genitive and consumer response.

To the author's knowledge there are no previous investigations that study the impact the relationship between the inclusion of the genitive has on consumer response correlated to a product's nature. The findings of study 3 demonstrate there is no interaction between the genitive and product nature affecting consumer response in the fields of purchase intention and word of mouth. This suggests that the positive impact the genitive has in consumers' purchase intention and word of mouth is indifferent to the nature of the product. Meaning that products from the sharing economy pursuing a rise in these parameters should not expect a significantly higher impact in the previously mentioned consumer responses from the inclusion of the genitive in their brand name.

An interaction was present between product nature and the presence of the genitive, and its effect on consumers' brand attitude; in which collectively used products are affected positively and in a larger extent by the presence of the genitive vs. individual ones, confirming that brand attitude is positively affected and to a larger extent by the genitive when products are collectively used. A further step on this analysis revealed that psychological ownership is also triggered when using the genitive in a more favourable way for collectively used products. The findings regarding response in brand attitude are consistent with previous research that states that attempts to generate psychological ownership in products and services belonging to the sharing economy leads to a more favourable consumer response (Xiao et al., 2019). Some benefits of these results include users experiencing higher levels of customer satisfaction, taking a higher care of the collectively used items and leaving more positive reviews of the product or service (Demirdag and Shu, 2020).

### Theoretical contributions

This research contributes to different realms of study. The first one being building investigation on the impact the modification of linguistic elements of brand names have in consumers (e.g., Lowrey and Shrum 2007) & (Xu & Liu, 2017) particularly complimenting the field dedicated to semantics in brand name configurations (Shi et al. 2011); further confirming that subtle modifications in name configurations do affect consumer response. This research adds relevant



insights on the few investigations made (Khamitov, 2018 & 2022) solely dedicated to understanding the effect the inclusion of the genitive in a brand name has on consumer response; confirming the genitive is a useful tool to enhance purchase intention, brand attitude and positive word of mouth in consumers. In contrast to the literature available, this research enlarges the scope of the name configurations available that include the genitive, distancing the research from traditional applications of the genitive in human-like names and surnames for company names to better represent the market's current conditions. Demonstrating that the effect of the genitive is held across non-traditional anthropomorphized brand names, which enlarges the possibilities of name configurations that could take advantage of the potential benefits of including the genitive in their brand name have in consumer response.

In the realm of psychological ownership this study integrates a more complex view of this construct, by adding to the dimension of control the two fundamental aspects of intimate knowledge and self-investment to assess the participants' perceived psychological ownership, demonstrating that the genitive is a successful tool to enhance psychological ownership and positively impact consumer response in all the dimensions considered for this study. With the previous statements the investigation enriches past research that focused solely on the psychological aspect of perceived individual control and inferred owner's control (Khamitov, 2022) by adding the two additional dimensions which have been proven beneficial to enhance companies' financial performance and foster competitive advantage (Harvard Business Review, 2018). The findings of this study contribute to previous investigation that focused on attempts to increase psychological ownership through marketing techniques that involve product and brand names in order to generate positive consumer responses (Stoner, et. al., 2017), revealing the genitive is a suitable practice to generate psychological ownership in consumers. Results of this research shed light on how managers could target specific aspects of psychological ownership through the inclusion of the genitive in their brand name.

In addition, to the authors' knowledge, this research is the first to complement previous literature by answering the call for exploration of the moderating effect product category has in the relationship between the use of the genitive and consumer response. In this case, product nature was distinction was made with products belonging to the sharing economy vs. traditional ones (collective vs. individual). By integrating this aspect to the study, the present work goes beyond previous literature related to psychological ownership in the sharing economy that suggests that generating psychological ownership in participants is beneficial for the company's performance (Xiao et al., 2019) & (Pasimeni, 2020) by demonstrating that the use of the genitive in a brand's name is one practical method that is beneficial for companies present in the sharing economy to generate positive



outcomes in all levers of psychological ownership and in at least one dimension of consumer response, brand attitude (Demirdag and Shu, 2020).

### **Managerial implications**

Managers must not underestimate the relevance of name selection for products and their brands. Findings from a data collection of several companies revealed that brand names are a fundamental factor contributing to the performance of a product (Kohli, 1997). Choosing the correct name for a brand is a heavy resource consuming task (Interbrand, 2021). As demonstrated in this study, and previous research, this very subtle modification can have an important impact on consumer preference; including an increase in purchase intentions of around 10% and the amount of money spent on a product by almost 110% (Khamitov, 2022).

Bearing in mind the importance of appropriate name selection, this study contains relevant insights showing that the inclusion of the genitive in a brand's name is a practice that managers can rely on to positively impact brand attitude, purchase intention and word of mouth in consumers. In addition, managers should be aware of the effects the genitive has on psychological ownership, which is a construct that can trigger potential clients to acquire products, at higher prices, and impact positively word of mouth which combined, result beneficial for the product and company's success (Harvard Business Review, 2018). In this study it was discovered that psychological ownership is one relevant factor that intensifies the effect the genitive has on consumers in the three fundamental pillars of self-investment, intimate knowledge and control. This study offers evidence for managers when approaching name selection, suggesting them that the inclusion of the genitive is beneficial and detailing in depth the effects it has on consumers to better inform their decisions.

Lastly, this study offers players within the sharing economy a proven tool to positively impact consumers' brand attitude and increase psychological ownership, which has been deemed beneficial for this type of product and services to generate engagement in users and increase product and service enjoyment (Baker et al., 2020)

### **Limitations and future research**

This study has several limitations. The first one being the fact that it's not viable to fully represent the scope of name configuration companies using the genitive have in the market today through a low number of stimuli. Even if the intention of the study was to shy away from the traditional application of the genitive in anthropomorphized names, there are further name configurations that were not included in this study that prevail in the market.

Another limitation is the impediment of capturing to its full extent the experience of the sharing economy for participants to evaluate. When participants engage in sharing economy they



access through a platform, that brings together owners and seekers, facilitating real-time interactions between them (Business Model Toolbox, 2021); although this experiment attempted to transmit the experience of the sharing economy through the stimuli applied, it's impossible to fully replicate the dynamic of this market structure, leaving out important elements of the sharing economy consumer journey that could further influence their response.

Lastly, even if the study aimed to include the fundamental aspects of psychological ownership (intimate knowledge, control and self-investment), there are other theoretical extensions such as belonging, self-efficacy, self-identity and emotional attachment (Avey et al.,2009) that could facilitate relevant insights on the outcomes of the inclusion of the genitive in consumer response and further inform managers for conscious redirection of efforts and resources in name selection.

The previous topic could be particularly interesting to explore more deeply; since zooming in specific constructs derived from psychological ownership such as emotional attachment and brand love have been proven to strongly influence beneficial behaviours in consumers such as brand loyalty and higher willingness to spend (Tibbals, 2019).

Another interesting stream of studies could be related to the effect the removal or inclusion of the genitive has in consumers when the company has a strong brand awareness. This is a relevant phenomenon happening in today's marketplace, case in point being the known brands of Wegmans, Barclays and Tim Hortons, which previously had the genitive in their brand name and text-based logo (DePuy, 2018). The re-branding decision should not be taken lightly, especially because loyal consumers are particularly sensitive to rebranding strategies. Resulting in detrimental effects to their perception and attitude towards the company's products, even when the changes are subtle, affecting the companies' revenues (Zetlin, 2021).

One final direction for further research may include the effect the genitive has in non-English speakers' consumer response or the application of the genitive in foreign names, to analyse if the genitive effect is still present in foreign markets, which could be significantly relevant for international companies wishing to establish themselves outside English-speaking markets, this is relevant because there currently are important players with international presence that include the genitive in their name, such as Jack Daniel's and Kellogg's (Interbrand, 2021).



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The previous study is an attempt to understand the effect a prevalent name configuration, the inclusion of the genitive in a brand name, has in consumers response. Aiming to respond the question: Does this subtle difference matter, and if does, in which way? In this regard, the contribution of the current research was to confirm that the genitive leads to positive consumer response and is prevalent with name configurations outside of common human-like names. Drawing from psychological ownership and linguistics streams of research, the study was able to identify the dimensions of self-investment, intimate knowledge and control as constructs exerting a mediating effect in the relationship between the use of the genitive in a brand name and consumer response, offering a more holistic and in-detail study of the relationship between psychological ownership and the impact of the genitive in consumer response.

One relevant contribution of this investigation is the examination of the variations in the phenomenon dependent upon product category. With the rise of the sharing economy, a market based on the disruption of ownership perceptions, this study combined the three pillars of this construct to demonstrate that the impact of the genitive in the brand's name has in consumer's brand attitude is affected by the nature of the product, such that products belonging to the sharing economy are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to traditional products.

Overall, this study serves as a guide to managers that are dwelling upon the decision to include or not the genitive in their brand names, sustaining the positive effect it has on consumer response and giving in detail the spilling consequences it conveys in psychological ownership, which could also add benefits to the company's performance. Finally, we demonstrate the inclusion of the genitive is a practical tool for managers operating within the sharing economy to positively impact consumer's brand attitude.



## Executive Summary

### Chapter 1: Introduction

What do Hershey's, McDonald's, and Victoria's Secret have in common? The similarity is in the configuration of their brand name. These are a few examples of brands that choose to include a genitive in their text-based logo. A genitive is a grammatical case used to denote possession or close association (Cambridge, 2022). Should the inclusion of this small modification be a concern for companies? Firms that wish to change their branding elements should be aware of the potentially negative consequences logo and name modifications could have on consumers, users with a higher degree of brand loyalty tend to negatively respond to branding modifications such as logo re-designs (Walsh et al., 2012). Since the main purpose of the genitive form is to convey possession, it transmits a message that might have a potential impact on the consumer's perceived psychological ownership, the feelings of possession that can occur even without the presence of legal ownership (Pierce, et al, 2003). In previous research psychological ownership has been proven to act as a trigger in consumers for greater product benefit expectations and a positive attachment to brands (Li et al., 2020) with the rise of access-based products and markets such as the sharing economy, the way consumers respond to ownership has drastically changed (Xiao et al., 2019).

The study of this construct is relevant because brands that use the genitive form in their brand name have a significant presence in today's market. Amongst the brands included in the "Amazon Best Sellers List" in ten different product categories, the use of the genitive form was present in up to 22% of the brands' names in some categories, a case in point being the brands Hunt's and Rao's present in the jarred tomatoes category (Amazon Best Sellers, 2021). Increasingly companies have developed tactics and products directed to enhance psychological ownership in consumers in the previous years (Hair, Barth, 2018). In some markets, the role of psychological ownership and its potential benefits are a source of debate, such is the case of the sharing economy. This market configuration has disrupted several industries and it's ever-growing, its estimated value for 2025 is expected to rise to 335 billion dollars (PWC, 2014). Is it smart for players in this market structure to ignite psychological ownership in consumers?

In the following research we will analyse how does the use of the genitive form (present vs. absent) in a company's name and text-based logo affect the consumers' purchase intention, brand attitude and word of mouth and to what extent this relationship is affected by psychological ownership. Lastly, the research will determine if the product nature (present in the sharing economy vs. absent in the sharing economy) acts as a moderator between the use of the genitive and positive consumer response. The research questions of this study are the following:





**Q1:** How does the use of the genitive form (present vs. absent) in a company's name and text-based logo affect consumers' response in terms of purchase intention, brand attitude and word of mouth?

**Q2:** To what extent is the relationship between consumer response and the use of the genitive in a brand name affected by psychological ownership?

**Q3:** Is the nature of the product (present in the sharing economy vs. absent in the sharing economy) a relevant moderator between the use of the genitive and positive consumer response?

## Chapter 2: Literature review

There is a vast amount of research devoted to analysing the effects of subtle differences in name and logo configurations have on consumers' psychological and behavioural response. Names are a fundamental part of our existence, they allow people to form assumptions and draw conclusions without actively trying to, about someone or something (Dyer, 2021). This phenomenon does not apply to individuals exclusively, it also applies to the products we consume. Brand names can create credibility to product efficacy and provide an assurance of quality, letting consumers know what they can expect from product performance (Nielsen, 2021). In a nutshell, the possession of an appropriate brand name can influence positively brand equity, impacting the outcomes of a company's marketing efforts in a way that would not occur with a different brand name (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). A brand's name is part of the company's brand image and its visual identity, which is relevant because they foster competitive advantage for firms, capturing a larger market share; in addition, a positive brand image means consumers associate a product with both tangible and intangible benefits (Williams, 2021). Name selection should not be a secondary task for managers, since names are the first touchpoint between a user and a company, just as with humans, users involuntarily form assumptions and evaluations of a product, just from its name (Aaker and Keller 1990).

There exists a vast body of literature dedicated to analysing consumer response to subtle changes in name and logo configurations. For example, the use of certain colours can affect the users' perception of a brand, for example the use of the colour black in logos signals to consumers expensiveness (Bottomley, 2006). Another example is the study of how the interstitial space between text-based logos (the distance between individual logo elements, particularly text) affect consumer response. A study revealed that consumers perceive a product as "safer" when the text-based logo has a lower interstitial space (Hagtvedt, 2021).

Another branch of studies in the field of subtle name and text-based logo modifications are linguistic modifications. Linguistic techniques have become powerful devices used to create successful brand names and persuade the consumers' purchasing decision. These techniques include



semantic metaphors, an example of this is the luxury automobile company, Jaguar, which aims to convey values of speed, elegance and power through its brand name. Another example is the use of morphological elements in brand names to persuade consumer behaviour, case in point, the bed company Craftmatic, which added the suffix “-matic” to its brand name, it recalls the adjective pragmatic. Another linguistic technique relevant in the market is phonetic symbolism, for example, the use of alliterations, which occur when two initial word sounds (also known as phonemes) are similar, present in brand names like Coca-Cola are applied to create easier brand names that contribute to higher brand recall (e.g., Lowrey and Shrum 2007). Another example is the inclusion of specific vowels and consonants carry symbolic meanings, making specific sounds more favourable compared to others, meaning different vowels and sounds are responsible for transmitting different product qualities and benefits; a study proved that product names with front vowel sounds tend to be associated with products with smaller and faster dimensions and the back-vowel sound with products with larger and slower dimensions (Sapir, 1929).

The last example of linguistic elements to be modified in name configuration is the centrepiece of this research, the use of the genitive, a grammatical cue under the umbrella of possessive nouns. For the purpose of this research, the author will focus on the English form of the genitive, which is constructed by adding an “s” to the end of a singular noun or name. Adding a genitive to a brand name is nothing new, it is a widely used naming configuration that has a significant presence in today’s marketplace. A previous study conducted to analyse 1,657 brand names present in the YouGov Brand Index data set shows 8% of brand names included a genitive (YouGov, 2019). In addition, some of the most popular brand names in the world include this grammatical cue. This was demonstrated by Interbrand in 2021, where three out of 100 brands listed in the “Best Global Brands Index” (McDonald’s, Kellogg’s and Jack Daniel’s) include the genitive form in their name and text-based logo (Interbrand, 2021).

The field of study that explores the potential effect the presence of linguistic elements that convey possession, including the use of the genitive (present vs. not present), in a brand name and text-based logo have on consumers is rather narrow. It has been demonstrated in literature that the use of linguistic elements that convey possession in product names generate affective responses in consumers (Shi et al. 2011). Participants in these studies presented a higher preference and product recall towards the items that included the possessive pronoun “my” in their name. In contrast when products lack possessive pronouns in their names, or they use other possessive pronouns such as “his” the positive response is attenuated. This study makes it clear that including linguistic techniques that convey possession affect consumer behaviour. However, it leaves two questions open: How exactly does it affect specific responses such as purchase intention, brand attitude and word of mouth? And



most relevant to this study, how do other possessive linguistic queues such as the presence of the genitive in a brand name (vs. not present) affect consumer behaviour?

To answer these questions the most significant body of literature has been led by Dr. Mansur Khamitov. His first study on this subject explores the role that the genitive (present vs. not present) in a brand name has in consumers. The stream of studies revealed that the inclusion of the genitive in anthropomorphized brand names leads to a more positive consumer response. In addition, this research demonstrated that the presence of a positive identity marker acts as a mediator in the relationship between the inclusion of the genitive (vs. not present) in a brand name and positive consumer response. The author attributes this response to psychologic ownership and linguistic theories that include self-identity and self-control.

A more recent investigation that presents further evidence on the effects the presence of the genitive has in specific consumer responses (Khamitov, 2022) analyses how the genitive (present vs. not present) in brand names affects consumer brand preference and choice from the perspective of one psychological ownership ramification: perceived control. The results of this studies demonstrated that consumers respond positively to the genitive (present vs. not present) in this occurs because the presence of the genitive in a brand name generates in consumers a higher inferred control and involvement from the business owner in the company's operations, which translates into a higher perceived quality, and an overall positive brand attitude in consumers. human-like brand names, leading to a higher product expenditure and purchasing intention.

These studies shed a light on the effects the genitive has on consumer response, however by focusing on anthropomorphized they are not truly representative of the market today, since they don't fully encompass the spectrum of brand names with the genitive present in the market today, which include fictional names, adjectives or nouns plus a genitive (ex. Children's place and Women's Wear Daily).

Even with this limitation, the previous evidence suggests that the inclusion of linguistic elements that convey possession, more specifically, the genitive, in a brand name have positive results in consumers. They can be a useful tool for companies to enhance brand quality perceptions in users, as well as signalling positive attributes such as higher quality and better performance, leading to a positive brand attitude, higher purchase intention and word of mouth, supporting our first hypothesis:

**H1: The presence of the genitive form in a brand name (vs. not present) leads to a positive brand attitude, a higher purchase intention and positive word of mouth in consumers.**

Since the primary function of the genitive is to signal ownership towards a product, an interesting take on this topic is exploring the role psychological ownership plays in the relationship between the genitive (present vs. not present in a brand name) and consumer response. Psychological



ownership refers to “the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is ‘theirs’. Consumers that experience psychological ownership think, believe and are aware of their target of ownership as part of an extension of themselves, this is also accompanied by emotional and affective attachments (Pierce, et al., 2001). The elements that form psychological ownership include perceived control, self-investment, and intimate knowledge; meaning that people develop feelings of ownership in three main paths: perceived control over a target, investing themselves in a target, and coming to intimately know a target (Pierce et al., 2018). In line with the reported literature, fostering psychological ownership in consumers is a successful tool to persuade consumers to acquire more products, at premium prices, and even increase positive word of mouth among their friends (New York Tech, 2018). Prior research suggests that overall, when consumers experience psychological ownership towards a good it translates into higher consumer demand, willingness to pay, customer satisfaction, relationships, positive word of mouth, and competitive resistance (Morewedge, et al., (2020).

Previous studies (Khamitov 2018, 2022), attempt to explain the reason why psychological ownership plays a key role in the dynamics between the use of the genitive in a brand name (present vs. not present) and consumer response. The first study (Khamitov 2018) shows evidence of consumers preferring brand names that include the genitive and an identity market (a positive adjective that hints consumers about the company owner’s identity (Elegant Charlie’s vs. Elegant Charlie). This phenomenon can be explained through an analogy using the common saying “everything looks like its owner” meaning that individuals are likely to view others’ owned items as extensions of their owner’s identity. In addition, when users see brands with or without a genitive (“Charlie’s” vs “Charlie”), the former signals to them a higher sense of control by the company owner. This sense of control “spills” to the user; meaning they perceive the actual company owner is more involved in the company operations which intuitively translates in higher product quality and positive associations.

A second study (Khamitov, 2022) illustrates the role psychological ownership plays in the dynamics between the inclusion of the genitive in a brand name and the consumer’s inferred control. The evidence of this study reveals that inferred control is the main factor that enhances the positive effect the presence of genitive in a brand name has on consumers. According to the author this happens because combining the use of human-like names and the genitive in brand names signal individual or collective ownership of a specific entity. This ownership is perceived by individuals as companies presenting a high level of control by their owners due to the perception that people seek ownership to increase the influence and control, they exert on a particular entity (Dittmar, 1992). This sense of owner’s control increases consumers’ perception of brand quality and consequently brand



preferences, which results in higher quality expectations and an increased purchase intention (Khamitov, 2022).

One limitation of these past studies is that the variables affecting the intensity of the relationship between the use of the genitive and consumer response were constrained to individual elements of psychological ownership such as perceived control, instead of the holistic construct. Despite this limitation, the previously studies support our hypothesis that perceived psychological ownership increases the intensity of the relationship between the presence of the genitive in a brand's name and text-based logo and positive consumer response.

**H2: A higher presence of psychological ownership towards a product, enhances the effect the genitive form in a brand name (present vs. not present) has on consumer's brand attitude, purchase intention and willingness to share with others.**

In previous research (Khamitov 2018, & 2022), although the effect of possessive cues held across multiple product and service categories in the studies, future work may examine the variations in the phenomenon dependent upon product category to reveal further insights. One market practice or type of product mentioned briefly in the literature is co-creation (Khamitov 2022), which is a product or service design process in which input from consumers plays a central role from start to finish. Although this is a relevant trend present in the market today, it is only a practice utilized by some companies, not necessarily a business model, market configuration or disruption in the current marketplace. Even if the effect using the genitive has on the context of co-creation is an interesting topic to analyse from the psychological ownership perspective, there are market trends with a wider presence and scope where psychological mechanisms, particularly ownership, play a key role to understand the underlying motivations of consumers to engage in a specific market dynamic, no other market exemplifies this more than the sharing economy (Graul et al. 2022). Based on these limitations, the author constructed the last hypothesis of the current research, whilst linking the relevant streams of knowledge for this study: name configuration, psychological ownership and our next field of study, the sharing economy. sharing economy.

Technological innovations are abruptly changing consumption habits, especially because consumption is evolving from a market structure where people have legal ownership of goods and services to access-based models such as the sharing economy (Eckhardt et al. 2019). In fact, the theory of psychological ownership has shaped the sharing economy literature, since this market configuration disrupts all previous conceptions of ownership in traditional markets (Pasimeni, 2020). "An economic system that is based on people sharing possessions and services, either for free or for payment, usually through the use of online platforms" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). The sharing economy has multiple benefits and has addressed market failures to improve market efficiency, such



as the exploitation of unused assets, lowering transaction costs between users and providers and strengthening trust through collective feedback systems (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). However, for all the benefits sharing economy brings, it poses several threats to building psychological ownership. Users engaging in sharing economies experience a lower sense of psychological ownership compared to market structures based on legal ownership (Demirdag and Shu, 2020). This phenomenon can be explained by two main factors, the underlying fractional ownership makes consumer feel unattached to the products they consume, since they perceive they are “borrowing” products that many users will use instead of owning them; consumers feel equal levels of psychological ownership for goods they are solely evaluating for purchase and collectively used goods (Bagga, et al., 2019). Secondly, the sharing economy is based on temporality of consumption. When engaging in the sharing economy consumers obviously expect their ownership rights and possession of goods to be temporary, which diminishes their perceived psychological ownership towards collectively used products (Demirdag and Shu, 2020).

The previous literature might make the reader wonder if in the world where “sharing” is more important than “owning”, is it worth it for firms to pursue psychological ownership? Contrary to what the reader may believe, the body of literature regarding this topic states that creating psychological ownership in consumers is beneficial for players in the sharing economy.). For example, scholars have identified a rise in customer satisfaction with the presence of psychological ownership. A previous study analysed user experience for Uber rides and Airbnb stays; it revealed that consumers perceived the service as less enjoyable due to a lower presence of psychological ownership. To revert this effect, one element of psychological ownership, intimate knowledge, was manipulated by informing consumers more about the product benefits and service modalities to increase intimate knowledge and ultimately enhancing perceived psychological ownership in users (Demirdag and Shu, 2020). The previously mentioned stream of research is fundamental to the formulation of the third and last hypothesis of this investigation:

**H3: The impact the presence of the genitive in the brand’s name has in consumer’s purchase intention is affected by the nature of the product (collective vs. individual use), such that products meant to be collectively used are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to individually used products.**

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

For the data collection of this research an online survey, using the software Qualtrics, was the instrument chosen to test the hypothesis mentioned in this study. Respondents were recruited from social media posts and live scouting in the cities of Rome and Milan. Only participants who had an



English proficiency above B1 (Intermediate level) were considered in the data collection due to the importance of the correct understanding of the function of the genitive.

## Measures

### Experimental design

The three hypotheses of this study were tested in a set of three experiments (n=200 English-speakers) with a between-subjects design in which participants were equally divided and were shown a different randomly assigned stimuli of a staged advertisement of a clothing company with variations of the variables of study.

### Stimuli



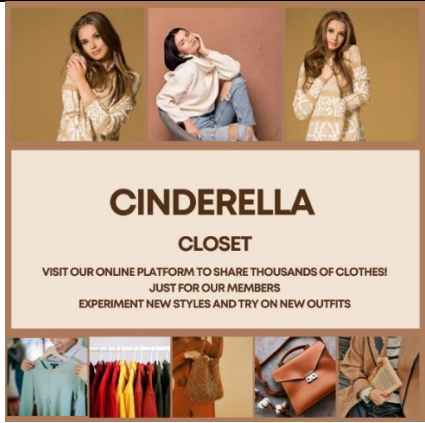

Participants were randomly assigned one of four images alternating between the configuration of the name of the company in terms of the genitive (“Cinderella’s Closet” vs Cinderella Closet) and the nature of the product (collective vs. individual use) which was displayed in a small description of the brand within the advertisement. The name of the staged company was chosen because it represents a wider scope of names compared to extensive studies focused on anthropomorphized names of companies that include the genitive (Khamitov, 2022). Building a compromise between anthropomorphized names, and other variations including the use of the genitive with nouns, adjectives and abstract constructs such as nouns and fictional characters to better represent the real-life market (i.e., Domino’s Pizza, Mini Moo’s and Lands’ End) (Content Marketing Institute, 2021).

To differentiate the stimuli between individual vs. collective use in the stimuli this investigation drew inspiration from marketing techniques applied in products and services that belong to sharing economies. A small phrase in the advertisement was included to briefly describe the characteristics of the company, its products and operations. The stimuli designed for collective use highlighted important characteristics of this market structure, such as temporary access, transfer of economic value, platform mediation, expanded consumer role, and crowdsourced supply (Rindfleisch, 2019).



The following table shows the set of advertisement shown to participants in this experiment:

**Table 1. Stimuli**

Stimuli Genitive/ Product Nature	Collective	Individual
<b>Present</b>		
<b>Not Present</b>		

## Questionnaire

The survey contained three blocks of questions using a five-item Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) to evaluate (1) level of psychological ownership towards the brand, (2) brand attitude, (3) purchase intention, and (4) willingness to give a positive word of mouth. This study used as example previous investigations that measured the above-mentioned dimensions; slightly adapting them to the context of the current investigation. The following table shows the set of questions asked to consumers to evaluate the above-mentioned criterion.



**Table 2. Questionnaire**

<p><b>Summary of the measured items</b></p> <p><b>Constructs</b></p> <p><b>Self-investment (Wetherbe, 2006)</b></p> <p>21. Do you feel personally connected to this brand?</p> <p>22. Do you believe this brand could closely attend to your needs?</p> <p>23. Do you believe this brand could you personal attention?</p> <p>24. Would you be willing to spend time and effort to visit this store?</p> <p>25. Would you be interested in belonging to the community of users of this brand?</p> <p><b>Control</b></p> <p><b>Individual control (Kwon, 2020)</b></p> <p>26. If you had the chance to visit this store, do you believe you could choose freely which items to buy?</p> <p>27. If you had the chance to visit this store, do you believe you could have a great deal of control on your visiting experience? (ex. browse freely around the store, try on products, talk to customer service)</p> <p><b>Inferred control (Khamitov, 2022)</b></p> <p>28. Do you believe all decisions regarding the business of this brand are under high control?</p> <p>29. To what extent do you believe that the person who owns this brand seems to be competent?</p> <p><b>Intimate knowledge (Harvard Business Review, 2018)</b></p> <p>30. Would you say this brand properly communicates its purpose to potential consumers?</p> <p>31. Are you able to perceive the brand identity of this company?</p> <p>32. Would you be interested in learning more about this brand?</p> <p>33. Are you able to identify some values this brand has? (ex. contemporary, convenience, trendy)</p> <p><b>Brand attitude (Spears et. al., 2004)</b></p> <p>34. Would you describe this as a desirable brand?</p> <p>35. Would you say this brand has positive attributes?</p> <p>36. Would you prefer buying products from this brand instead of other clothing brands?</p> <p><b>Purchase intention (Spears et. al., 2004)</b></p> <p>37. I intend to purchase products from this brand in the future.</p> <p>38. I will be willing to spend more on products from this brand than products from other clothing brands.</p> <p><b>Word of mouth (Andrei, 2012)</b></p> <p>39. I will be willing to recommend this brand to other people.</p>
---



40. My feedback and reviews of this brand would be positive

## Chapter 4: Results

### Study one

**H1: The presence of the genitive form in a brand name (vs. not present) leads to a positive brand attitude, a higher purchase intention and positive word of mouth in consumers. (n=200)**

The participants' results were submitted to a one-way ANOVA to test the effect the presence of the genitive in a brand name has in consumers' brand attitude, purchase intention and word of mouth. The following table summarizes the results of the test:

**Table 3: ANOVA Test Results Study 1**

ANOVA Test Results Study 1			
Means			
<i>Groups</i>	Brand attitude	Purchase intention	Word of mouth
Genitive	3,87	3,71	3,85
No genitive	2,15	1,85	2,17
<i>P-value Between groups</i>		<i>Significance</i>	
Brand Attitude	8,1392E-26	Yes	
Purchase Intention	4,55808E-27	Yes	
Word of mouth	2,80508E-22	Yes	

With a perspective of  $p < \alpha = 0.05$ , an effect of the genitive in consumer response. It is concluded that participants responded in a more positive way to the advertisement that included the genitive, since the average for the three measures of consumer response were higher in the presence of the genitive. therefore, hypothesis one is accepted.

### Study 2

**H2: A higher presence of psychological ownership towards a product, enhances the effect the genitive form in a brand name (present vs. not present) has on consumer's brand attitude, purchase intention and willingness to share with others. (n=200)**

The average responses of participants were grouped in blocks of psychological ownership (self-investment, control and intimate knowledge) and Consumer response (brand attitude, purchase intention and word of mouth) to apply a regression analysis. The first regression was conducted to



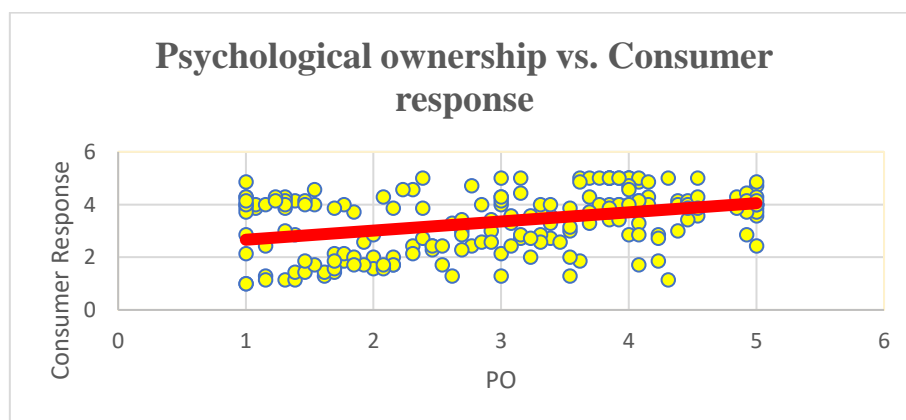
investigate the effect between the independent (presence or absence of the genitive in a brand name) and the mediator variable (psychological ownership). The second regression investigated the effects of both the independent and the mediator variable (psychological ownership) on the dependent variable (consumer response). After conducting both regression analysis results were submitted to a Sobel test to determine whether the mediating effect is significant. The following table shows the results of both regressions (input for the Sobel test) and the Sobel test result for p value:

**Table 4: Regressions and Sobel Test Results Study 2**

<b>Regressions and Sobel Test Results Study 2</b>			
<i>Analysis</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Regression 1	1,63608669	0,132659041	2,6652E-26
Regression 2	0,19877114	0,077985834	0,0115709
Sobel Test			0.012558

With a value of  $p < \alpha = 0.05$ . We can determine that the presence of the genitive had a significant effect on psychological ownership, in turn, psychological ownership presented a significant effect on consumer response and there is a significant mediating effect of the presence of the genitive in a brand name and consumer response via psychological ownership. With this results our third hypothesis is accepted. The following scatter plot presents the mediating effect psychological ownership has on consumer response, clearly depicting a growing trend between the two variables further confirming our hypothesis:

**Figure 2: Psychological Ownership vs. Consumer response Study 2**



### Study three

**H3: The impact the presence of the genitive in the brand's name has in consumer's purchase intention is affected by the nature of the product (collective vs. individual use), such that products meant to be collectively used are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to individually used products. (n=200)**

To test our third hypothesis, results were submitted to a two-factor ANOVA test (genitive: present vs. not present) & (individual products vs. collective products). The following table summarizes the results of the test:

**Table 5: ANOVA Test Results Study 3**

ANOVA Test Results Study 3						
Means						
Groups	Brand attitude		Purchase intention		Word of mouth	
	Collective	Individual	Collective	Individual	Collective	Individual
Genitive	4,09	3,64	3,77	3,65	4,00	3,69
No genitive	2,03	2,27	1,75	2,04	2,06	2,28
<i>P-value Interaction</i>		<i>Significance</i>				
Brand Attitude	0,01349941	Yes				
Purchase Intention	0,16621991	No				
Word of mouth	0,08244123	No				

The two-factor analysis of the relationship between the variables of the genitive (present vs. not present) and the nature of the product (collective and individual) with consumer response presented no interaction, in the levers of purchase intention and word of mouth, since  $p > \alpha = 0.05$ . However, for brand attitude, the interaction was present since  $p < \alpha = 0.05$ . To go further in detail, in the case of brand attitude participants responded in average more favourably to collective products with the presence of the genitive.

To deepen our analysis the level of psychological ownership was measured through a two-factor ANOVA test, the results are shown in the following table:



**Table 6: ANOVA Test Results Study 3.1**

ANOVA Test Results Study 3.1							
Means							
<i>Groups</i>	Self-investment		Control		Intimate knowledge		
	<i>Collective</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Collective</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Collective</i>	<i>Individual</i>	
Genitive	3,99	3,46	4,25	3,82	4,14	3,61	
No genitive	1,91	2,08	2,28	2,60	2,11	2,27	
<i>P-value Interaction</i>		<i>Significance</i>					
Self-investment	0,013279695	Yes					
Control	0,005603177	Yes					
Intimate knowledge	0,019216894	Yes					

There existed an interaction in all levers of psychological ownership. In the three dimensions, the results were more favourable in the presence of the genitive for collectively used products. These results reveal that psychological ownership is present when the genitive is included, but also higher when the product is of collective use. With the previous results the null hypothesis is accepted for the levers of purchase intention and word of mouth; the effect the genitive has on consumers' brand attitude is affected by the products' nature, such that products meant to be collectively used are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to the effect caused in individually used products. In addition, psychological ownership is higher in the presence of the genitive, especially when the products' nature is of collective use.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Based on the results of the experiment, the inclusion of the genitive in a brand name systematically affects participants' brand attitude, purchase intention and word of mouth in a positive way. These results are consistent with previous literature that demonstrate a positive impact from the genitive in consumer response, such as brand ratings, when including possessive cues in brand names (Khamitov, 2022) & (Kachersky & Carnevale, 2015) The genitive also affects positively psychological ownership in consumers, which acts as a mediating variable between the presence of the genitive and consumer response. To the author's knowledge there are no previous investigations that study the impact the relationship between the inclusion of the genitive has on consumer response correlated to a product's nature. The findings of study 3 demonstrate there is no interaction between the genitive and product nature affecting consumer response in the fields of purchase intention and



word of mouth. This suggests that the positive impact the genitive has in consumers' purchase intention and word of mouth is indifferent to the nature of the product. Suggesting that products from the sharing economy pursuing a rise in this parameter should not expect a significantly higher impact in the previously mentioned consumer responses from the inclusion of the genitive in their brand name.

An interaction was present between product nature and the presence of the genitive, and its effect on consumers' brand attitude; in which collectively used products are affected positively and in a larger extent by the presence of the genitive vs. individual ones, confirming that brand attitude is positively affected and to a larger extent by the genitive when products are collectively used. A further step on this analysis revealed that psychological ownership is also triggered when using the genitive in a more favourable way for collectively used products. The findings regarding response in brand attitude are consistent with previous research that states that attempts to generate psychological ownership in products and services belonging to the sharing economy leads to a more favourable consumer response (Xiao, et. al., 2019).

### **Theoretical contributions**

This research contributes to different realms of study. The first one being building investigation on the impact the modification of linguistic elements of brand names have in consumers (e.g., Lowrey and Shrum 2007) & (Xu & Liu, 2017) particularly complimenting the field dedicated to semantics in brand name configurations (Shi et al. 2011); further confirming that subtle modifications in name configurations do affect consumer response. This research adds relevant insights on the few investigations made (Khamitov, 2018 & 2022) solely dedicated to understanding the effect the inclusion of the genitive in a brand name has on consumer response; confirming the genitive is a useful tool to enhance purchase intention, brand attitude and positive word of mouth in consumers. In contrast to the literature available, this research enlarges the scope of the name configurations available that include the genitive, distancing the research from traditional applications of the genitive in human-like names and surnames for company names to better represent the market's current conditions.

In the realm of psychological the study adds two fundamental aspects of intimate knowledge and self-investment to assess the participants' perceived psychological ownership, demonstrating that the genitive is a successful tool to enhance psychological ownership and positively impact consumer response in all the dimensions considered for this study. In addition, to the authors' knowledge, this research is the first to complement previous literature by answering the call for exploration of the moderating effect product category has in the relationship between the use of the genitive and consumer response. In this case, product nature was distinction was made with products belonging to



the sharing economy vs. traditional ones (collective vs. individual). By integrating this aspect to the study, the present work goes beyond previous literature related to psychological ownership in the sharing economy that suggests that generating psychological ownership in participants is beneficial for the company's performance (Xiao, et al., 2019) & (Pasimeni, 2020).

### **Managerial implications**

Managers must not underestimate the relevance of name selection for products and their brands. Findings from a data collection of several companies revealed that brand names are a fundamental factor contributing to the performance of a product (Kohli, 1997). Bearing in mind the importance of appropriate name selection, this study contains relevant insights showing that the inclusion of the genitive in a brand's name is a practice that managers can rely on to positively impact brand attitude, purchase intention and word of mouth in consumers. In addition, managers should be aware of the effects the genitive has on psychological ownership, in this study it was discovered that psychological ownership is one relevant factor that intensifies the effect the genitive has on consumers in the three fundamental pillars of self-investment, intimate knowledge and control. This study offers evidence for managers when approaching name selection, with the confirmation that the inclusion of the genitive is beneficial and detailing in depth the effects it has on consumers to better inform their decisions. Lastly, this study offers players within the sharing economy a proven tool to positively impact consumers' brand attitude and increase psychological ownership.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study has several limitations. The first one being the fact that it's not viable to fully represent the scope of name configuration companies using the genitive have in the market today through a low number of stimuli. Even if the intention of the study was to shy away from the traditional application of the genitive in anthropomorphized names, there are further name configurations that were not included in this study that prevail in the market. Another limitation is the impediment of capturing to its full extent the experience of the sharing economy for participants to evaluate; although this experiment attempted to transmit the experience of the sharing economy through the stimuli applied, it's impossible to fully replicate the dynamic of this market structure, leaving out important elements of the sharing economy consumer journey that could further influence their response. Lastly, even if the study aimed to include the fundamental aspects of psychological ownership (intimate knowledge, control and self-investment), there are other theoretical extensions such as belonging, self-efficacy, self-identity and emotional attachment (Avey et al., 2009) that could facilitate relevant insights on the outcomes of the inclusion of the genitive in consumer response.



Zooming in specific constructs derived from psychological ownership such as emotional attachment and brand love have been proven to strongly influence beneficial behaviours in consumers such as brand loyalty and higher willingness to spend (Tibbals, 2019). One final direction for further research may include the effect the genitive has in non-English speakers' consumer response or the application of the genitive in foreign names, to analyse if the genitive effect is still present to foreign markets, which could be significantly relevant for international companies wishing to establish themselves outside English-speaking markets, this is relevant because there currently are important players with international presence that include the genitive in their name, such as Jack Daniel's and Kellogg's (Interbrand, 2021).

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The previous study is an attempt to understand the effect a prevalent name configuration, the genitive, has in consumers response. Aiming to respond the question if this subtle difference matter, and if yes, in what way? In this regard the contribution of this research was to confirm the genitive leads to positive consumer response with name configurations outside of common human-like names. The study was able to identify the dimensions of self-investment, intimate knowledge and control as constructs exerting a mediating effect in the relationship between the use of the genitive in a brand name and consumer response, offering a more holistic and in-detail study of the relationship between psychological ownership and the impact of the genitive in consumer response. One relevant contribution of this investigation is the examination of the variations in the phenomenon dependent upon product category. With the rise of the sharing economy, a market based on the disruption of ownership perceptions, we combined the three pillars of this study to demonstrate the presence of the genitive in the brand's name has in consumer's brand attitude is affected by the nature of the product, such that products belonging to the sharing economy are impacted positively and in a larger scale by the presence of the genitive compared to traditional products. Overall, this study serves as a guide to managers that are dwelling upon the decision to include or not the genitive in their brand names, sustaining the positive effect it has on consumer response and giving in detail the spilling consequences it conveys in psychological ownership, which could also add benefits to the company's performance. Finally, we demonstrate the inclusion of the genitive is a practical tool for managers operating within the sharing economy to positively impact consumer's brand attitude.





## References

- Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer Evaluations of Brand Extensions. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(1), 27.
- Amazon Best Sellers (2021), Amazon.com.
- Andrei, Andreia. (2012). Word of Mouse Approach for Word of Mouth Measurement. *USV Annals of Economics and Public Administration*. 12. 87-93.
- Avey, James & Luthans, Fred & Youssef-Morgan, Carolyn. (2010). The Additive Value of Positive Psychological Capital in Predicting Work Attitudes and Behaviors. *Journal of Management - J MANAGE*. 36. 10.1177/0149206308329961.
- Baker, Jonathan & Kearney, Treasa & Laud, Gauri & Holmlund, Maria. (2021). Engaging users in the sharing economy: individual and collective psychological ownership as antecedents to actor engagement. *Journal of Service Management*. 32. 483-506. 10.1108/JOSM-08-2020-0300.
- Bardhi, F., & Eckhardt, G. M. (2012). Access-Based Consumption: The Case of Car Sharing: Table 1. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(4), 881–898.
- Batra, R., & Homer, P. M. (2004). The Situational Impact of Brand Image Beliefs. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14(3), 318–330.
- Best Brands. (2021). Interbrand.
- Bhasin, Kim (2012) “Why Wegmans Doesn't Have an Apostrophe in Its Name.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider.
- BrandIndex: Track Brand Health And Performance. (2019, December 1). YouGov Brand
- Business Model Toolbox. (2021, March 23). Sharing Economy. Retrieved September 21, 2022, from <https://bmttoolbox.net/patterns/sharing-economy/>
- Cambridge Dictionary. (2022, June 1). sharing economy definition.
- Chernatony, D. L. (2010). *Creating Powerful Brands* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Dawkins, S., Tian, A. W., Newman, A., & Martin, A. (2015). Psychological ownership: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 38(2), 163–183.
- Deloitte, (2016) “The Rise of the Sharing Economy: Deloitte: Manufacturing.”, Deloitte Website.
- Demirdag D. and Shu S, 2020. (2020), "Creating Ownership Where Ownership Does Not Exist: Psychological Ownership Increases Enjoyment in Sharing Economy", in *NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 48*, Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 868-873.



- Dittmar, H. (1992) *The Social Psychology of Material Possessions: To Have Is to Be*. Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf and St Martin's Press, New York.
- Eckhardt, G. M., Houston, M. B., Jiang, B., Lambertson, C., Rindfleisch, A., & Zervas, G. (2019). Marketing in the Sharing Economy. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(5), 5–27.
- Gabler, N. (2015, January 15). The Weird Science of Naming New Products. *The New York Times*.
- Gazzola, P., Vătămănescu, E. M., Andrei, A. G., & Marrapodi, C. (2018, December 27). Users' motivations to participate in the sharing economy: Moving from profits toward sustainable development. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 26(4), 741–751. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1715>
- Graul, A. R., Brough, A. R., & Isaac, M. S. (2022). How emotional attachment influences lender participation in consumer-to-consumer rental platforms. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 1211–1217.
- Hagtvedt H, (2021) Safe Together, Vulnerable Apart: How Interstitial Space in Text Logos Impacts Brand Attitudes in Tight versus Loose Cultures, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 48, Issue 3, Pages 474–491
- Hair, J. F., Barth, K., Neubert, D., & Sarstedt, M. (2016). Examining the Role of Psychological Ownership and Feedback in Customer Empowerment Strategies. *Journal of Creating Value*, 2(2), 194–210.
- How Customers Come to Think of a Product as an Extension of Themselves. (2018, September 26). *Harvard Business Review*.
- Hsiang-Ming Lee, Tsai Chen & Bonnie S. Guy (2014) How the Country-of-Origin Image and Brand Name Redeployment Strategies Affect Acquirers' Brand Equity After a Merger and Acquisition, *Journal of Global Marketing*, 27:3, 191-206, DOI: 10.1080/08911762.2014.909550
- ISO 10668:2010(en), I. 10668:2010(en). (2010). Brand valuation — Requirements for monetary brand valuation. ISO. <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/fr/#iso:std:iso:10668:ed-1:v1:en>
- Kachersky, Luke & Carnevale, Marina. (2015). Effects of pronoun brand name perspective and positioning on brand attitude. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. 24. 157-164. 10.1108/JPBM-02-2014-0495.
- Kohli, Chiranjeep & Labahn, Douglas. (1997). Observations: Creating effective brand names: A study of the naming process. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 67-75.
- Kotler, P. T., & Armstrong, G. (2022). *Principles of Marketing Global Edition*. Pearson.



- Li, D. and Atkinson, L. (2020), "The role of psychological ownership in consumer happiness", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 37 No. 6, pp. 629-638. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-09-2019-3420>
- Li, Dahui & Browne, Glenn & Wetherbe, James. (2006). Why Do Internet Users Stick with a Specific Web Site? A Relationship Perspective. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce / Summer*. 10. 105-141. 10.2753/JEC1086-4415100404.
- Lieven, T., Grohmann, B., Herrmann, A., Landwehr, J. R., & van Tilburg, M. (2015). The effect of brand design on brand gender perceptions and brand preference. *European Journal of Marketing*, 49(1/2), 146–169.
- Luu, C. (2018, August 15). What’s in a Brand Name: the Sounds of Persuasion. *JSTOR Daily*.
- Morewedge, C. K., Monga, A., Palmatier, R. W., Shu, S. B., & Small, D. A. (2020). Evolution of Consumption: A Psychological Ownership Framework. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(1), 196–218.
- Nancy Spears Ph.D. & Surendra N. Singh Ph.D. (2004) Measuring Attitude toward the Brand and Purchase Intentions, *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 26:2, 53-66, DOI: 10.1080/10641734.2004.10505164
- Nielsen (2021, June 8). When it Comes to Brand Building, Awareness is Critical. Nielsen.
- Owned: When Consumers Feel a Brand Is “Theirs” | Box. (2018). New York Tech.
- Ownership in Organizations. *The Academy of Management Review*, 26(2), 298–310.
- Panel®, Expert. (2022) “Council Post: How to Get Customers Engaged and Excited about a Branded Competition.” *Forbes*, *Forbes Magazine*.
- Pasimeni, F. (2020). The Origin of the Sharing Economy Meets the Legacy of Fractional Ownership. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.
- Paundra, Joshua & Rook, Laurens & van Dalen, Jan & Ketter, Wolfgang. (2017). Preferences for car sharing services: Effects of instrumental attributes and psychological ownership. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. 53. 10.1016/j.jenvp.2017.07.003.
- Peck, J., & Shu, S. B. (2018). *Psychological Ownership and Consumer Behavior*. Springer Publishing.
- Phillips, Barbara & Mcquarrie, Edward & Griffin, W.. (2014). How Visual Brand Identity Shapes Consumer Response. *Psychology & Marketing*. 31. 10.1002/mar.20689.
- Pierce et al., (2002). The State of Psychological Ownership: Integrating and Extending a Century of Research. *In Press: Review of General Psychology*



- Pierce, J. L., Kostova, T., & Dirks, K. T. (2003). The State of Psychological Ownership: Integrating and Extending a Century of Research. *Review of General Psychology*, 7(1), 84–107. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.7.1.84>
- Piller, I. (1999). Extended Metaphor in Automobile Fan Discourse. *Poetics Today*, 20(3), 483–498.
- Pogacar R. & Angle, Justin & Lowrey, Tina & Shrum, L. & Kardes, Frank. (2021). EXPRESS: Is Nestlé a Lady? The Feminine Brand Name Advantage. *Journal of Marketing*. 85.
- PWC. (2014), Sharing or paring? Growth of the Sharing Economy - PWC.
- Rindfleisch, Aric. (2019). Marketing in the Sharing Economy. *Journal of Marketing*. 83. 10.1177/0022242919861929.
- Sapir, E. (1929). A study in phonetic symbolism. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 12(3), 225–239.
- Shi, Z., Zhou, A., Han, W., & Liu, P. (2011). Effects of ownership expressed by the first-person possessive pronoun. *Consciousness and cognition*.
- Shumaker, N. W. (1975). The Semantics of the English 's Genitive. *American Speech*, 50(1/2), 70–86.
- Stoner, Jennifer & Loken, Barbara & Stadler Blank, Ashley. (2018). The Name Game: How Naming Products Increases Psychological Ownership and Subsequent Consumer Evaluations. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. 28. 130-137. 10.1002/jcpy.1005.
- The Best Way to Name Your Product 2.0. (2016, June 8). *Harvard Business Review*.
- Tibbals, K. (2019, February 5). *Marketing Landmines: The Next Generation of Emotional Branding. The Ethical Frames Series*.
- Verkuyten, M., & Martinovic, B. (2017). Collective Psychological Ownership and Intergroup Relations. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(6), 1021–1039.
- Walsh, Michael & Winterich, Karen & Mittal, Vikas. (2012). Do Logo Redesigns Help or Hurt Your Brand? The Role of Brand Commitment. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. 19.
- Weiss, L., & Johar, G. V. (2016). Products as Self-Evaluation Standards: When Owned and Unowned Products Have Opposite Effects on Self-Judgment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(6), 915–930.
- Wood, L.M. (2000). Brands and brand equity: definition and management. *Management Decision*, 38, 662-669.
- Xiao, B. and Lee, Z. W. Y. and Lim, E. and Tan, C. (2019) 'The sharing economy : promises and challenges.', *Internet Research*, 29 (5). pp. 993-995.



- Xu, X., Chen, R., & Liu, M. W. (2017). The effects of uppercase and lowercase wordmarks on brand perceptions. *Marketing Letters*, 28(3), 449–460.
- Zetlin, M. (2021, January 5). Brain Science Explains Why Customers Don't Like It When Companies Change Their Names. Inc.com. Retrieved September 19, 2022, from <https://www.inc.com/minda-zetlin/name-change-negative-impact-psychology-dunkin-donuts-weight-watchers.html>

