

Any similarity to actual German or Swedish words is purely coincidental

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Earlier this year, the Advertising Standards Authority (the UK’s advertising watchdog) ruled that the use of umlauts in the name of kitchen furniture manufacturer Möben is purely decorative and not intended to mislead consumers into believing that the company is German or Scandinavian. The fact that the name is only one letter away from both the German word (“Möbel“) and Swedish word (“möbel“) for “furniture” is not intended to mislead but rather is simply a coincidence.

This appears to be a variation of the heavy metal umlaut. (Not to be confused with a diaeresis. I used to use diaereses, but you mocked me so I stopped.) It troubles me to see the umlaut being treated as a decorative element, for it dooms another generation of language students to treating umlauted and non-umlauted vowels as just typographical variations of each other rather than being distinct vowels with different pronunciations. An “ö” is not an “o” with dots over it any more than a “Q” is an “O” with a squiggly tail. Treating umlauts as just decorative dots is sort of the German version of the tattoo consisting of meaningless Chinese characters that “look pretty”.

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