Branding and Google Trends: Software companies' names, the metaverse and virtual reality

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ABSTRACT

The growth of interactive media has changed the branding game, with one of its leading players being Google: Google search data provides insights into patterns of B2B consumers, while Google Trends can help any researcher gain insights into when and how often a particular word or term has been searched for using the Google search engine. This paper explores the extent to which Google Trends can yield information about how software companies can brand internationally. We analyzed 25 software companies' names to identify their geographic location impact, and we classified the top 10 software company names according to the level of search popularity on Google Trends. Moreover, we explored words and terms related to the topics of "software company", "metaverse" and "virtual reality" that were commonly searched for on Google. Mixed methods were employed in this study. This study aims to contribute to this growing area of research of Google Trends, marketing, and branding in and by software companies, as well as their possible market strategies for virtual reality and metaverse applications.

1. Introduction

Google is the most powerful and well-known search engine on a global scale. This search engine publishes statistics for trend words on an independent website called "Google Trends". Google Trends can show the popularity of specific terms, topic or keywords by geographic location, time range, categories, and type of web search. Users can download this data directly from the website or obtain a comparative analysis through graphs, figures and charts about specific words or terms. Dergiades et al. (2018)(p.108) explain that this "web-related data" can influence commercial activities and predict possible tendencies in the market and industry. Following this, Karamitros Dimitrios & Fouskas (2020) described that Google Trends can be used to recognize the impact of the company's brand and demands on the customer from empirical research. However, uncertainty remains as to whether Google Trends can be used for marketing and branding for software companies or within topics such as the metaverse and virtual reality. Virtual reality is defined as immersive technology that simulates environments and entities in a digital setting, in a manner that can be amplified with visual, haptic, motion auditory sensory feedback (Kozinets, 2022). Also, the

metaverse was described by Kozinets (2022) (p. 3) as "currently a compilation of imagination and futuristic engineering in which virtual worlds link seamlessly with telepresence and social media technologies to a persistent social space, a complex worlds-containing-world proffering users with an extended digital self with virtual experience". Applications and digital content for virtual reality and metaverse simulations is generally developed by software companies. Often, users or B2B companies search for this by the name of the software company or brand using an online search engine. Branding is a powerful marketing strategy that gives a competitive advantage (Todor, 2014; Spais et al., 2022). For users to develop their possible applications in immersive technologies (virtual reality, augmented reality or mixed reality), they generally search the internet for companies that can demonstrate their ability to make these applications effectively and a good quality. For this reason, the branding of a software company plays a fundamental role in attracting potential clients. The credibility of the company name can be more easily determined by referring to previous user experiences, while another marketing mechanism is the company name's appearance in blogs or website reports. Users typically assume that there is a correlation between the prominence of the company/brand name and the positively of user reviews and the quality of these applications for virtual reality or the metaverse. However, lack of research studies have been performed to directly determine if the name of a software company has any relationship to branding impact and the global trends on search engines.

2. Research questions:

- What are the top 10 software companies worldwide in terms of popularity according to Google Trends?

- What is the search popularity (Google Trends) in the seven continents on Dutch and Non-Dutch software companies' names?

- What topic-related words are associated with the term "software company" in Brazil, the Netherlands and worldwide?

- What topic-related words are associated with the terms "virtual reality" and "metaverse" worldwide?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

A quantitative approach was used to answer Research Questions 1 & 2. RQ 1 was addressed through descriptive analysis, and RQ 2 with a non-parametric analysis. We analyzed the data with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. To answer Research Questions 3 and 4, a qualitative approach was conducted. The frequency analysis used Word Clouds, whereby the larger the

depiction of a word, the greater the number of times it appears within Google Trends data. The qualitative data was analyzed with Atlas.ti Qualitative Software version 22.

3.2. Sampling method and Procedure for Data Collection

We used quantitative data for the first two research questions, employing a value scale of 0 to 100 for search popularity by region for analysis (See Fig. 1). We searched for the names of 25 software companies and looked at the countries in which searches for them were most popular. Resulting from this, 10 Dutch and 15 non-Dutch software companies were identified. The 10 Dutch companies were as follows: 1. Addvision, 2. Citygis, 3. Mproof, 4. Paqt, 5. Prezent, 6. Pridis, 7. Raet, 8. Sofon, 9. Webpower, 10. Websitebouwers; while the 15 non-Dutch companies were: 1. Accenture, 2. Atomicobject, 3. Aubay, 4. Bairesdev, 5. Bluelabellabs, 6. Capyba, 7. Fueled, 8. Hedgehoglab, 9. Labcodes, 10. Merixstudio, 11. Mobixtec, 12. Strv, 13. Unleashed-Technologies, 14. Vinta, and 15. 10 pearls.
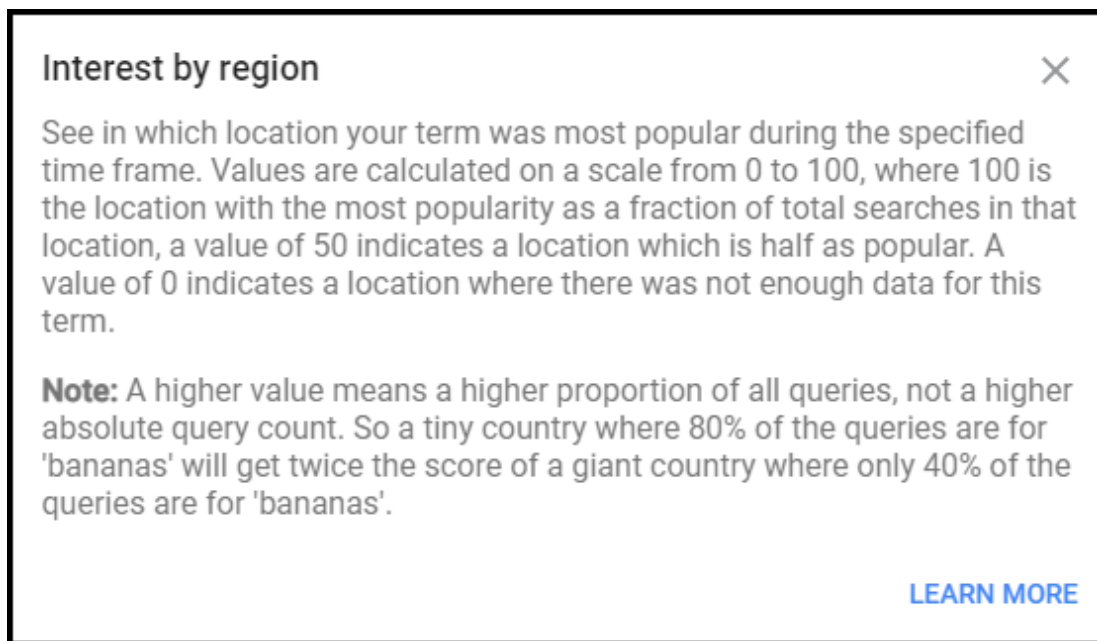

Figure 1. Interest by region description on Google Trends (Geo-map)

3.3. Procedures for Data Analysis

RQ1 and RQ2: Data on branding of the software company names

We searched for names of software companies and looked at the countries in which they are popular. Resulting from this, we grouped the countries into seven continents to perform a more accessible descriptive analysis by comparing averages (means). We named the independent variables "continents". The dependent variables were obtained by the popularity (on a scale of 0 to 100) of

software companies' names. The value 0 to 100 relates to the total number of most popular searches in that location, which was reported by Google Trends. The selection of the 25 companies' names was undertaken by means of a discussion during the Data-Driven Course in Creative Business at Breda University of Applied Sciences. Following a kickoff interview with "Capyba" (software company), possible worldwide software company competitors were determined semi-randomly, with the names of potential software companies in the Netherlands being additionally proposed for analysis. We downloaded the relevant data using Google Trends on February 22, 2022. The settings on Google Trends were: "worldwide", and "past 12 monthS". The countries resulted from the "Interest by region" and "worldwide" settings settings on Google Trends website.

RQ3 and RQ4: Data on software company, virtual reality and metaverse related words

We utilized qualitative data to address Research Questions 3 & 4. To better understand the different search terms associated with the word "software company", we selected specific locations: Brazil, the Netherlands and worldwide. For the terms "virtual reality" and "metaverse", we used "top and rising" categorization and "worldwide" location. The results were analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative software and words in the English language. We analyzed the words associated with the terms "software company", "virtual reality" and "metaverse" through word clouds, with a thematic analysis subsequently being conducted. This involved analyzing all word clouds and identifying central themes and primary and secondary patterns. The data was obtained on March 25, 2022, when we searched for the phrase "software company" (See Fig. 2). The parameters were set to Worldwide/Netherlands/Brazil, with a time limit of the past 12 months. Our secondary data was obtained from the "related topics" dataset. Related topics were determined by users' searches for other related topics alongside the term "software company". We downloaded the data for the terms "virtual reality" and "metaverse" using Google Trends on April 14, 2022. The parameters were set to Worldwide, with a time limit of the past 12 months.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

We emphasized here that this study used secondary data obtained through Google Trends and not directly from the software companies themselves. The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the Zenodo repository titled "Data: Branding and Google Trends: Software company's names, metaverse, and virtual reality" at `https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6802460`.

4. Results

Table 1 and Figure 3 show an overview of the mean of the search popularity of companies' names on seven continents (North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and
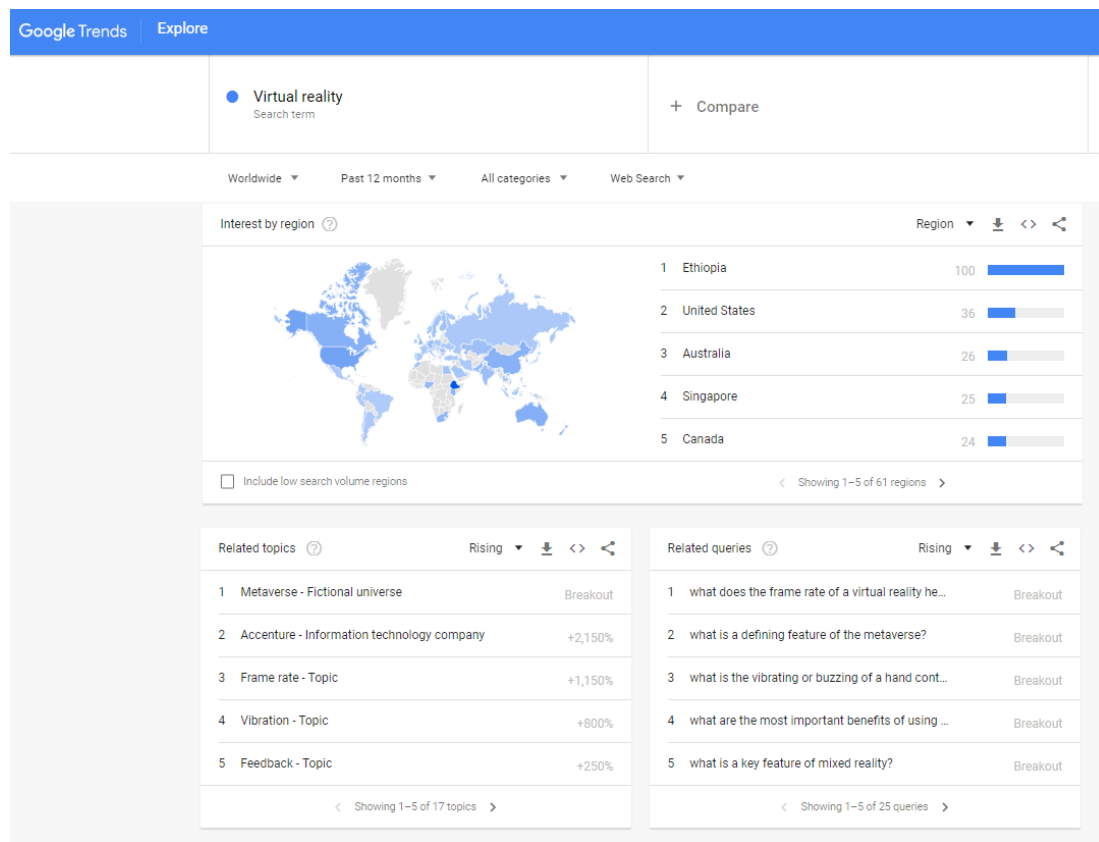
Figure 2. Google Trends visualization of the term "virtual reality".

Antarctica). It can be seen from the data in Table 1 that fifteen companies' names are non-Dutch companies, and ten companies' names are based in The Netherlands.

Table 1. Mean of Search Popularity on Google Trends

	North America	South America	Europe	Africa	Asia	Oceania	Antarctica	Total
				Non-Dutch Companies				
1. Accenture	0.68	0.91	3.33	1.73	3.77	0.45	0.00	1.56
2. Atomicobject	0.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.27	0.00	0.00	0.73
3. Aubay	0.00	0.11	1.96	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.30
4. Bairesdev	8.37	17.69	0.06	2.50	0.12	0.03	0.00	4.11
5. Bluelabellabs	5.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.75
6. Capyba	4.00	2.86	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.98
7. Fueled	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
8. Hedgehoglab	0.16	0.00	1.96	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.34
9. Labcodes	0.00	2.86	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.41
10. Merixstudio	0.00	0.00	1.96	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.28
11. Mobixtec	0.00	0.03	4.16	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.60
12. Strv	0.68	0.23	13.45	0.00	4.23	1.32	0.00	2.85
13. Unleashed-Technologies	5.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.75
14. Vinta	0.42	0.43	1.65	0.03	2.40	0.13	0.00	0.72
15.10 pearls	0.42	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.08	0.00	0.00	0.36
				Dutch Companies				
1. Addvision	0.00	0.00	1.96	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.32
2. Citygis	0.00	0.00	1.96	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.28
3. Mproof	0.00	0.00	1.96	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.28
4. Paqt	0.00	0.03	2.51	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.37
5. Prezent	0.00	0.00	2.55	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.38
6. Pridis	5.26	0.00	0.84	0.00	0.00	3.16	0.00	1.32
7. Raet	0.00	3.00	0.96	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.58
8. Sofon	0.16	3.20	3.02	0.00	0.62	0.48	0.00	1.07
9. Webpower	0.00	0.00	2.43	0.40	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.41
10. Websitebouwers	0.00	0.00	1.96	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.28

Continent

4.1. RQ1: What are the top 10 software companies worldwide in terms of search popularity according to Google Trends?

As is illustrated in Table 2, we found ten software companies worldwide are more popular in the total mean of the search of 25 software companies' names in Google Trends: (1) Bairesdev (M=4.11), (2) Strv (M=2.85), (3) Accenture (M=1.56), (4) Pridis (M=1.32), (5) Sofon (M=1.07), (6) Capyba (M=0.98), (7) Bluelabellabs (M=0.75), (8) Unleashed-technologies (M=0.75), (9) Atomicobject (M=0.73), and (10) Vinta (M=0.72).

Table 2. Top of the total mean of Search Popularity on Google Trends of the Software companies' names

Top	Software companies' name	Continent							
		North America	South America	Europe	Africa	Asia	Oceania	Antarctica	Total
1	Bairesdev	8.37	17.69	0.06	2.50	0.12	0.03	0.00	4.11
2	Strv	0.68	0.23	13.45	0.00	4.23	1.32	0.00	2.85
3	Accenture	0.68	0.91	3.33	1.73	3.77	0.45	0.00	1.56
4	Pridis (NL)	5.26	0.00	0.84	0.00	0.00	3.16	0.00	1.32
5	Sofon (NL)	0.16	3.20	3.02	0.00	0.62	0.48	0.00	1.07
6	Capyba	4.00	2.86	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.98
7	Bluelabellabs	5.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.75
8	Unleashed-Technologies	5.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.75
9	Vinta	0.42	0.43	1.65	0.03	2.40	0.13	0.00	0.72
10	Atomicobject	0.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.27	0.00	0.00	0.73

4.2. RQ2: What is the search popularity (Google Trends) in the seven continents on Dutch and Non- Dutch software companies' names?

Non-Dutch Software Companies

This study aimed to assess the search popularity of Non-Dutch software companies' names across seven continents using Google Trends' Geo-map feature (See Table 3 and Figure 4). A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in Accenture between the different continents, $X^2(6)$=29.932, p<0.0001, with a mean rank continent score of 152.60 for Europe, 134.18 for Asia, 123.11 for South America, 116.24 for North America, 111.27 for Oceania, 107.37 for Africa, and 103.00 for Antarctica. Moreover, there was a statistically significant difference in Bairesdev between the different continents, $X^2(6)$=56.380, p<0.0001, with a mean rank continent score of 169.81 for South America, 138.11 for North America, 115.98 for Africa, 115.96 for Europe, 118.13 for Asia, 115.13 for Oceania, and 111.50 for Antarctica. Likewise, for Mobixtec there was a statistically significant difference between the seven continents, $X^2(6)$=14.212, p=0,027, with a mean rank continent score of 135.82 for Europe, 125.73 for Asia, 124.51 for South America, 121.00 for North America, 121.00 for Africa, 121.00 for Oceania and 121.00 for Antarctica. Strv evidenced a statistically significant difference between the seven continents, $X^2(6)$ = 61,925, p<0.0001, with a mean rank continent score of 168.47 for Europe, 138.92 for Asia, 111.08 for North America, 110.61 for South America, 110.94 for Oceania, 99.00 for Africa, and 99.00 for Antarctica. Finally, Vinta exhibited a statistically significant difference between the seven continents, $X^2(6)$ = 22.865, p <0.001, with a mean rank continent score of 146.94 for Europe, 127.22 for South America, 127.22 for Asia,
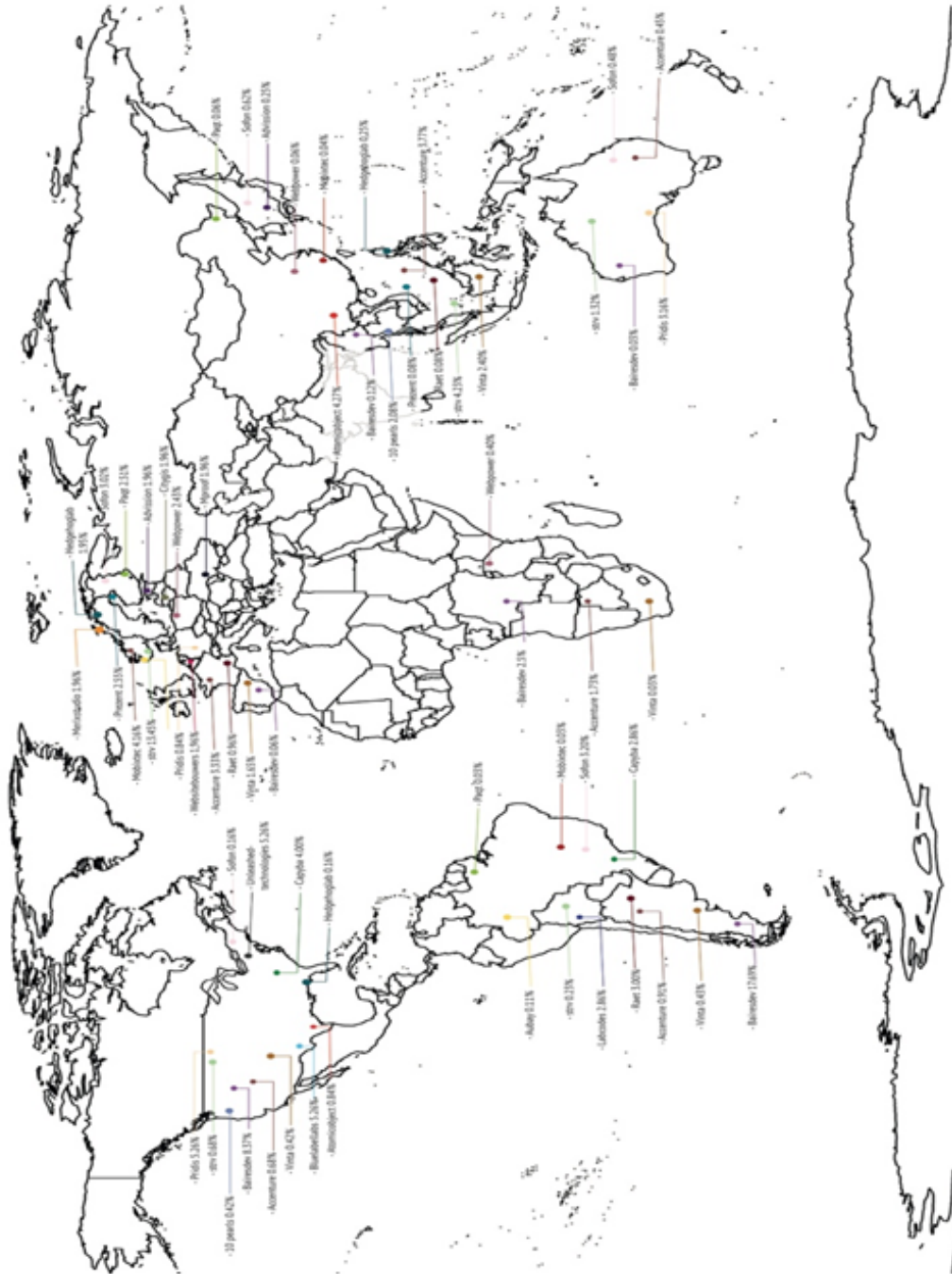
Figure 3. Worldwide software companies' names and their search popularity based on Google Trends' Geo-map.

121.58 for North America, 115.15 for Oceania, 109.48 for Africa, and 107.50 for Antarctica. No significant difference was found for Aubay, Bluelabellabs, Capyba, Fueled, Hedgehoglab, Labcodes, Merixstudio, Unleashed-Technologies or 10 Pearls.

Table 3. Kruskal-Wallis H of Non-Dutch Companies by Continent

Software Company'name	M	SD	H	df	Sig.
Accenture	2.12	8.909	29.932	6	0.000
Atomicobject	0.95	8.883	10.238	6	0.115
Aubay	0.42	6.329	4.030	6	0.673
Bairesdev	3.75	14.648	56.380	6	0.000
Bluelabellabs	0.40	6.325	12.158	6	0.059
Capyba	0.70	7.928	8.159	6	0.227
Fueled	0.00	0.000	0.000	6	1.000
Hedgehoglab	0.46	6.376	4.616	6	0.594
Labcodes	0.40	6.325	6.143	6	0.407
Merixstudio	0.40	6.325	3.902	6	0.690
Mobixtec	0.86	8.937	14.212	6	0.027
Strv	3.87	12.053	61.925	6	0.000
Unleashed-Technologies	0.40	6.325	12.158	6	0.059
Vinta	0.95	6.888	22.865	6	0.001
10 Pearls	0.46	6.361	7.850	6	0.249

Note. Non-Dutch Companies' names and Grouping Variable: Continent

Dutch Software Companies This study aimed to assess the search popularity of Dutch software companies' names across seven continents (See Table 4 and Figure 5). A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in Prezent between the different continents, $X^2(6) = 39.241$, p <0.0001, with a mean rank continent score of 149.10 for Europe, 126.38 for Asia, 117.00 for South America, 117.00 for North America, 117.00 for Oceania, 117.00 for Africa and 117.00 for Antarctica. No significant difference was found for Addvision, Citygis, Mproof, Paqt, Pridis, Raet, Sofon , Webpower and Websitebouwers.

4.3. RQ3: What topic-related words are associated with the term "software company" in Brazil, the Netherlands and worldwide?

One objective of this study was to investigate what topic-related words can create more traffic for B2B software companies. We studied which search words are essential for users using Google Trends. We compared three types of Word Clouds: for Brazil, the Netherlands and worldwide (See Figure 6). For the Word Cloud analysis, we considered the size of each word. The size was determined by the popularity of the word's use in Google Trends. For search words in the Netherlands, the top five words were "software", "business", "company", "salary" and "testing".
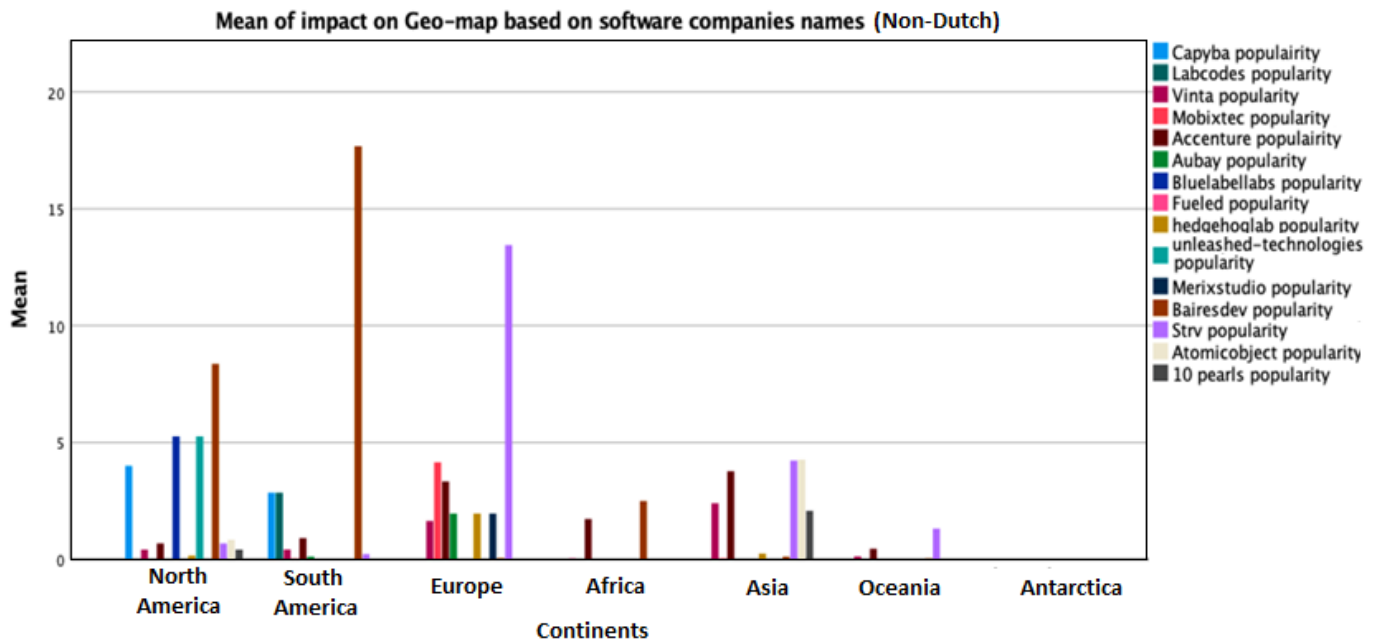
Figure 4. Bar graph of the mean of impact on Geo-map popularity based on software companies' names (outside NL or Non-Dutch)

<div align="center">

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis H of Dutch Companies by Continent

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Software Company'name	M	SD	H	df	Sig.
Addvision	0.45	6.374	2.867	6	0.825
Citygis	0.40	6.325	3.902	6	0.690
Mproof	0.40	6.325	3.902	6	0.690
Paqt	0.53	6.563	3.964	6	0.682
Prezent	0.54	6.364	39.241	6	0.000
Pridis	0.96	9.060	6.300	6	0.390
Raet	0.63	6.857	8.981	6	0.175
Sofon	1.26	8.396	6.363	6	0.384
Webpower	0.60	6.562	12.051	6	0.061
Websitebouwers	0.40	6.325	3.902	6	0.690

Note. Dutch Companies' names and Grouping Variable: Continent
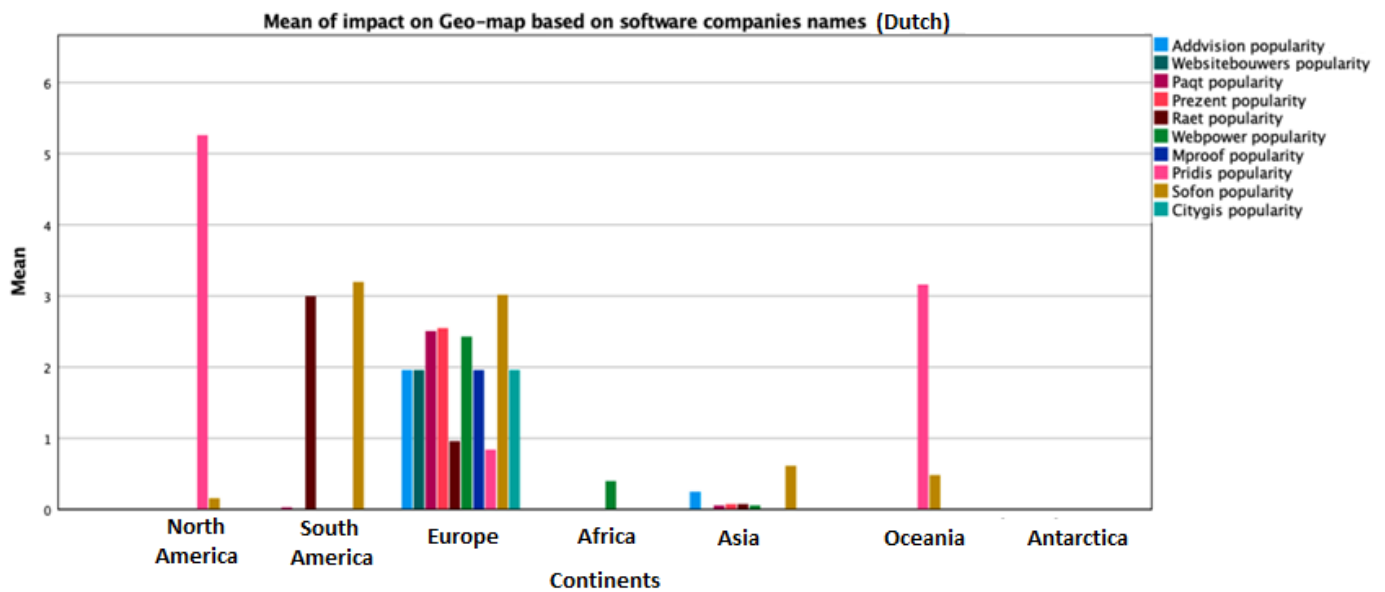
Figure 5. Bar graph of the mean impact on Geo-map popularity based on software companies' names in the Netherlands.

For search words in Brazil, the top five words were: "software", "computing", "data", "business" and "customer". For search words worldwide, the top five words were: "warranty", "software", "home", "management" and "project". In the Word Cloud for the Netherlands, only traditional search words for software companies exist. Unexpected words identified in the Word Cloud of Brazil were: "pizza", "Bangladesh", "cosmetics", "India", "suite" and "United States". Likewise, unexpected words in the Word Cloud for worldwide trends were: "choice", "flower", "Yves Saint Laurent", "garage", and "relationship". The word "software" was the most common term found, the most obviously related search term to "software company". Interestingly, the term "company" was not as equally popular as that of "software". The word "salary" had a high interest in the Dutch language. Another important finding was the word "testing", which shows that Dutch people pay attention to product testing and reviews. In contrast, the Brazilian Word Cloud had terms related to the name of countries. For instance, the United States, Bangladesh and India. We assumed that Brazilian software companies many have a tendency to attract business-to-business companies abroad or internationally. Curiously, the term "warranty" was highly searched for on a worldwide scale. A possible explanation for these results may be the lack of adequate consumer protection worldwide regarding the quality of the products and applications from one country to another. People are frequently concerned about the warranty for future maintenance, improvements and repairs of a product. We found that the term "management" had a significant value in the worldwide Word Cloud. This word may be due to modern society's great interest in companies that can have transparent and efficient management processes. Also, we considered that it depends on the culture, quality concerns, and potential clients in each country. Unexpected words were as follows: "pizza", "suite" and "cosmetics" for the Brazilian Word Cloud, and "Yves Saint Laurent", and "flower" for the worldwide Word Cloud.

Figure 6. Word cloud of the term "software company" in Google Trends.

4.4. RQ4: What topic-related words are associated with the terms "virtual reality" and "metaverse" worldwide?

As illustrated in Figure 7, the topic-related words associated with the term "metaverse" were: "coin", "Oculus Quest", "Zuckerberg", "Meta", "sandbox", "token", "Shiba", "virtual reality", "cryptocurrency", "Snoop Dogg", "investment" and "exchange". For the term "virtual reality", the topic-related words were: "Oculus Quest", "arcade", "game", "headset", "company", "Accenture", "haptics", "PlayStation", "room", "technology", "vibration", "experience" and "simulation".

Figure 7. Word Cloud of the terms "metaverse" and "virtual reality" in Google Trends (Worldwide)

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study set out to investigate the branding of B2B software companies and how Google Trends' data can provide insight into a global branding strategy. This study has identified the top 10 software companies from among the 25 according to their greatest mean search popularity on Google Trends. Lastly, we researched topic-related words that create more traffic to terms such as "software company", "virtual reality", and "metaverse". This empirical research can attract business-to-business companies from abroad through the utilization of rebranding campaigns focused on international audiences. An increase in the number of software company names included in this analysis could possibly change the main results of this current research.

RQ1. What are the top 10 software companies worldwide in terms of popularity according to Google Trends?

We studied 25 software companies around the world. We found the top 10 software company names in terms of Google search popularity are (1) Bairesdev, (2) Strv, (3) Accenture, (4) Pridis, (5) Sofon, (6) Capyba, (7) Bluelabellabs, (8) Unleashed-technologies, (9) Atomicobject and (10) Vinta. One unanticipated finding was that Capyba, which originates in Brazil, has a greater prominence in searches conducted from North America than South America. Among the top ten most-searched companies on Google, two are Dutch, and eight non-Dutch.

RQ2. What is the search popularity (Google Trends) in the seven continents on Dutch and Non-Dutch software companies' names?

We analyzed 25 software companies, with ten being from the Netherlands and fifteen from outside the Netherlands. The results showed a statistically significant difference in four non-Dutch software companies' names – (1) Accenture, (2) Bairesdev, (3) Mobixtec, and (4) Vinta – between the different continents. Only one Dutch software company (Prezent) had a significant difference in relation to the other nine Dutch companies. These results indicate that these companies had a variate search popularity in each continent. We recommend that software companies improve upon their current market(s) through investment in the creation of global branding strategies with the aim of expanding into continents where they have a little-to-no current impact.

RQ3. What topic-related words are associated with the term "software company" in Brazil, the Netherlands and worldwide?

We have analyzed the word "software company" in 3 different geographic areas: the Netherlands, Brazil and worldwide. The terms "software", "business", "company", "salary", "testing", "computing", "data", "customer", "warranty", "home", "management", and "project" were most commonly searched for on Google in combination with "software company". These words most commonly searched for in combination with "software company" in the Netherlands reflect the interest of the country's inhabitants in searching for products or companies that have been tested

previously. We also hypothesize that words such as "the United States", "Bangladesh" and "India" from the Brazilian Word Cloud stem from an interest in attracting business-to-business companies from abroad. A limitation imposed upon the analysis of the Word Clouds was the presence of non-related search terms such as "pizza" and "cosmetics". We found that Dutch users of Google greatly appreciate the reliability and reviews of products or companies. Therefore, we recommend that software companies take this into account when creating a rebranding strategy for the Dutch audience. Further research should explore Google Trends' use within software companies' content (website, blogs, and social media posts). Information derived from such research could potentially give software companies branding advantages in Google Ads compared to software companies that do not have such information. Another recommendation for software companies is that they undertake research on popular word trends according to the target market and design different targeted content for different audiences.

RQ4. What topic-related words are associated with the terms "virtual reality" and "metaverse" worldwide?

Considering data accessibility from Google Trends, it is becoming challenging to ignore the existence of their possible new digital terms related to "virtual reality" and "metaverse". We analyzed the terms "Metaverse" and "Virtual reality" in terms of worldwide search tendencies, and found that "metaverse" is associated with terms such as "Mark Zuckerberg" and "Snoop Dogg", "Token coin", "Exchange-traded fund", "Shiba Inu coin", and "cryptocurrency". However, "Metaverse" and "Virtual reality" are also strongly connected to visual hardware, such as Oculus Quest. In contrast, the term "Virtual reality" is associated with renowned software companies like Accenture. Moreover, virtual reality is related to technical terms such as "feedback", "haptics", "3D modeling", "visualization", "avatar", "experience", etc. Overall, we recommend software companies use Google Trends to gain insight into words strongly connected to digital applications such as "virtual reality" and "metaverse" to increase their search power on Google.

Acknowledgements

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