

## Language effects on source credibility and persuasion among bilingual consumers

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### ■ ABSTRACT

This research investigates the interactive effects of language and the identification with American culture on source credibility and, subsequently, on persuasion among Hispanics. The results revealed that low American identifiers perceived a higher source expertise and greater positive attitudes towards brands advertised in English compared to brands advertised in Spanish. On the other hand, source expertise and attitudes towards the brand did not vary because of the language used among high American identifiers. Sources that communicate with code-switching elicited lower expertise and brand attitudes compared to sources that use English or Spanish. The study results found no significant effects for source trustworthiness and attractiveness.

**Keywords:** source, credibility, persuasion, language, ethnic identification

### Efectos del lenguaje en credibilidad y persuasión de la fuente de información entre consumidores bilingües

### ■ RESUMEN

Esta investigación examina los efectos del lenguaje e identificación con la cultura estadounidense sobre la credibilidad de la fuente de información y persuasión entre hispanos bilingües. Los resultados revelaron que participantes que no se identifican con la cultura estadounidense perciben que la fuente tiene más experiencia, y las actitudes son más positivas hacia las marcas anunciadas en inglés comparadas con marcas anunciadas en español. La experiencia de la fuente y las actitudes no variaron entre participantes que se identifican altamente con la cultura estadounidense. Las fuentes de información que mez-

clan los dos idiomas fueron percibidas menos expertas y las actitudes fueron menos favorables en comparación con fuentes que usan inglés o español. No se reportan efectos significativos para la confiabilidad y el atractivo de la fuente.

**Palabras clave:** fuente de información, credibilidad, persuasión, lenguaje, identificación étnica

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## Introduction

The idea that judgments we make regarding those we communicate with are affected by the language they speak becomes particularly relevant in the multicultural marketing environment, where marketing practitioners are forced to make decisions about the language employed to communicate with bilingual consumers. The prevalence of marketing advertising and stimuli in languages other than the dominant language, has increased not only in the United States (Alvarez et al., 2017a), but also in Europe (Gerritsen et al., 2010; Hornikx et al., 2010), South East Asia (Lin & Wang, 2016; Lin et al., 2017), and across Latin America (Alvarez, 2017b).

Prior research has examined the relative effects of language choice on brand recall, brand attitudes, and attitudes toward the advertised product, reporting mixed results. Communication in a language other than the dominant language has resulted in less comprehension of the ad content among the general market (Gerritsen et al., 2010), and less favorable ad and brand evaluations (Pagani et al., 2015) within the target market. On the other hand, the use of English is likely to gather customers' attention and be associated to a perceived image of modernity, sophistication, internationality, and prestige (Lin & Wang, 2016). However, no prior research has evaluated the impact that language has on the communication source and the products and brands they endorse.

Whether it is a celebrity endorser, a spokesperson, or an influencer, advertisers must consider the language that the source employs to communicate product benefits, as the language will

become part of the meaning transferred to consumers (McCracken, 1989). Consider Kathy Cano-Murillo, the influencer behind the *Crafty Chica*<sup>1</sup> website, her language choice not only communicates an ethnic affiliation that imbues her blog, but also is likely to affect consumers judgements about her credibility and consequently her sponsorships (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Some theoretical and practical questions arise. Are individual's judgments of the source credibility, and subsequently of brands they endorse, affected by the language they chose to communicate with? If so, what language enhances consumers evaluations of a source credibility among bilingual audiences? Are these effects moderated? Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) made a call for more research on the effects of target audience factors on source persuasion. This paper will examine target audience identification with the dominant culture as a possible moderator of the language effects on source credibility and persuasion, unlike previous studies that focused on consumers' strength of identification with their culture of origin as an important moderating variable (Madadi et al., 2020).

The purpose of this article is to make predictions about the effects of English, Spanish, and code-switching on source credibility and on persuasion. By doing so, this research will contribute theoretically not only to our understanding of source effects on brand evaluations, but also this research will contribute to the marketing practice by providing guidelines regarding language use of spokespersons, celebrity endorsers, and influences in marketing communications targeted to bilingual audiences.

## Conceptual Background

It is a well-accepted notion among sociolinguistic researchers that language is not only an instrument of communication, but also a symbol of social and ethnic identity (Grosjean, 1982). As a communication instrument and as a symbol of group identity,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://craftychica.com/>

language is accompanied by attitudes or judgments towards the language itself, and attitudes towards language users.

It is proposed that language associations, as well as their potential to influence consumers' responses to the source, depend on their accessibility during communication processing. Accessibility represents the likelihood that a judgmental input stored in memory is retrieved and available for use when rendering a judgment (Feldman & Lynch, 1988). The basic premise is that a source utilizing Spanish will differ in its persuasive power from that using English among Hispanic bilinguals because the use of Spanish enhances the accessibility of their ethnicity and, consequently, the accessibility of those associations linked to the societal status of the ethnic group and its language. Although ethnicity is a permanent trait determined by one's ancestors, like any aspect of a person's self-identity, its level of accessibility is not constant. For example, when people describe themselves, they are more likely to mention their ethnicity when this trait is made more accessible by their environment (Oyserman et al., 2017). This temporary surge in the accessibility of a person's ethnicity has been referred to as ethnic salience and increases a person's responsiveness to ethnic-relevant stimuli (Reed II et al., 2012).

That language serves as a potent cue of its user's social or ethnic identity (Grosjean, 1982; Grosjean, 2010) underscores its powerful connection to one's ethnicity. The source language is an environmental cue that enhances ethnic accessibility among users of the language (Alvarez et al., 2017a). Processing an endorsed communication in Spanish should temporarily increase the accessibility of both the Hispanic ethnicity and the associations attached to this ethnic group.

Attitudes towards the language and the source of the communication become relevant when individuals from two sets of cultures are in continuous contact and begin an adaptation process. Under these circumstances, one language becomes the majority language, frequently associated with economic, cultural, and political power, and the other language becomes the minority language (Grosjean, 1982). Attitudes that individuals hold towards

the language are intertwined with individuals' stereotypes of the ethnic group that speaks the language (Alvarez et al., 2017a; Grosjean, 1982; Grosjean, 2010; Lambert & Lambert, 1973). Hence, individuals' attitudes towards a linguistic behavior or communication are associated to the cultural symbolism attached to the corresponding ethnic group.

For example, Lambert and Lambert (1973) examined language effects among bilingual Canadians. In their study they asked two groups of bilingual students, English-dominant and French-dominant speakers, to listen to recorded voices of English and French speakers reading the same prose (the voices were of five perfectly bilingual speakers). The students evaluated the personality characteristics of each of the speakers. The researchers assumed that the students would not be able to disregard the language spoken, and any differences in personality assigned to the readers would be attributed to the stereotyped attitudes already formed towards members of both ethnic groups. As expected, the English-dominant students evaluated more favorably the English readers; they were perceived more intelligent, more dependable, kinder, and more ambitious than the French readers. Unexpectedly, the French dominant students evaluated significantly more favorable the English readers than the French readers on most of the personality traits (c.f. Lambert & Lambert, 1973). Lambert and Lambert's results pointed out two main conclusions. First, judgments made about the speakers were affected by the language they spoke; language was used to identify the speakers as members of an ethnic group, eliciting stereotyped attitudes. Second, attitudes of members of the minority group were affected by their social, political, and cultural status.

Lawlani and his colleagues (2005) examined individual's response to variations of source accent in relation to perceived credibility and its persuasiveness. According to their results, the spokesperson using British English accent was perceived more credible and solicited more favorable ad and brand evaluations compared to the Singlish accent among Singaporeans. The researchers suggest that the results might be associated to a natural

favoritism to the British English accent due to the higher status of the English language in Singapore.

Although not considered an ethnic group, people that code-switch between two languages are perceived unfavorably by society, eliciting negative stereotypes. Research among bilingual U. S. Hispanics has provided evidence that language “purity” or “correctness” is highly valued (Badiola et al., 2018). Alternating use of English and Spanish within a discourse, or code-switching (colloquially named Spanglish, Tex-Mex, or Pocho) has been socially stigmatized. Culturally, code-switching is often associated with illiteracy, lack of formal education, or lack of proficiency in one or both languages (Badiola et al., 2018).

### **Language and Ethnic Identification**

According to Grosjean (1982), the minority group’s need to gain social approval results in an idealization of the majority group. Consequently, the stereotype that the minority group holds about the majority group is more favorable than their own stereotype, reflected in higher evaluations towards the majority-language speaker compared to the minority-language speaker. Findings in Koslow et al. (1994) are consistent, such that bilinguals held a less favorable attitude toward an ad using Spanish rather than English; an outcome they attributed to bilingual Hispanics holding a language-related inferiority complex.

Although Grosjean’s (1982) view of a language’s majority/minority status may accurately characterize many of society’s members, it may not do so for all its members. Ultimately, macro-level factors, such as a language’s societal status, are influential because of how individuals respond to them and their responses need not be universal in nature. Grosjean’s (1982) expectation of Spanish being tainted by its minority status seems likely to hold for many Hispanics. Others, however, may believe that society embraces diversity and is respectful of other cultures coexisting with its own. This view may be quite prevalent among those that are bicultural and, therefore, highly identify with the American culture (Alvarez et al., 2014).

Studies including Hispanic consumers have recognized the importance of classifying consumers by the strength of their identification with the Hispanic culture, and have examined consumers' behavior and persuasion across these groups (Madadi et al., 2020). In particular, Koslow et al. (1994) tested the effects of ethnic identification on Hispanic consumers' affect towards advertisements that use Spanish; they hypothesized that greater identification with the American culture, as opposed to ethnic cultures, was associated negatively with affect towards advertisements that increasingly use Spanish. The results did not support their theory; Hispanic consumers' identification with the American culture was positively associated with affect towards advertisements that increasingly use Spanish. Koslow and his associates followed the assumption that high identification with the American culture implied low identification with the Hispanic culture. However, research on acculturation proposes that Hispanic consumers' adaptation process is bicultural. From this perspective, adaptation to the host culture is not related to the loss of one's culture of origin (Alvarez et al., 2014). Instead of assuming that individuals approach full assimilation, the possibility that individuals acquire features of the host culture while maintaining aspects of their native culture is suggested. According to the results reported by Alvarez et al. (2014), the adaptation of Hispanic consumers' feelings of belonging and identifying to the American culture is associated to changes of their communication patterns, adopting the use of English in some contexts, while at the same time using Spanish for communicating among family and friends.

Under the former conceptualization, it would be expected that bilingual Hispanic consumers that highly identify with the American culture will not feel the need to gain social desirability, as they highly identify with the majority culture. Consequently, the stereotype that American identifiers have of Hispanic consumers that speak English or Spanish would show no significant differences. On the other hand, bilingual Hispanic consumers that have low identification with the American culture are more likely to feel the need to gain social approval. As a result, the stereotype

that they hold about the majority group is likely to be more favorable than the stereotype they have of their own culture. However, for high and low American identifiers, code-switching is considered a stigma, and language correctness is highly valued. Therefore, it would be expected that both groups would equally react unfavorably towards a source that uses code-switching.

### **Language and Source Credibility**

The literature has identified three dimensions of source credibility: trust, expertise, and attractiveness. Expertise is associated to the spokesperson's knowledge, competence, and authoritative-ness; trustworthiness is related to the spokesperson's honesty, reliability, and dependability; and attractiveness is associated to the spokesperson's physical appearance.

Taking in consideration the previous discussion, it would be expected that the source language will increase the accessibility of the corresponding ethnic group, eliciting stereotyped attitudes (Alvarez et al., 2017a; Lambert & Lambert, 1973), and consequently affecting consumers' evaluations about the source's credibility. Bilingual consumers, as members of the minority group, will judge the source credibility when confronted with communications in English, Spanish, and code-switching according to their identification with the American culture. Given that previous research has indicated that Hispanics that highly identify with the American culture have favorable stereotypes of English and Spanish speakers, we would expect that the source credibility would be affected accordingly, showing no significant differences. On the other hand, the stereotyped associations about English speakers are more favorable compared to Spanish speakers' stereotype among low American identifiers (e.g. Koslow et al., 1994). Hence, we would expect that the source credibility of English communications will be more favorable compared to the source credibility of Spanish communications among low American identifiers.

Finally, regardless of the identification with the American culture, Hispanics are likely to evaluate unfavorably the source credibility if the communication employs code-switching, due to the



unfavorable stereotypes held by both American identification groups. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

- H1: Among high American identifiers, source trust, expertise, and attractiveness are not likely to differ between ads in English or in Spanish.
- H2: Among low American identifiers, source trust, expertise, and attractiveness are likely to be higher for ads in English compared to ads in Spanish.
- H3: Source trust, expertise, and attractiveness are not likely to differ between American identification groups when the ads use code-switching.

Enhancing the accessibility of Hispanics' ethnicity and their cultural stereotypes is important because of the potential for these associations to influence their advertising responses. Conceptualizations of judgment formation such as Feldman and Lynch's (1988) accessibility-diagnostics perspective emphasize the importance of a judgmental input's accessibility at the time of judgment. Just by simply associating a product to a stimulus can alter product evaluations depending on the valence of the stimulus (Stuart et al., 1987). By virtue of connecting the featured product to the associations made accessible during ad processing, product attitudes may be affected. Alvarez et al. (2017a) provided empirical evidence that culturally shared stereotypes about the use of Spanish in America have an impact on brand attitudes. Their results show that Spanish may be persuasively superior, inferior, or equivalent to English depending on the favorableness of these cultural stereotypes.

Thus, the impact of Hispanic bilinguals' cultural stereotypes becoming more accessible will depend on their favorability. Specifically, for low American identifiers, sources employing Spanish in advertising should undermine its persuasive impact relative to its English counterpart because of Spanish's unfavorable associations stemming from its lower social status as perceived by its users. However, for high American identifiers, this disadvantage should disappear. If so, then the source language should prove immaterial to the brand attitudes generated by the ads.

Last, since both low and high American identifiers have unfavorable evaluations of sources that employ code-switching, we would expect brand judgments to be equally unfavorable for both groups. These expectations are formalized as follows:

H4: Among high American identifiers, brand attitudes are not likely to differ between ads in English or in Spanish.

H5: Among low American identifiers, brand attitudes are likely to be higher for ads in English compared to ads in Spanish.

H6: Brand attitudes are not likely to differ between American identification groups when the ad uses code-switching.

It is well established in the literature that a spokesperson's trustworthiness and expertise affect persuasion (e.g. Lord et al., 2019). Hence it is expected that spokesperson's trust and expertise would mediate the effects of language on brand attitudes. Hence:

H7: Source trustworthiness is likely to mediate the effects of source language on individuals' brand attitudes.

H8: Source expertise is likely to mediate the effects of source language on individuals' brand attitudes.

H9: Source attractiveness is likely to mediate the effects of language on individuals' brand attitudes.

In sum, we propose that source credibility should be affected by the advertisement language, consequently affecting brand evaluations according to consumers' strength of identification with the American culture. The following study will test these expectations.

## Experimental Study

### Design and Sample

The study employed a 3 (levels of language: English, Spanish and code-switching)  $\times$  2 (levels of strength of American identification: high and low) between subjects, quasi-experimental de-

sign. To address the shortcomings of the quasi-experimental design, participants across the American identification groups were compared to demonstrate equivalency. Ninety-eight Hispanic bilingual students from a major state university in south Florida participated in exchange for extra credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three language conditions (English, Spanish and code-switching) with the only difference being the source language. Participants' demographic characteristics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participants Demographic Characteristics*

Characteristic	Descriptive Statistics
Age	
(18-25 years)	86.7%
(26-30 years)	9.2%
(36- or older)	4.1%
Gender	
Female	58.2%
Bilingual (English - Spanish)	100%
Hispanic	94.5%
Generation	
First	53.1%
Second	46.9%
Proficiency*	
Average English Proficiency*	6.6
Average Spanish Proficiency*	5.9
Average Language Preference*	
At home	4.3
With friends	2.9
Listening to the radio	2.6
Watching T.V.	2.2

*Note.* \* Measures described in the method section.

Source: Own elaboration.

## Ad Stimuli

The ad featured a fictitious spokesperson speaking on behalf of a fictitious online insurance company. The spokesperson's surname was of Hispanic origin (Carlos Delgado), and he claimed to have more than 10 years of experience as an insurance agent. The ad included a photo of a middle-aged gentleman wearing a suit. To create the Spanish version of the ad, the advertisement was translated and back translated into Spanish by two bilingual experts. Two code-switching strategies were employed in the design of the code-switching ad. In the first paragraph of the ad, intersentential code-switching was included. For example, "*I speak on behalf of Drive; una nueva manera de comprar seguros*" (I speak on behalf of Drive; a new way to shop for insurance). In the second paragraph of the ad, intra-sentential code-switching was employed. For instance, "*Permítanos hacer el shopping por usted con nuestro sistema comparativo de tarifas*" (Let us do the shopping for you with our comparative rating system). Both directions of code-switching were executed in the ads.

## Procedure

Participants were informed that they were taking part in an advertisement survey about a service that might be available in the future in their area. They were instructed to examine the ad carefully with the objective of evaluating the service advertised. After reviewing the ad, participants received a booklet with the measures described later. After the booklets were collected, the students were thanked for their participation and dismissed.

## Measures

Participants evaluated the service using seven-point semantic differential scales anchored at "unfavorable/favorable," "dislike very much/like very much," "positive/negative," and "not appealing at all/very appealing." Subsequently, source's credibility was measured with the scale proposed by Ohanian (1990); participants evaluated the source trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness using seven-point scales. To measure American iden-

tification, the Hispanic identification measure commonly used in the consumer behavior literature was adapted (Deshpande et al., 1986). First, participants were asked to declare their ethnicity; then, they were asked to declare the strength of their identification with the American culture with a seven-point scale anchored at “very weak/very strong.” A set of measures was employed to determine participants’ bilingual abilities; they were asked to declare their English and Spanish proficiency with a seven-point scale anchored at “1 = bad/7 = good.” Language preferences at home, with friends, watching TV, and listening to the radio were measured using a seven-point scales anchored at “1 = only Spanish/7 = only English.” Participants’ attitudes towards code-switching were measured with a question that requested respondents’ opinions about using *Spanglish* (mixing two languages) with two seven-point scales anchored at “1 = extremely unfavorable, extremely negative / 7 = extremely favorable, extremely positive.” Participants were asked to declare the language employed in the ad they evaluated. Last, a section with demographic questions was included.

### **Manipulation Check**

A hundred percent of the respondents that were assigned to the code-switching condition declared reading the ad in both languages mixed, 90.9%. One hundred percent of the respondents assigned to the Spanish language condition reported reading the ad in Spanish, and 100% of the respondents that were in the English condition declared reading the ad in English. Self-reported language proficiency, language preferences ( $\alpha = .80$ ), and attitudes towards code-switching ( $r = .83$ ), were compared between language conditions. The results indicate that Spanish proficiency ( $F(2, 95) < 1$ ), English proficiency ( $F(2, 95) < 1$ ), language preferences ( $F(2, 95) < 1$ ), and attitudes towards code-switching ( $F(2, 95) = 2.55, p > .05$ ) do not differ significantly among the experimental groups. The results indicate that the language manipulation was successful.

## Results

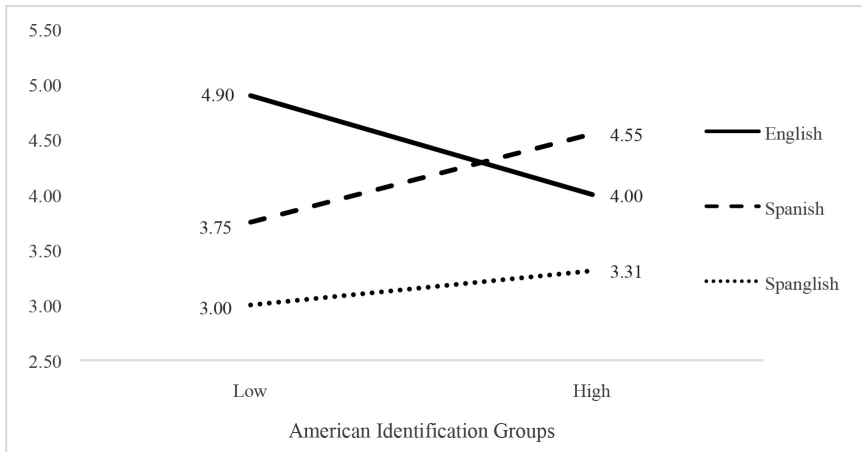
Collectively, H1 and H2 predict a significant interaction between source language and American identification. Support for H1 requires a null effect of language on the three source credibility measures, trust, expertise, and attractiveness, when American identification is high. In contrast, support for H2 requires a significant language effect on source credibility when American identification is low. Last, support for H3 requires a null effect of null effect of language on the three source credibility measures.

To test the effects of language and American identification on source credibility, overall scores of source trustworthiness ( $\alpha = .94$ ), expertise ( $\alpha = .95$ ), and attractiveness ( $\alpha = .88$ ) were calculated. The overall scores of trustworthiness were analyzed using a 3 (language)  $\times$  2 (American identification) ANOVA. The results show no significant main effects for language ( $F(2,92) = 2.34, p > .05$ ) and American identification ( $F(1,92) = 1.28, p > .05$ ), nor a significant interaction ( $F(2,92) < 1$ ). The effects of language and American identification on source attractiveness were tested similarly. None of the main effects were significant (language:  $F(2,92) = 1.49, p > .05$ ; American identification:  $F(1,92) = 1.49, p > .05$ ). Contrary to our predictions, the interaction between language and American identification was also non-significant ( $F(2,92) < 1$ ). Last, the overall scores of expertise were also submitted to a 3 (language)  $\times$  2 (American identification) ANOVA. The results show no significant main effects for language ( $F(2,92) < 1$ ) and American identification ( $F(1,92) = 1.52, p > .05$ ). However, as predicted, the interaction between language and American identification was significant ( $F(2,92) = 3.89, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .08$ ). Showing partial support for H1, among high American identifiers the source expertise was perceived equally favorable when the ad was in English ( $M_E = 4.14$ ) and Spanish ( $M_S = 5.02, p > .1$ ). As predicted, post hoc comparisons indicate that among low American identifiers source expertise is higher when advertisement is in English

( $M_E = 5.15$ ,  $t(50) = 4.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ) compared to the advertisement that use code-switching ( $M_{CS} = 3.76$ ). The comparison of perceived source expertise between the ad in English and the ad in Spanish reached marginal significance ( $M_S = 4.52$ ,  $t(43) = 1.77$ ,  $p = .08$ ). Hence, H2 is partially supported. Last, source expertise is not significantly different between American identification groups when the ad was in code-switching ( $M_L = 4.43$ ,  $M_H = 4.65$ ,  $t(96) < 1$ ), as predicted in H3. In sum, H1, H2 and H3 are partially supported, the combined effects of language and strength of identification with the American culture were only significant for source expertise.

To test H4, H5 and H6, the average scores of brand attitudes ( $\alpha = .91$ ) were submitted to a 3 (language)  $\times$  2 (strength of American identification) ANOVA. A significant main effect for language was found ( $F(2,92) = 8.29$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .15$ ); brand attitudes were significantly lower for advertisements using code-switching ( $M_{CS} = 3.16$ ) compared to advertisements in English ( $M_E = 4.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or Spanish ( $M_S = 4.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As expected, the interaction between language and strength of identification with the American culture was significant ( $F(2,92) = 3.38$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ ). Showing support for H4 among bilingual Hispanics that identify highly with the American culture, brand attitudes are not significantly different between ad languages ( $M_E = 4.0$ ,  $M_S = 4.55$ ,  $t(15) < 1$ ). Pairwise comparisons show that among low American identifiers, brand attitudes were significantly higher when the brand was advertised using English ( $M_E = 4.9$ ) than when it was advertised in Spanish ( $M_S = 3.75$ ,  $t(43) = 3.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as predicted in H5. Finally, no brand attitude differences were found between American identification groups, when the advertisements used code-switching ( $M_L = 3.84$ ,  $M_H = 4.0$ ,  $t(96) < 1$ ). Therefore, H4, H5 and H6 are supported (Figure 1).

Figure 1

*Mean Brand Attitude by Language and American Identification Groups*

According to H7, H8 and H9, the effects of language and American identification on brand attitudes are mediated by source trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Since the language and American identification effects were only significant on source expertise, H7 and H9 are not supported. Therefore, the mediation effects were only analyzed for source expertise. To test for the mediation effects, we submitted the brand attitudes to a 3 (language)  $\times$  2 (strength of American identification) ANCOVA using source expertise as a covariate. The results reveal a significant effect for source expertise ( $F(1, 91) = 39.21$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .3$ ), a significant effect for language ( $F(2, 91) = 7.16$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .14$ ), and a non-significant interaction between language and American identification ( $F(2, 91) = 1.48$ ,  $p > .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ), indicating that the effects of language on brand attitudes are mediated by the source expertise. Hence, H8 is supported.



## Discussion

Despite the acknowledgement that cultures have blended and the recognition of multicultural societies and markets, little research exists on bilingual consumers. There are limited efforts in the literature to understand the effects of language choice in persuasion among bilingual consumers. The present study contributes to our understanding of language effects on source credibility and persuasion, and the moderating effects of American identification.

### Theoretical Implications and Future Research

Predictions about the effects of language on source credibility and brand evaluations were made under the assumption that language was used as an ethnic cue and made accessible not only the source ethnicity, but also the stereotypes attached to that specific ethnic group.

Therefore, judgements about the source expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, and consequently brand evaluations, would be affected by the stereotype associated to the language according to participants' strength of ethnic identification. Our conceptualization assumed that because of their adaptation process, Hispanics can identify with both cultures at different degrees of strength (Alvarez et al., 2014; Alvarez et al., 2017a). Unlike previous research (e.g., Madadi et al., 2020), this study explored, for the first time, the moderating role of consumers' strength of identification with the American culture on source credibility and persuasion. Our investigation should caution researchers about the risks of neglecting individual differences when testing the persuasive impact of advertising language. To illustrate, suppose we had not used the strength of ethnic identification with the American culture as a potential moderator. If so, no language effects would have been found on source credibility.

The study results reveal that language only affects the perceived knowledge and competence of the source; in other words, the source level of expertise. Hence, the effects of language on

source expertise are the only source effects that have a significant impact on brand judgements. In addition, the effects of language on brand evaluations are mediated by the perceived source expertise. According to our results, among high American identifiers, a source using English to communicate is perceived equally competent in comparison to a source using Spanish; consequently, brands advertised using both languages were equally evaluated. However, source's level of expertise and brand evaluations were evaluated more favorably when the communication was in English compared to Spanish among participants that do not identify with the American culture. In accordance to previous research in sociolinguistics (Montes-Alcalá, 2000), compared to a source that uses English or Spanish to communicate, a source that communicates with code-switching elicits lower expertise and brand evaluations, regardless of participants identification with the American culture.

Perceived trustworthiness was not affected by the language of the communication, and consequently brand evaluations were unaffected as well. Based on a review of celebrity endorsement literature, Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) conclude that there is no evidence to support the idea that source trustworthiness, measured independently, influences brand evaluations. When compared, the effects of source expertise on brand evaluations are more prevalent than the effects of source trustworthiness (Rositer & Smidts, 2012). However, in a meta-analysis, Amos et al. (2008) concluded that source trustworthiness was more influential compared to source expertise. Our results are in accordance with Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) findings; these mixed results call for more research about possible moderators of the relationship between source expertise, trustworthiness, and brand evaluations.

It was predicted that language will also affect the perceived source attractiveness. The study results do not show support for such prediction. The experiment stimuli offered participants an additional visual cue for forming judgements about the source attractiveness, the spokesperson photograph. We cannot discern if this cue was the only piece of information that participants

used to judge the attractiveness of the source, or if language was employed in addition or instead of the photograph. The study results can be explained by this confound, since there were no significant differences between the experimental conditions. Therefore, we cannot conclude that participants' judgements of the source physical attributes were not affected by language. The stimuli design represents a limitation of the experimental study, future research should consider that consumer judgements can be formed from several cues provided by the advertisements, including language.

However, another possible explanation for the lack of results on perceived source attractiveness could be because source attractiveness is associated to physical characteristics, rather than competence or dependability, therefore, the stereotype associated to each language did not affect individuals' judgments on the source attractiveness and brand evaluations. According to Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) while most studies have documented a relationship between source attractiveness and brand evaluations, some have failed to support this relationship (e.g., Ohanian, 1991). Hence, our results underline the need for future research on this area that would clarify the moderating variables that affect the relationship between source attractiveness and brand evaluations.

According to the study findings, regardless of the level of identification with the American culture, the source expertise and consequently brand evaluations were the lowest when they employed code-switching. Research on code-switching has been tested using slogans and printed advertising (e.g. Luna & Peracchio, 2005). According to Montes-Alcalá (2000) attitudes towards code-switching vary according to the communication mode used (oral or written code-switching). Future studies might consider varying the advertising mode and test whether source credibility is affected when a different language is employed in oral advertisements, much like the methodology employed by Lambert and Lambert (1973).

This research is a first attempt at measuring the effects of language on source credibility, replications are needed among non-

student samples and different communication strategies. The study employed a spokesperson as the communication source. Although there is no reason to believe that the meaning transfer evoked by the communication language would be moderated by the type of source, more research is granted before generalizing these effects to celebrity endorsers or influencers.

The present study tested the moderating effects of American identification; however, as previously stated, the acculturation process is bicultural. Future research should attempt to understand the joint effects of both ethnic identification constructs and determine if consumers' cultural stereotypes vary according to the strength of Hispanic identification.

Finally, our research evaluated the effects of language on a single product. Previous research supports the idea that a match-up between spokesperson and product characteristics increase consumer evaluations of the product advertised (e.g. Choi & Rifon, 2012). Future research might investigate if a match between the type of product and language improves customer evaluations, and if this improvement does not vary across ethnic identification groups.

### **Managerial Implications**

Considering that the majority of U.S. Hispanics are bicultural-bilingual (Alvarez et al., 2014), and therefore, identify with both, the American and the Hispanic culture, communications to Hispanics using English and Spanish should elicit similar responses to the source credibility and brand evaluations. However, for those that do not identify with the American culture, communications in English are more effective. Be that as it may, the segment of bilingual Hispanics that do not identify with the American culture is smaller and harder to target. Therefore, including measures of ethnic identification in the segmentation scheme should prove to be useful.

Our results suggest that advertisers should stay away from using code-switching as a communication tool in printed advertising; among bilingual Hispanics the effectiveness of this strategy is

lower than the conventional use of English or Spanish. Sources that employ code-switching were perceived less competent and knowledgeable compared to sources that used either English or Spanish, generating lower brand attitudes.

In closing, this study reveals not only the effects of language choice on printed advertisements among bilingual Hispanic audiences, but also the relevance of Hispanic consumers' American identification. The consequences of both language choice in advertisements and American identification are mostly unknown; the present study only begins to unveil the issues involved in advertising to the Hispanic market.

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