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## Bilingual Speakers and Language: A Viable Marketing Strategy for Advertisers Worldwide

Advertising is an industry that measures its success by how effectively it sways audiences into purchasing a product; it generally does this by using words and phrases that appeal to logic, emotion, and authority. Wanting to further their commercial success, advertising companies worldwide have recently turned their attention to the bilingual community. Researchers have been investigating the impact of language on how amenable the bilingual community is to advertisement persuasion. Most sources agree that presenting an advertisement in a native language versus a second language positively impacts how susceptible the bilingual community is to the effects of advertising; however, others believe the above sources misattribute the link between language and advertisement susceptibility (Micu 5). Therefore, given the existence of these contradictory positions, this paper will address the following question: Is there a difference in the success of an advertisement when advertisers use the native language versus the second language of a bilingual community? I will first explore the arguments of those who claim a link between persuadability and presenting an advertisement in the native language of a bilingual community. I will next challenge those arguments with the arguments of those who deny any correlation, putting both sides in conversation with one another. I will conclude by introducing my primary research, determining the results of my secondary research that support those of my primary research, and supporting my answer to the aforementioned question: Although some research suggests that native language and advertisement susceptibility for bilingual speakers are

not directly related, I argue that--given the amount of evidence that suggests there is a relationship--the success of an advertisement is positively correlated with an advertisement's usage of a bilingual community's native language. And, given this correlation, using the native language of a bilingual community becomes a viable marketing strategy for advertisers to cater to bilingual audiences.

The first argument supporting the existence of a link between language and advertisement success is that bilingual speakers are more emotionally attached to their native languages.

Stefano Puntoni, a marketing professor at Rotterdam School of Management, conducted an experiment in 2008 that tested the emotionality of Dutch and French advertising slogans for trilingual Dutch-French-English speakers; of the sixty-four participants, half of the participants' first language was French, and the remaining half's first language was Dutch. After showing the participants six slogans and asking them to rate the emotional intensity of each slogan on a seven-point scale, Puntoni found that, across both the Dutch and French native speakers, L1 (maternal language) advertising slogans were rated as more emotional than L2 (second language) slogans. Puntoni's reasoning for these results is that

episodic trace theories suggest that, in general, the activation intensity of an echo is a positive function of the number of relevant episodic traces stored in memory. Words that are encountered more often should be part of a larger number of episodic traces, leading to stronger echo of emotions that have been experienced during these episodes. As a result, there should be a positive correlation between how often a word is encountered in a particular language and emotionality. (1014)

Therefore, given that someone's native language is generally the language they encounter most frequently, Puntoni's results demonstrate that presenting advertisements in the native language of

a bilingual community increases persuadability because bilingual speakers gain emotional attachments to their native languages as a result of interacting so frequently with them.

Agreeing with Puntoni's results, another experiment conducted in 2013 by Marco Santello, a lecturer for International Competence at University of Leeds, showed that English-Italian bilingual speakers living in Australia responded more favorably to advertisements presented in Italian—the native language of each participant. After showing each participant a set of six advertisements—three in English and three in Italian—Santello recorded that each participant was generally more receptive to advertisements presented to them in Italian, but additionally noted that “emotionality of languages in advertising to bilinguals has been found in previous research (Puntoni et al. 2009), and emerges here too with marked emphasis when the participant cites a line in the advertisement and reproduces the prosody she remembers”; he is referring to a participant who actually cried after seeing an advertisement for a well-known campaign of a telecommunications company addressing Italians in Australia (109-110). The fact that an advertisement in Italian actually prompted a participant to cry is a testament to the level of emotionality that advertisements presented in the native language of a bilingual community are capable of evoking. Therefore, these results not only confirm Puntoni's findings that bilingual speakers are emotionally attached to their native languages, but take his results even further by demonstrating just how intense that emotional connection is.

While some researchers found that bilingual speakers are more emotionally attached to their native languages, another argument supporting the existence of a link between advertisement success and language is that bilingual speakers are more likely to remember advertisements in their native languages. In a 2001 study, Laura Peracchio, a professor at the Lubar School of Business, assessed the ability of forty English-Spanish speakers to remember

advertisements presented in Spanish versus English. According to her results, Peracchio found that retention was generally greater for L1 advertisements versus L2 advertisements among the participants. Commenting on her results, Peracchio writes that “conceptual links to the individual’s L2 are weaker than L1 links because it is only after individuals have achieved a high level of proficiency in their L2 that they rely less on their L1 to gain access to meaning” (285). Given that conceptual linking, or the ability to process meaning in a language, is more accessible for bilingual speakers in their dominant languages, Peracchio thereby shows through this study that bilingual speakers presented an advertisement in their dominant language are able to better process and recall the content of the advertisement. Consequently, because they are better able to remember advertisement in their native languages, bilingual speakers are more likely to be susceptible to them and thereby more likely to purchase the advertised product. It is important I emphasize that, although there is a much greater probability of purchasing the advertised product, there is no guarantee. Many other factors influence the purchasing decision, including the bilingual speaker’s financial context, the product’s availability, etc.. Thus, using the bilingual speaker’s native language in the advertisement merely increases the susceptibility of a bilingual consumer to an advertisement, but does not offer any guarantee.



Figure 1 This advertisement was used in Noriega and Blair's study to test the impact of language and culture on advertisement favorability.

As research has demonstrated, emotionality and conceptual-linking are two arguments that support the existence of a link between language and advertisement success. Another important argument supporting the existence of this link is that native languages trigger memories of family, friends, and culture for bilingual speakers; as a result, they will react more favorably to advertisements that appeal to them culturally. An experiment conducted by Jamie Noriega, an assistant professor of marketing at DePaul University, showed that Spanish-English bilingual speakers living in southwest United States responded more favorably to advertisements written in Spanish than English. They asked participants to rank on a scale of one to seven how often they ate lunch with their families and how often they ate dinner with their families. Based on the results, the participants ate lunch with their families less than half the time, but ate dinner with their families almost always. They then showed the participants either a pair of lunch

advertisements-- one written in Spanish and the other in English-- or a pair of dinner advertisements (Figure 1) and asked them to write every thought they had when they looked at the pair of advertisements. Noriega found that “the Spanish-dinner condition yielded a significantly higher proportion of FFHH [family, friends, home and homeland]-related thoughts than the other conditions” (77). Because our languages are informed by our cultures, this experiment demonstrates that native languages automatically elicit cultural attachments for bilingual speakers, so bilingual speakers will naturally view advertisements that appeal to them linguistically and culturally in a more positive light. Therefore, it reasonably follows that bilingual speakers would be more susceptible to these advertisements and thereby more likely to purchase the advertised product.

Despite the various evidence that suggests a link between language and advertisement success, some researchers found that native language and advertisement success are not always positively correlated. For instance, in her study that tested the effects of language on advertisement susceptible for bilingual English-Romanian in Romania, Dr. Camelia C. Micu, a marketing professor at Fairfield University, found that the participants generally had more positive attitudes toward advertisements presented in English than those presented in Romanian when the advertisement was for a multinational company; as for local companies, Micu found no difference in the success of the advertisement. Micu attributes these results to “the positive associations that are related to the English language such as globalness, prestige, and being cosmopolitan” (5). Therefore, Micu’s study offers not only that there is no difference between language and advertisement success, but that the positive effect of English on consumer attitudes is due to English’s status as a globally represented language; this global representation, in consumer’s eyes, makes English a reliable business language because of its commercial

representation, and this reliability translates to more favorable attitudes toward advertisements presented in English.

For my primary research I interviewed Arthur Tavora, the Marketing and Graphic Design Coordinator for the San Francisco Stem Cell Treatment Center; he also worked for five years as a marketing manager for a multinational law firm. Although Tavora claims that San Francisco Stem Cell Treatment Center only advertises in English because its target market is the United States, he acknowledges a benefit to advertising in the native languages of bilingual speakers--as he says, "if you define your target as having a better response to their native language, I believe it should be better to have [advertisements] in their own language." However, it is interesting that Tavora—a native Spanish speaker—prefers English as an advertising language. Tavora attributes this to the fact that English, his second language, is a more straightforward language for him than Spanish-- straightforward in the sense that he cannot discern connotation as effectively as he can in Spanish, and thus understands advertisements more denotatively. Tavora's preference for English over Spanish is a very particular context; however, as he offered, advertisements that do use the native language should be more successful in persuading their audience, which does support the overall argument. This thereby extends the conversation about the effects of language on advertisement success for bilingual consumers.

Advertising companies are always searching for the most commodious, efficient, and effective ways to market their products; therefore, it logically follows that they are always striving to best appeal to various consumers. As I have demonstrated through this paper, advertising companies can use language to appeal to bilingual consumers—language familiarity and advertising success are positively correlated; this is because bilingual speakers are more emotionally attached to their native languages, more likely to remember advertisements

presented to them in their native language, and more susceptible to cultural appeals by advertisements. However, although some findings disagree with the notion that native language and advertisement success are directly related, Micu and Coulter's study raises an interesting question about the susceptibility of international bilingual speakers to advertisements presented in English. Because English is the language at the forefront of the global market, it certainly makes sense that advertisements presented in English would be viewed favorably by internationals; English is a familiar business language, and advertisements are promotional notices implemented by virtually every business. Therefore, if anything, Micu and Coulter demonstrated through their study that the link between advertisement success and language for bilingual speakers is not a simple binary--there are other interesting factors that account for linguistic attributions to the success of advertisement, such as the status of English as the dominant business language globally. Accordingly, important questions arise from this finding: How do cultural perceptions of English factor into the link between native language and advertisement susceptibility? Are international bilingual speakers more likely to favor advertisements in English than U.S bilingual speakers? If advertisers want to ascertain that their marketing strategies are most effectively and commodiously inclining bilingual consumers to purchase their products, it is necessary that they research the various linguistic factors that contribute to bilingual attitudes toward advertisements.

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## Abstract

As stated in the survey “Europeans and Their Language,” conducted by the TNS Opinion & Social division of *EU Reporter*, the bilingual community accounts for roughly fifty-six percent of the world’s population. Accordingly, the bilingual community is a very prominent market for the advertising industry. Given that language is theorized to influence our framework for thinking, this paper examines whether presenting an advertisement in the native language of a bilingual community impacts persuadability. More specifically, this paper explores if there is a positive correlation between language and advertisement susceptibility for bilinguals; intuitively, this makes sense because bilinguals should have stronger attachments to their native languages than their second languages. Although some research suggests that native language and advertisement susceptibility for bilingual speakers are not directly related, I argue that--given the amount of evidence that suggests there is a relationship--the success of an advertisement is positively correlated with an advertisement’s usage of a bilingual community’s native language. And, given this correlation, using the native language of a bilingual community becomes a viable marketing strategy for advertisers to cater to bilingual audiences. In analyzing the arguments of those who support the existence of a link between language and advertisement susceptibility, I found that the bilingual community is more receptive to advertisements presented to them in their native language. However, the research challenging the link between native language and advertisement susceptibility, at the very least, confirms that the link is not a simple binary; there are many factors that advertisers must consider when catering to bilingual audiences.