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THE INFLUENCE OF MARKETING
LANGUAGE ON BRAND
ATTITUDES AND CHOICE

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Marketers want to communicate with consumers for a variety of reasons, ranging from increasing brand awareness to persuading people to purchase products or services. In doing so, marketers have multiple means of communicating and persuading. For example, they may use emotional appeals, rational appeals, visual appeals, and so forth, which differ in terms of what is said. However, along with *what* is said (the content of the appeals), *how* it is said also makes a difference. That is, marketers may use linguistic devices to make their claims more persuasive.

In this chapter, we focus on *marketing language*. Language is a ubiquitous but often overlooked marketing tool. It facilitates brand communications in diverse modes and platforms, from print to digital, from personal sales to radio and television advertisements. By marketing language, we refer to various linguistic devices that are used to facilitate communication apart from the content of the communication. Examples include tropes (e.g., metaphors, puns, rhetorical questions), alliteration, rhyme, speech rate, and sound symbolism, just to name a few.

We explore these and other marketing linguistic devices that influence brand attitudes and choice in detail in the following sections. We also discuss the cross-modal interaction of marketing language devices with other sensory elements such as name font and logo, boundary conditions, and practical implications. Finally, we identify promising avenues for future research based on the reviewed literature.

Marketing Language Devices

Metaphor

Metaphor is a form of figurative speech in which a word or phrase that denotes a particular thing or concept is used to refer to another concept, thereby conveying similarities and linkages (e.g., “He is the black sheep of the family”). McQuarrie and Mick (1996) propose that metaphors increase elaboration and generate pleasure in consumers because their initial

ambiguity stimulates interest, and resolving the ambiguity feels rewarding (cf. Berlyne, 1971; McQuarrie & Mick, 1992; Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1994).

Figurative language is often used in product reviews (e.g., “paradise disguised as a hotel”). Because hedonic experiences are more emotional than utilitarian experiences (Adaval, 2001; Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Drolet, Williams, & Lau-Gesk, 2007; Kivetz & Simonson, 2002; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998), and figurative language is a conversational norm for emotional communications, reviews containing more figurative language are more persuasive for hedonic than utilitarian products. Furthermore, reading a review with figurative language increases choice share of hedonic over utilitarian options. Perhaps intuiting this, consumers use more figurative language when sharing about hedonic than sharing about utilitarian products (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013). Thus, hedonic brands should benefit more from metaphorical marketing language than utilitarian brands.

Puns

A pun is a humorous play on words in which a word or phrase exploits the different possible meanings the same word might have or how two different words may sound alike but mean different things (e.g., “shoes with lasting soul”). Some research suggests that consumers prefer slogans with puns to slogans without puns (Van Mulken, van Enschot-van Dijk, & Hoeken, 2005) because the use of puns provides the pleasure of solving a mental puzzle. One way brand advertisements can leverage this preference is by incorporating verbal puns with visual imagery. For instance, in one study, participants who were shown hypothetical ads that either featured a verbal pun (e.g., for tea: “get yourself into a lot of hot water”) or no verbal pun (e.g., “get yourself into a lot of hot tea”) subsequently expressed more positive brand attitudes, attitudes toward the ad, and memory for the ad, in the pun condition than in the no-pun condition (McQuarrie & Mick, 1992). However, these effects are bounded by the degree of difficulty involved in comprehending the advertisement, because too much difficulty can have a negative impact, creating confusion rather than interest (McQuarrie & Mick, 1999). Similarly, participants prefer a hypothetical brand extension that is moderately incongruent with the parent brand (e.g., Coppertone book about Vitamin D) rather than very congruent (e.g., Coppertone book about healthy skin) or very incongruent (e.g., Coppertone book about grilling steak; Meyers-Levy, Louie, & Curren, 1994), because the increased elaboration that is stimulated by moderate incongruence and the pleasure of resolving the incongruity is limited to situations where resolving the incongruity is not too taxing (Berlyne, 1971; Eco, 1979; McQuarrie & Mick, 1992; Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1994).

Questions

Rhetorical questions (e.g., “Cheerios taste great, don’t they?”) may also stimulate elaboration and enhance message processing (Petty, Cacioppo, & Heesacker, 1981). Ahluwalia and Burnkrant (2004) found that rhetorical questions are not highly salient to un-savvy consumers (i.e., participants low in persuasion knowledge), and such participants are therefore unlikely to elaborate on a rhetorical question. However, rhetorical questions are salient to savvy consumers (i.e., participants high in persuasion knowledge), who are therefore more likely to elaborate on the question and try to infer why the communicator asked the question, which focuses attention on the communicator. Subsequently, for savvy consumers, rhetorical questions posed by positively perceived sources, such as socially responsible corporations, are deemed more open, less pressuring, and are more persuasive. Conversely, rhetorical questions posed by

negatively perceived sources, such as corporations described as lacking concern for the environment, are deemed more pressuring and produce negative evaluations and brand attitudes.

Tag questions – short question phrases at the end of a statement, for example, “don’t you think?” – may also increase or decrease persuasion, depending on source credibility (Blankenship & Craig, 2007; Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999). This subtype of rhetorical question can soften the impact of assertions (Lakoff, 1972), is associated with feminine speech patterns, (Mulac & Lundell, 1986), and has been found to produce negative perceptions of speakers’ credibility and trustworthiness (Hosman, 1989). Furthermore, tag questions, along with hesitations (e.g., “um”) and hedges (e.g., “sort of”) are the three most common language markers of powerlessness (Ng & Bradac, 1993). Nevertheless, this linguistic device may sometimes be useful. For instance, tag questions can be persuasive when the speaker is highly credible (e.g., the dean of a university writing about the value of comprehensive exams). Under such conditions, communications with tag questions increase processing relative to communications without tag questions, and therefore strong arguments are more persuasive, but weak arguments are less persuasive. However, when the source is not credible (e.g., a high school student writing about the value of comprehensive exams), tag questions decrease persuasion regardless of argument strength (Blankenship & Craig, 2007).

Therefore, a highly credible brand spokesperson such as Steve Jobs could effectively ask a rhetorical question such as, “This iPhone is great, don’t you think?” at a product launch where he also made many strong arguments for the iPhone’s utility. However, many celebrity spokespeople should probably not use tag questions, particularly if they do not also present strong arguments.

Rate of Speech

Rate of speech may also be an important linguistic variable for brand spokespersons. In general, spoken communication can produce warmer listener attitudes than written communication (Novielli, de Rosis, & Mazzotta, 2010). However, rate of speech is an important factor because people with a faster rate of speech are perceived as more competent, credible, knowledgeable, and trustworthy than those with a slower rate of speech, a perception that can influence persuasion (Miller, Maruyama, Beaver, & Valone, 1976; Stewart & Ryan, 1982). In general, faster speakers are perceived more favorably than slower speakers, and younger speakers are perceived more favorably than older speakers. Similarly, using a synthetic speech system that passed for human speech, researchers found that low-pitched voices are generally evaluated more favorably than high-pitched voices, and slowing the rate of speech led participants to evaluate voices as less competent, whereas speeding up the rate of speech led participants to evaluate voices as less benevolent (Brown, Strong, & Rencher, 1973). However, when young people speak slowly this violates expectations, leading to especially negative attitudes toward speakers, whereas incongruent fast-speaking older people elicit mildly favorable attitudes (Stewart & Ryan, 1982).

Politeness

Politeness can be persuasive because matching the linguistic style of a request to the listener’s expectations increases compliance (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987). Dispreferred markers are words or phrases, such as “I’ll be honest,” that allow speakers to downplay the negativity of their statements. Dispreferred markers function as a form of social etiquette by softening the delivery of criticism, which eases the social costs of negative (e.g., face-threatening) pronouncements for

both communicators and listeners, for instance in product reviews. Consequently, dispreferred markers enhance attitudes toward communicators, perceptions of the product's personality, and consumers' willingness to pay. For example, when participants read a review with both positive and negative information, in which the negative information was preceded by the statement "I don't want to be mean, but . . .," they were willing to pay more for the product than when the negative information was not preceded by such a dispreferred marker (Hamilton, Vohs, & McGill, 2014). This finding has clear implications for brand spokespeople, salespeople, and online content managers.

Intensity

Language intensity refers to the degree to which words or phrases increase the extremity of a concept or proposition. Language intensity can increase brand message processing. Adverb intensifiers, such as "very," "really," or "extremely," increase the degree of intensity associated with a message, and intensity has been shown to influence attitudes (Hamilton, 1998), perceived credibility (Aune & Kikuchi, 1993; Hamilton, 1998), and behavior (Andersen & Blackburn, 2004; Buller, et al., 2000). For instance, e-mail messages featuring intense language increase survey response rates relative to the same messages without intense language (Andersen & Blackburn, 2004). Craig and Blankenship (2011) found that degree of processing led to enhanced attitudes toward comprehensive exams, and behavioral intentions to sign a petition in favor of comprehensive exams, for participants who read a message with intense language and strong arguments, relative to those who read the same message without intense language. Conversely, when intense language was used in conjunction with weak arguments, attitudes and behavioral intentions were reduced relative to strong argument conditions. However, for non-intense language, argument strength was not a significant factor. Marketing communications leveraging intense language in conjunction with strong arguments should therefore enhance brand attitudes, whereas communications with intense language and weak arguments risk undermining brand attitudes.

Explaining Language

Writing about why an experience happened, or why the experience was good or bad, can have a strong influence on people's evaluations and intentions to repeat or recommend products (Moore, 2012). Explaining language, such as "because . . ." statements, stimulate processing, which can help consumers understand their experiences better. This process of understanding subsequently dampens consumers' feelings about hedonic experiences (making positive experiences less positive, and negative experiences less negative in memory), but polarizes feelings about utilitarian experiences (making positive experiences more positive, and negative experiences more negative in memory). Thus, hedonic brands should not encourage consumers to think too analytically about their positive experiences. However, utilitarian brands may benefit from helping consumers explain and therefore understand their positive experiences.

Assertive Language

Assertive language (such as US Airway's slogan "Fly with us") is more persuasive in communications about hedonic products, and hedonically advertised utilitarian products, than non-assertive language (Kronrod, Grinstein, & Wathieu, 2012). Reference to hedonic consumption elevates positive mood (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), and listeners in a positive mood

expect more assertive language (Bloch, 1996). Hence, assertive messages promoting hedonic consumption (e.g., Take a ride on a flying balloon!) are more congruent with expectations than nonassertive messages (e.g., Why not take a ride on a balloon?), and expectation–message congruence facilitates persuasion (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Burgoon & Aho, 1982; Kim, Rao, & Lee, 2009). Hedonic brands should therefore consider leveraging assertive language in marketing communications.

Sound Repetition and Alliteration

Sound repetition refers to multiple occurrences of the same sound within a word (e.g., *Pepsi*), whereas alliteration refers to occurrences of the same sound at the beginning of adjacent words (e.g., *Dunkin Donuts*). These phonetic devices can produce positive affect, which enhances brand evaluations, reactions to cross-selling, and product choices, particularly when the name is spoken aloud. For example, Argo, Popa, and Smith (2010) manipulated sound repetition by reading aloud to participants hypothetical brand names that either featured sound repetition (i.e., “sepsop” or “temasema”) or did not (i.e., “sepfut” or “temafanu”), while varying whether participants were instructed to regulate or not regulate their emotions. In the natural (non-regulation) emotion condition, participants were told to be as natural as possible and to let their feelings flow. In the emotion suppression condition, participants were told to remain completely neutral, to try not to let any feelings show, and to suppress their internal reactions. The results showed that brand names with sound repetition were evaluated more favorably than those without in the natural emotion condition, but there were no differences in brand name evaluation in the emotion suppression condition. These findings suggest that emotion is an important mechanism by which marketing language influences consumers.

Rhyme

Brand names with sounds that are repeated to produce rhymes can be more memorable. The memory benefits of rhyme were illustrated by a study in which participants listened to recorded word lists that they were instructed to remember so they could subsequently recall and write down the words they had heard in the correct order. The words contained either rhyming suffixes (e.g., “pin – tin”), alliterative suffixes (e.g., “pin – pig”), or unrelated suffixes (e.g., “pin – mob”). Participants were better able to recall words with rhyming suffixes than words with alliterative suffixes, and better able to recall words with alliterative suffixes than unrelated suffixes. This effect was driven by enhanced recall for the final rhyming word in each list (Carr & Miles, 1997). These findings suggest that the initial and final syllables of a word are stored as separate entities in short-term acoustic memory (Treiman & Danis, 1988), leading to memory differences between alliteration, which is based on the first syllable, and traditional rhyme, which is based on the final syllable, because rhyme endings provide a retrieval cue that enhances recall (Tehan & Fallon, 1999).

Sound Symbolism

Sound symbolism refers to a non-arbitrary relation between the sound of a word and its meaning. More specifically, sound symbolism posits that the mere sound of a word, apart from its definition, conveys meaning. Sound symbolism is one of the most studied brand namings devices, possibly because it has been recognized as a phenomenon since antiquity (for a review, see Shrum & Lowrey, 2007). The notion that individual sounds convey meaning

dates to Plato's *Cratylus*, in which Socrates suggests that although sound and meaning may sometimes be arbitrary, *good* words are those with sound and meaning that are congruent (Plato, 1892). Sound symbolic meaning can convey many attributes relevant to product branding (Lowrey & Shrum, 2007). For example, product names with front vowels seem smaller, lighter (relative to darker), milder, thinner, softer, faster, colder, more bitter, more feminine, friendlier, weaker, lighter (relative to heavier), and prettier than names with back vowels (Klink, 2000). Notably, the front vowel "eee" (as in eBay), associated with the former group of concepts (small, fast, light, etc.), was found to be the most common vowel sound among top brand names (Pogacar, Plant, Rosulek, & Kouril, 2015).

Particles

Particles (including pronouns) are simple function words whose influence often goes unnoticed (Pennebaker, 2011), yet these function words can have profound influence. For instance, classifiers – which are particles, similar to "a" and "the" in English – are used in some languages to categorize objects. In Chinese, for instance, the words chopstick and pen share a classifier (*zhi*), which often accompanies the noun (e.g., "zhi chopsticks" or "zhi pens"), whereas the word *bonsai* is accompanied by a different classifier. For speakers of languages with classifiers, the valence associated with one object can influence the choice of a separate object that shares a common classifier. This phenomenon was demonstrated by Schmitt and Zhang (1998), who presented English and Chinese speaking participants with a gift-buying scenario and asked them to choose between two products. In the scenario, participants were asked to imagine that they had asked their friend's parents for guidance about what to buy for the friend's birthday, and learned that the friend would like two things (e.g., a pen or a *bonsai*), which are distinguished by different classifiers in Chinese. In the positive reference condition, the participants also learned that their friend would *most* like chopsticks, whereas in the negative reference condition the participants learned that their friend would *least* like chopsticks.

Importantly, as mentioned previously, chopsticks share a common classifier with pens in Chinese. In a control condition, no mention was made of chopsticks. Participants were then told that chopsticks were not available when they reached the store, and were asked to choose between buying their friend a pen or a *bonsai*. Chinese participants were more likely to choose the pen, which shares a classifier with chopsticks, in the positive reference condition, in which chopsticks were described as the most desirable gift, than in the control condition. Conversely, Chinese participants were less likely to choose the pen in the negative reference condition, in which chopsticks were described as an undesirable gift, than in the control condition. For English speakers, however, who did not perceive any classifier-based similarity between the pen and the chopsticks, there was no significant association between conditions and choice. These findings suggest that brand communications targeted at markets like China, with classifier systems, should be carefully crafted to make positive classifier associations.

Cross-Modal Sensory Interactions

Different elements of marketing language, such as the voice used to read a name and the font the name is written in, may interact with each other to influence consumer evaluations. Because the voice used to read the name is an audio element, and the font the name is written in is a visual element, this interaction can be termed cross-modal: it spans multiple modes of sensory perception. One illustration of such a cross-modal effect is provided by Pan and Schmitt (1996), who had Chinese and English speaking participants evaluate brand names in

product categories that were either masculine (e.g., power tools) or feminine (e.g., lipstick). The brand names were written in either masculine or feminine fonts, or read by a male or female announcer. Thus, the design had four conditions: congruent font – congruent voice; congruent font – incongruent voice; incongruent font – congruent voice; and incongruent font – incongruent voice. All participants liked the brands best when both the font and voice matched the product category. However Chinese speakers liked brands more when the font matched the product category than when it did not, whereas English speakers' evaluations did not differ significantly based on font. Conversely, English speakers liked the brands better when the voice matched the product category than when it did not, whereas Chinese speakers' evaluations did not vary based on voice. These differences occur because Chinese features a logographic writing system, which emphasizes visual elements, whereas English uses an alphabetic system, which emphasizes phonetic (sound) elements.

Linguistic elements of brand name articulation may also interact with visual elements of the brand's logo to influence consumer perceptions of meaning. For instance, the sound symbolism in a brand name, as conveyed by front versus back vowels, can work together with the logo size, shape, and color to communicate brand meaning (Klink, 2003).

Boundary Conditions

Marketing language effects may differ as a function of contextual factors, individual differences, and consumers' bilingualism. We discuss these potential boundary conditions in the following sections.

Contextual Factors

Consumer Arousal. Consumers in a low state of arousal prefer extreme over moderate incongruity, because it creates curiosity (Noseworthy, Di Muro, & Murray, 2014). Thus, consumers in a low state of arousal should respond best to more complex marketing linguistic devices, which produce curiosity (e.g., via metaphor or pun) and pleasure through incongruence. Conversely, consumers in a high state of arousal prefer no incongruity, because it may be anxiety-producing (Noseworthy et al., 2014). It is therefore likely that consumers in a high state of arousal will respond best to simple marketing linguistic devices. Furthermore, high arousal reduces consumers' processing capacity, thereby increasing the influence of peripheral cues that require little processing capacity (Sanbonmatsu & Kardes, 1988). Consequently, simple marketing linguistic devices (e.g., sound symbolism or rhyme) are likely to have greater influence on brand attitudes when consumers are in a high, rather than moderate or low, state of arousal.

Involvement. High involvement contexts lend themselves more to complex language than do low-involvement contexts. For instance, Lowrey (1998) manipulated linguistic complexity by varying whether a claim for a bran cereal was written as a lower complexity, right-branching sentence ("BRAN-NEW is a healthy choice for breakfast, because it's high in fiber, and it's preservative-free"), or higher complexity, left-branching sentence ("Because it's high in fiber and contains no preservatives, BRAN-NEW is a healthy choice for breakfast"). For high involvement participants, complex syntax increased elaboration, was more persuasive than simple syntax, and enhanced attitudes toward products advertised with strong, rather than weak, arguments. However, complex syntax reduced low-involvement participants' motivation to process the information, suggesting that linguistic complexity is a potentially useful tool that may backfire if used in the wrong context. Simple marketing linguistic devices, such as rhyme and sound symbolism, may be more beneficial in low-involvement contexts.

Expectations are also an important variable in consumer preferences about brand communication. For example, consumers prefer that self/brand relationships are expressed using the closer “we,” or more distant “you and I,” depending on how close the consumer feels to the brand (Sela, Wheeler, & Sarial-Abi, 2012). Language congruent with consumer expectations of closeness can increase trust and brand evaluations, but only when consumers are able to devote processing effort to elaborating on the message.

Emotion. Consumers’ abilities to experience emotion in a given situation is also an important variable in determining the degree to which marketing language may be effective. As mentioned previously, the benefits of sound repetition are limited when participants are told to regulate their emotions (Argo et al., 2010), suggesting that this device may be less effective in certain contexts, such as formal or professional settings (e.g., at the office), and more effective in casual or recreational settings (e.g., at an amusement park).

Emotional state may also lead to gender differences in language comprehension. Language congruent with one’s emotional state is generally easier to comprehend. Women’s reactivity to sad events facilitates faster comprehension of sentences about sad events, whereas men’s reactivity to angry events facilitates faster comprehension of sentences about angry events. Switching between emotions slows comprehension, such that for women, reading a sad sentence slows subsequent reading of a happy sentence more than it does for men, whereas men are slower than women to read a happy sentence following an angry one (Glenberg et al., 2009).

Individual Differences

Individual differences in key personality traits also play an important role in how language affects consumer behavior. For example, participants high in tolerance for ambiguity like ads with mixed wordplay (i.e., both positive and negative elements) more than do participants low in tolerance for ambiguity (McQuarrie & Mick, 1992). Because tolerance for ambiguity is a component of need for closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), it is likely that mixed wordplay will also appeal to those low in need for closure.

Sensory effects such as sound repetition and sound symbolism may be differentially influential depending on individual differences in sensory sensitivity. For example, the effect of sound repetition on preference and choice is moderated by individual differences in consumers’ sensitivity to sound repetition (Argo et al., 2010).

People who are higher in need for cognition tend to generate more thoughtful analyses of written messages (Petty, Cacioppo, & Morris, 1983). Given that complex language requires ability and motivation to process (Lowrey, 1998), it is likely that high need for cognition increases appreciation for complex marketing language, such as metaphors and puns. Conversely, low need for cognition may decrease appreciation for such complex linguistic devices and increase preference for simple marketing linguistic devices such as rhymes.

Need for cognition also influences how people evaluate brand names. For example, consumers usually follow a “higher is better” rule of thumb when choosing among alphanumeric brand names (e.g., KP700 is considered better than KP300). However, consumers high in need for cognition are more likely than those low in need for cognition to process brand names systematically and form inferences about the product from the numbers imbedded in alphanumeric brand names. In contrast, low need for cognition consumers are more likely to choose products with higher-number alphanumeric brand names even when they are objectively inferior to alternatives (Gunasti & Ross, 2010).

Gender can also influence how consumers respond to some marketing linguistic devices. For instance, women prefer brand names with front vowels, such as “Trèbbi,” over names

with back vowels, such as “Trobbi,” particularly when the masculinity/femininity of the product is considered important. Men, on the other hand, are less sensitive to brand name vowel sounds (Klink, 2009). This difference may emerge because women are more sensitive than men in most perceptual modalities (McGuinness, 1976).

Bilingualism

Research suggests that phonetic devices such as sound symbolism are effective across languages, because people from diverse linguistic backgrounds derive similar meaning from the sounds in names (Pogacar, Peterlin, Pokorn, & Pogacar, 2017), regardless of bilingualism or language fluency (Shrum, Lowrey, Luna, Lerman, & Liu, 2012). However, bilingualism, or cross-linguistic marketing environments, may also represent an important moderator of marketing linguistic effects. For example, advertisements are less well remembered when the text is in a consumer’s second language rather than first language, because messages in one’s second language are less likely to be processed at a conceptual level. However, including highly congruent imagery with second language text facilitates conceptual processing of second language messages, and increases memory among bilingual consumers (Luna & Peracchio, 2001).

Relatedly, bilingual consumers perceive text slogans using familiar words from their native language as more emotional than slogans in their non-native language. This effect occurs because, according to the encoding specificity principle (Tulving & Thomson, 1973), memories of experiences are stored together with the linguistic context. Consequently, because autobiographical memories are emotionally powerful (Bower, 1981) and likely to be stored in the context of one’s native language, native language becomes a powerful emotional trigger (Puntoni, De Langhe, & Van Osselaer, 2009). Consistent with this reasoning, advertisements presented in consumers’ native languages are more likely to stimulate self-referent thoughts about family, friends, home, or homeland, which can enhance attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the advertised product (Noriega & Blair, 2008). Indeed, findings from bilingual radio programs suggest that Spanish speakers use Spanish to talk about emotional topics and English to talk about work, finances, or politics (Pennebaker, Mehl, & Niederhoffer, 2003).

Code-switching refers to switching one or more words in a sentence from one language to another. Code-switching directs attention to the code-switched word(s) and activates language schemas associated with the switched-to language (e.g., high vs. low language status). This process leads to elaboration and processing of these associations, and the valence of the associations influences subsequent product evaluations (Luna & Peracchio, 2005). For instance, in the United States, English is commonly associated with affluence, whereas Spanish is associated with lower socioeconomic status, possibly triggering negative valence (Barker et al., 2001). Consequently, when advertisements switch from English to Spanish, which focuses attention on the Spanish language schema and associated valence, attitudes toward slogans are generally less favorable than when ads switch from Spanish to English, which focuses attention on the English language schema (e.g., “In my cocina I would never use any other coffeemaker” vs. “En mi kitchen nunca usaría ninguna otra cafetera”). However, when minority language associations are positive, this pattern is reversed and listeners prefer the slogan that directs their attention toward the minority language word (Luna & Peracchio, 2005).

The influence of pronouns may be particularly important in languages with formal and informal distinctions. For example, in Spanish, informally addressing consumers (e.g., “tu”) elicits more positive reactions for warm brands, whereas formal address (e.g., “usted”) elicits more positive reactions for competent brands (Lenoir, Puntoni, & van Osselaer, 2014).

Agenda for Future Research

Relatively little attention has been paid to many marketing language devices. Therefore, many open questions remain. For example, are different linguistic devices more appealing to consumers of different generations (e.g., millennials vs. baby boomers), levels of product adoption (e.g., innovators vs. laggards), or stages of the purchase process (e.g., information gathering vs. decision-making)? Future research should also address issues of measurement and stimuli, and the need for an integrated framework of marketing language.

Measurement and Stimuli

Most studies of marketing language fall into one of two categories: observational studies that measure the frequencies of different linguistic devices in the marketplace, and experimental studies that measure explicit reactions to (usually) hypothetical advertisements or brand names. One avenue for future research is to take different measurements of consumer responses to marketing language, such as neurological activation or response latency. A measurement method that shows promise is the implicit association test (IAT), which would be particularly appropriate for measuring implicit attitudes toward marketing language devices that are processed automatically and nonconsciously, like brand name phonetics (Klink, 2000; Lowrey & Shrum, 2007; Yorkston & Menon, 2004). One advantage of the IAT, relative to neurological measurement devices such as fMRI, is the availability of software that is free and user-friendly (Carpenter et al., 2016). This response latency approach would enable examination of whether different rhetorical devices are processed at equally implicit levels.

The degree to which different marketing language devices influence consumers when presented visually versus auditorially is another relevant topic for future research. It is interesting to note that whereas most wordplay and sound symbolism effects have been obtained using written experimental materials, which participants read and respond to (e.g., Lowrey & Shrum, 2007; McQuarrie & Mick, 1992), many sound repetition, alliteration, and rhyme effects have been studied using audio stimuli (e.g., Carr & Miles, 1997). Some researchers propose that the mode of brand name presentation (audio vs. visual) influences consumer responses (Argo et al., 2010), whereas others argue that this distinction is inconsequential, at least in the domain of sound symbolism (Brown & Nuttall, 1959; Klink & Athaide, 2012).

Organizing Framework for Marketing Language

Perhaps most importantly, future research should seek to synthesize marketing linguistic effects related to brand name articulation within a larger framework of marketing language that includes more complex communication devices like figurative and assertive language. Such an organizing theoretical framework may answer questions such as how simple and complex marketing linguistic devices interact to influence brand perceptions, and when a given device is more attention-getting or persuasive than others. Moreover, research should investigate when and how different marketing linguistic devices differentially influence consumer choices.

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