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Bachelor's Thesis

Damn! The effects of swearing in foreign language advertising.

Pablo van Maren Díaz

s1004625

Bachelor International Business Communication

Supervised by dr. Frank van Meurs & dr. Marten van der Meulen

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Abstract

Previous studies have shown the effect of the use of swearing in advertising, as advertisements containing obscene language appeared to be more appreciated in terms of attitude and purchase intention. Nevertheless, none of the previous studies have investigated the possible differences in swearing in a foreign language in advertising. The aims of the present study were to identify the effects of the use of swearwords in advertising and to what extent the perception of swearing in advertising in a consumer's native or foreign language influences those effects. In order to gain insight into how consumers perceive advertisements containing swearwords in the consumer's L1 or a foreign language, the attitude towards the ad and product, the purchase intention, emotional response and offensiveness of the advertisements were measured. The experiment used in this study assigned participants to a questionnaire with made-up advertisements with or without the presence of a swearword, either in the native language or in a foreign language (English). The statistical tests showed that there were no significant differences in the appreciation of the advertisements between the different conditions, but the emotional response towards advertisements containing non-swear words was found to be significantly stronger. The results of the tests could be explained by the participant's perceived offensiveness of the advertisements with swear words, as statistical tests showed that perceived offensiveness is significant negative predictor for ad and product attitude and emotional response.

Keywords: swear words, advertising, foreign language, native language, emotional response, appreciation.

Background

Nowadays, advertisements can be seen everywhere. On television or on the radio, in newspapers or on social media, on banners or on posters, consumers are bombarded with hundreds of advertisements every day. From the advertiser's perspective, there are various strategies to break through this clutter of advertisements.

An example of such a strategy that has been used in modern marketing communications is shock advertising or 'shockvertising'. This concept can be defined as a type of advertising that captures the consumer's attention and initiates buzz by using shocking and/or unexpected images and text. A study by Dahl, Frankenberger and Manchanda (2003) has shown that using such a shock appeal in advertising increases both attention and recall of

the advertisement. The concept of shock advertising can be executed in various different ways, with the most common type among these being the use of a shocking image, which multinational Benetton uses in their advertisements, for example. However, Urwin and Venter (2014), who mainly used advertisements with shocking images in their experiment, have demonstrated that the level of the shock and the level of norm violation contribute negatively towards the effectiveness of the advertisements; if the shock of the violation of the norm is immoderate, the appreciation diminishes. In conclusion, as shown by the studies presented above, shock advertising can be effective, provided that the level of the shock is not excessive.

A different type of shock advertising that could be effective, without violating the norm more than is desirable, is the use of swear words in advertising. Swearing in advertising could have a positive effect on consumers towards an advertisement, as swearing/cursing has already been linked to honesty and credibility (Rassin & Van der Heijden, 2005), and has been proved to be persuasive (Scherer & Sagarin, 2006). Westerholm (2017) also suggests that using swear words in advertising improves the average rating of the ad.

Furthermore, when designing the verbal aspect of an advertisement, a marketer has to take various variables into account. In the current globalized world, besides the use of surprising elements like swear words, it is fundamental to consider different languages. The use of foreign language in advertising, mostly used to attract the consumer's attention, has increased in the past decades. A study by Gerritsen et al. (2000) showed that one-third of the advertisements in the corpus that was studied (Dutch nationwide TV) contained English. For German TV, Piller (2000) even found that 70% of the commercials she analysed were bilingual. The research on foreign languages in advertising is more extensive, but the question remains if there are also differences between native and foreign languages in shocking advertising.

Dewaele (2004) found that swear words in someone's native language are perceived as more emotional than the swear word in a foreign language. Dewaele (2016) found some contradicting results, where foreign English speakers overestimate the offensiveness of an English swear word, compared to native English speakers. This could be explained by the environment in which these swear words were learned, as those who have learned the foreign language by instruction are less likely to use and comprehend swears in that foreign language, than those who have learned the language naturally or mixed. Nevertheless, the existence of significant differences in the perception of swear words in a person's native or foreign language are evident. Overall, earlier studies have demonstrated effects of using swear words

in advertising, effects of the use of foreign languages in advertising and significant differences in perception of swear words between languages.

However, these three effects mentioned above have not been tested for reciprocal relations: no research has been done on the effects on consumers when advertisements use swear words in a person's L1 or in a foreign language. Such a study would not only be relevant for advertising research possible effects would also be of interest for advertisers, as the results could support certain strategies involving shockvertising, both globally as locally. In the present study, the possible effects of swearwords in advertising in consumers' native or foreign languages were investigated with the aim of complementing previous studies and filling the existing research gap, while defining some practical implications for advertisers.

RQ: What are the effects on consumers' responses towards advertisements when using swear words in their L1 or a foreign language?

Theoretical Framework

'Shockvertising'

In the current salad bowl of advertising clutter, the use of shocking elements in advertisements is not the most common one. However, it is probable that most people can recall a shocking advertisement. Pictures of pitch-black lungs on cigarette packaging, videos of deadly accidents to stop drunk driving or the controversial ads by Benetton, these are just some examples of the more well-known campaigns that contain shocking advertising. The intentions of such shocking campaigns are usually to increase attention and recall, and to break with the social norms. In general, 'shockvertising' can be defined as advertising "that deliberately, rather than inadvertently, startles and offends its audience" (Dahl et al., 2003, p. 268).

The study by Dahl et al. (2003) among university students reports a positive effect of shock appeal in advertising. The study tested three different appeals (shock, fear and information) in print advertising for attracting attention. The results indicated that shocking appeals were the most effective in attracting attention. Moreover, the researchers suggested that shocking appeals are likely to affect other measures, like recall. Cockrill and Parsonage (2016) demonstrated that shock advertising for charitable organizations has significant effects, by evoking emotions like surprise and interest. The results of this study do suggest that the key to success is the element of surprise, and not the shock element by itself; participants that indicated the perception of swearwords as 'surprising', appreciated the advertisements more than those who thought the ads were 'shocking'. This implies that for charitable marketing,

such shocking appeals do indeed work when they lead to surprise, but if the shock itself is too appalling it will overshadow the effect of surprise, which will lead to negative attitudes. According to Cockrill and Parsonage, advertisements that are perceived as shocking, and not as surprising, are likely to receive strong and unfavourable emotional responses.

Urwin and Venter (2014) support the claim that not all shock appeals can be classified as effective. Their investigation using different shocking appeals (impropriety, sexual reference, moral offensiveness, disgusting images and religious taboos) in print advertising shows that the level of the shock and the level of the norm violation contribute to the ineffectiveness of the advertisement. The more the participants rated the different shocking appeals as shocking and norm violating, the more it contributed to the ineffectiveness of the advertisements. Furthermore, the results of this study suggested that shock advertising appeared “dull” and “nothing out of the ordinary” (Urwin & Venter, 2014, p. 212). Urwin and Venter claim that marketers need to find alternatives for the use of shocking appeals, as it is deemed ineffective. However, the methodology used in this study only contained advertisements with shocking images. The advertisements made by Urwin and Venter were focused on the use of imagery, without using shocking language, such as swear words. Therefore, a general conclusion about the effects of ‘shockvertising’ cannot be drawn from this, as the element of shocking language has not been considered.

***#\$: the effects of swearing**

If the use of shocking imagery appeals is deemed to be effective to a certain extent, or even ineffective, the question remains if there are other types of (shock) advertising that could create that effective element of surprise. The use of swear words in advertising could be the solution. According to Rassin and Van der Heijden (2005), credibility in speech can be increased by using swearwords. Their study tested the effects of using swearwords in speech by using a fictitious conversation of an interrogation of a suspect and an interview of a victim, with and without the use of swearwords. The results showed that in this situation, statements containing swearwords were perceived as more credible. Although it is likely not to be generalizable to every situation (e.g., in a president’s speech), the finding could imply a possible effect of swear words in advertising, as credible advertisements are likely to be more effective. Scherer and Sagarin (2006) dispute the finding that swearing increases credibility, as it can affect perception both positively and negatively. In their between-subjects experiment, participants were exposed to three different types of speeches, either containing a swear at the beginning of the speech, at the end of the speech or a speech without swearwords.

According to Scherer and Sagarin, the use of profane language can affect credibility positively, as it can make a speaker appear “more human”. However, obscenity could also affect credibility negatively as it can be perceived as inappropriate. Nevertheless, the results their study did demonstrate that swearing in speech increased persuasiveness; the analysis proved that swearing, either at the beginning of the speech or at the end, increases the attitude towards the topic. Following the results of this study, swear words in speech can be used to convince receivers about certain topics.

In terms of the use of swearing in advertising, the research on the effects of swearwords is scarce. Mortimer (2007) suggested a number of outcomes for which swearwords can be used. In this exploratory study, it is proposed that swearing can be used to create intimacy, emphasis, personality, humour, shock and offence. Mortimer states that contextual factors, such as demographic variables, strength of the swear and product, influence the perception of the advertisement.

Baker and Broadus (2014) have conducted one of the few studies containing swearing in advertising. In their research, they measured respondents’ attitudes towards four made-up advertisements, containing swearwords. The products that were advertised included an energy drink, a telephone, a magazine and shampoo. The results of the study showed that the use of the word *shit* had a positive effect on the attitude of the participants. For the political magazine, they found extensive significant effects on the use of the swearing advert vis-à-vis the non-swearing, as the ad containing the swearword was perceived more positively. The hypothesis that men would react more positively than women towards ads containing swearwords was not confirmed by the statistical tests. Baker and Broadus claim that ads with swear words for fitting products, evoke more strong emotions, which increases the positive effect of profanity in advertising. Additionally, Westerholm (2017) conducted a study to find possible effects of swearing in advertising. In this research, participants were exposed to four advertisements; three containing a swear (insurance, coffee and phone provider) and one control ad without a swear (energy drink). After conducting a group interview and a survey, the results suggested that the use of swearing increased the overall rating of these advertisements. Westerholm also suggests that swearing can have a positive effect on consumers, as long as the product is fitting and the swear is not too obscene and perceived as offensive.

The multilingualism of advertising

None of the studies presented above have examined the effects of the use of a foreign language. This is remarkable, as the use of foreign languages in advertising is becoming more and more significant in today's society. Globalization has opened the doors for constant transnational interactions, which has led to an increase of possible target groups for multinational companies. Such companies are often confronted with a problematic choice of marketing strategy. Using native languages (local strategy) to customize products for local markets, a global strategy (foreign language), which allows standardization of products, or a combination of both, which is a strategy that adapts the global message for different local markets (Laroche, Kirpalani & Darmon, 1999; Luo & Shenkar, 2006). In order to make such decisions, it is therefore important that possible differences in the effects of foreign language use in advertising are studied. According to Keysar et al. (2012), thinking in a foreign language reduces biases in the decision-making process (described as 'The Foreign Language-effect'). Their experiments showed the effect of foreign languages in the systematic process of deciding, which could influence the evaluation of advertising in terms of purchase intention or attitude. If the bias towards a product and/or brand is reduced, the consumer's perception of an advertisement is likely to be more honest and credible.

There have been numerous studies on the use of foreign languages in advertising, and there seems to be agreement that foreign languages in advertising is often used to attract attention (Domzal, Hunt, and Kernan 1995; Gerritsen et al. 2000; Piller 2001). Domzal, Hunt, and Kernan (1995) suggest that foreign languages are used to create a fuzzi: as this use of a foreign language is unexpected, the surprise effect could lead to an increase of attention. Domzal, Hunt and Kernan (1995), as well as Piller (2001) claim that the attention increases as it takes more effort for consumers to process a foreign language. Following these studies, it can be implied that a combination of foreign language use and 'shockvertising' can create that desired surprise effect, which would increase the effectiveness of an advertisement.

Nevertheless, swearing in a foreign language is likely to be perceived differently than swearing in the native language. As claimed by Dewaele (2004), swearing in one's native language is perceived as more emotional than swearing in a foreign language. In other words, a swearword in a L1 (for example, the Dutch *lul*) will evoke a stronger emotional response than a swearword in a foreign language (for example, the English *prick*). Moreover, according to Dewaele (2016), the emotional response is influenced by the learning method of the foreign language and the frequency of the use of this language, where learning the language by instruction leads to a reduced emotional response to the swearword.

The level of emotional response could thus either to an increase of appreciation of advertisements in the native language if the emotional response is positive, or to a diminution of the appreciation if the response is strongly negative.

According to the findings by Dewaele (2004, 2016) the use of swear words in foreign language advertising could either have a positive or negative effect. The combination of swearword and foreign language would theoretically create surprise and thus create a positive effect. However, as swearing in a foreign language is perceived as less emotional, this effect could be non-existent.

Nonetheless, the claim that ‘shockvertising’ only is effective when the level of shock is moderate (Urwin & Venter, 2014; Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016), could imply that a less emotional response to a swear could increase the positive effect. In the present study, previous research will be elaborated by investigating the effect on consumers’ responses towards advertisements when using swear words in an L1 or a foreign language. As shown by previous studies (Baker & Broadus, 2014; Westerholm, 2017), the shocking effect in advertising creates a positive effect of surprise, the use of swear words is likely to have a positive effect on advertising, provided that the swear words are not perceived as offensive. Therefore, it is expected that advertisements with the presence of swearwords will be more effective than ads that do not contain profane language.

H₁: The use of swearwords in an advertisement is significantly more effective (product attitude, attitude towards ad and purchase intention) than advertisements without swears.

Also, previous findings (Dewaele, 2004) have shown that swearwords are perceived as less emotional in a foreign language, which could influence the effect of swearing in foreign language advertising. However, a substantiated prediction that this would indeed increase consumers appreciation towards the advertisements cannot be made from this, as the results from earlier studies do not indicate that swears in foreign language will have a strongly positive or negative effect on attitude, recall and purchase intention. Therefore, it is hypothesised that the use of swearwords in foreign language advertising will not have different effects than advertisements containing swearwords in the native language.

H₂: The use of swearwords in a foreign language advertisement does not differ significantly in effectiveness (product attitude, attitude towards ad and purchase intention) than swearwords in the native language.

In terms of emotional response, it is hypothesised that advertisements containing swearwords will evoke a stronger emotional response than advertisements without obscene language, as swear words induce various emotions, such as shock and offence (Mortimer, 2007). Moreover, in line with the study by Dewaele (2004), it can be assumed that the participants will show a stronger emotional response when the swear word is in their L1 than in the native language.

H₃: The emotional response will increase for advertisements with a swearword, with a stronger reaction for swears in the L1 than in the foreign language.

The few studies that have been done on the effects of swearing in advertising, did not consider background variables such as age, frequency of swearing or learning environment. This is remarkable, as (some of) these contextual variables could certainly influence consumers' perception of swearing in advertising (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008).

For example, it can be expected that people who have learned the language in differently (by instruction, by environment or mixed), will perceive the foreign language swears differently in terms of attitude and/or emotional response, as found by Dewaele (2016). Besides that, it is often thought that foreign language proficiency and comprehensibility influences the effects of advertisements. This is supported by the study by Hornikx, Van Meurs and De Boer (2010), who compared the effects of advertisements containing native (Dutch) or foreign (English) slogans. They found that comprehensiveness does play a role in appreciation; easy English slogans were better appreciated than difficult English slogans. Moreover, the results of their experimental study showed that participants preferred the foreign language (English) when the foreign slogan was comprehensible, whereas they preferred the native language (Dutch) when the foreign slogan was harder to comprehend.

Nevertheless, the findings by Hornikx et al. (2010) assumption are not supported by Nederstigt and Hilberink-Schulpen (2017), which demonstrated a non-significant effect of language proficiency on attitude towards the advertisement. Their experiment tested the differences of foreign languages (German and Spanish) in language-product congruent advertisements, in comparison with native (Dutch) advertisements. Their analysis showed that foreign Spanish advertisements were more appreciated, although the proficiency of the participants in Spanish was significantly lower than the other languages. This difference could be explained by the fact that German and Dutch advertisements were very similar in terms of language, in comparison to the Spanish advertisements which were very different.

However, proficiency in both Spanish and German was not proven to be a predictor of attitude towards the advertisement. This suggests that advertisements in foreign languages could be appreciated more, even if the consumer does not even understand the language used in the advertisement.

Therefore, the background variables age, comprehensibility of the foreign language, learning environment and frequency of swearing are also tested for possible effects. In the design of the advertisements for this study, low-involvement products have been used to avoid attitude bias on products as much as possible. According to Holmes and Crocker (1987), advertisements containing low-involvement products, are affected more positively by emotional appeals, in comparison to advertisements with high-involvement products. As the use of swearing in advertising can be accounted as an emotional appeal (Mortimer, 2017), low-involvement products were used, as they are likely to have the most positive effect for the emotional appeal that is used in the present study (Holmes & Cocker, 1987).

Methodology

Materials

For this study, the data was collected using an experiment with a between-subjects design. The independent variables that were tested were language (native (L1) / English (Lx)) and presence of swearword (with / without). The questionnaire was conducted for two different groups of natives, Dutch and German. In the experiment, three fictitious advertisements with made-up low-involvement products were used. Examples of the advertisements with the accompanying slogans, for both versions and all languages can be found in the Appendix to this article.

In the version with presence of swearwords, three different swears were used. All the swearwords were chosen for their semantical and emotional equivalence to the same swear in English and the native languages. In the design with non-swear words, intensifiers replaced the swears or the swearword was removed, if it did not affect the sentence. See Table 1 for the slogans for each advertisement with the presence of swears are presented and Table 2 for the slogans for each advertisement without swear.

Table 1. Operationalization of advertisements with the presence of swear words.

Language	Advertisement	Slogan
Dutch (L1)	Ad. 1 (coffee)	Drink je verdomde ochtendhumeur weg
	Ad. 2 (beer)	Wees niet de idioot die met lege handen aankomt!
	Ad. 3 (chewing gum)	Verfris je adem, klootzak
German (L1)	Ad. 1 (coffee)	Trink deine verdammte Morgenlaune weg
	Ad. 2 (beer)	Sei kein Idiot der mit leeren Händen erscheint!
	Ad. 3 (chewing gum)	Frisch deine Atem auf, Arschloch!
English (Lx)	Ad. 1 (coffee)	Drink your damn morning mood away
	Ad. 2 (beer)	Don't be the idiot who shows up empty handed!
	Ad. 3 (chewing gum)	Freshen up your breath, asshole!

Table 2. Operationalization of advertisements without the presence of swear words.

Language	Advertisement	Slogan
Dutch (L1)	Ad. 1 (coffee)	Drink je ochtendhumeur weg
	Ad. 2 (beer)	Wees niet diegene die met lege handen aankomt!
	Ad. 3 (chewing gum)	Verfris je adem!
German (L1)	Ad. 1 (coffee)	Trink deine Morgenlaune weg
	Ad. 2 (beer)	Sei nich die Person die mit leeren Händen erscheint!
	Ad. 3 (chewing gum)	Frisch deine Atem auf!
English (Lx)	Ad. 1 (coffee)	Drink your morning mood away
	Ad. 2 (beer)	Don't be the person who shows up empty handed!
	Ad. 3 (chewing gum)	Freshen up your breath!

Subjects

In total, a number of 265 participants took part in the study; 51% ($N = 135$) of the participants indicated that their native language was German, the other 49% ($N = 130$) consisted of native Dutch speakers. Of the total number of participants, 111 ($N = 111$) were male and 152 ($N = 152$) female. One participant indicated their gender as 'Other' and one participant chose the option 'Don't want to say'. Higher educational levels were dominant in the sample of this experiment, where 50% ($N = 133$) of the participants indicated that they finished or were currently attending a Bachelor's degree. The mean age of the participants was approximately

29 years old ($M = 28.68$, $SD = 13.14$). On average, participants indicated that their proficiency in English was good ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 0.92$), which was mostly acquired by instruction ($N = 119$) and mixed acquirement ($N = 133$). Moreover, participants reported a moderate frequency of swearing ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.42$) and perceived swearing as slightly inappropriate ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.30$).

To test the equal distribution of age, educational level and gender across all versions, different statistical tests have been conducted. Multiple chi-square tests showed no significant values for gender across versions (swear / no swear) in L1 ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.22$, $p = .544$) and L2 ($\chi^2 (2) = 0.92$, $p = .631$), for educational level across versions in L1 ($\chi^2 (5) = 1.59$, $p = .902$) and L2 ($\chi^2 (3) = 3.32$, $p = .345$) and for English acquirement across versions in L1 ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.25$, $p = .535$) and L2 ($\chi^2 (2) = 0.06$, $p = .973$). For age, a one-way ANOVA showed no significant values for age across version in L1 ($F (1, 131) = 2.11$, $p = .149$) and L2 ($F (1, 130) < 1$). Multiple one-way ANOVA's showed no significant values for English proficiency across versions in L1 ($F (1, 131) = 1.91$, $p = .169$) and L2 ($F (1, 130) < 1$), for frequency of swearing across versions in L1 ($F (1, 131) = 1.21$, $p = .273$) and L2 ($F (1, 130) = < 1$) and for perceived appropriateness of swearing across versions in L1 ($F (1, 131) < 1$) and L2 ($F (1, 130) < 1$). The tests thus showed that the distribution of the variables age, gender, educational level, proficiency in English, English acquirement, frequency of swearing and perceived appropriateness of swearing was equal across all groups.

Design

In this experiment, a 2 x 2 between-subjects design was used. Participants were exposed to three different advertisements, either with the presence of swearwords or not and either in their native language (Dutch / German) or in the foreign language (English). Of these four groups, the participants that were exposed to the experiment in their native language without the presence of swearwords were seen as the control group of the study.

Instruments

The effectiveness of the advertisement was analysed by means of the following dependent measures: product attitude, attitude towards the ad, purchase intention and product recall and brand recall. The dependent variable of attitude towards the advertisement was measured using eight different items, based on Villegas & Lucas (2002). Participants were asked to indicate their reactions to the following eight statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *totally disagree* to *totally agree*: *I like this ad...*, *This ad is entertaining...*,

This ad is useful..., This ad is important..., This ad is interesting..., This ad is informative..., I would like to see this ad again... and This ad is good.... The reliability of the scale was good ($\alpha = .92$)

The operationalisation of the construct of product attitude, was measured using five items, inspired by the scale from Villegas & Lucas (2002). On a 7-point Likert scale (*totally disagree – totally agree*), participants reacted to the statements *I like this product..., This product is useful..., This product is interesting..., This product is good..., I like to use this product....* The reliability of the scale was good ($\alpha = .92$)

The intention to buy the product was measured using four different items on a 7-point Likert scale (*totally disagree – totally agree*), taken from In & Ahmad (2018), with the following statements: *My willingness to buy this product is high..., I am likely to buy this product..., I would intend to buy this product... and I have a high intention to buy this product....* The reliability of the scale was good ($\alpha = .92$)

The perceived offensiveness of the advertisements was measured using one statement, based on Timothy P. Christy & Eric Haley (2008): *I consider this ad...,* participants were asked to indicate their perception of the offensiveness on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all offensive* to *extremely offensive*.

To test if participants reacted differently in terms of emotional response, the construct of emotional response was operationalised using seven items based on Erickson & Ritter (2001). Participants were asked to give their opinion about their response to the advertisement on a 7-point Likert scale, using the following statements: *This ad makes me happy..., This ad makes me excited..., This ad makes me angry..., This ad irritates me..., This ad makes me feel guilty..., This ad makes me feel ashamed... and This ad makes me sad....* The reliability of the scale was good ($\alpha = .86$)

The construct of proficiency in English was measured by self-assessment on a 7-point scale ranging from poor to excellent, for the following four items: speaking, writing, reading and listening, inspired by Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008). Participants reacted to the statement *Please indicate how you assess your English on the following four skills...* The reliability of the scale was good ($\alpha = .91$)

Procedure

Participants were approached via e-mail and social media. They received a URL to start the questionnaire and were then randomly assigned to a version of the questionnaire with or without the presence of a swearword, either in their native or foreign language. Participants were then asked to give consent for the voluntary participation in this study, confirm that they had read the introduction that was provided and that they were at least 18 years old. The introduction to the questionnaire consisted of a brief text where participants were informed about the questionnaire as if they were participating in a test about new (Dutch / German) products, on which they were asked to give their opinion. Every advertisement was followed by the questions of the dependent measures stated earlier.

After the participants had answered the questions related to the advertisements, they were asked to provide some details about their background (age, gender, proficiency, learning environment, swearing frequency and perceived appropriateness of swearing). At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to guess the aim of the study. On average, it took participants 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Statistical Treatment

To investigate possible main and interaction effects, a two-way ANOVA was conducted for every dependent variable with language (native / English) and presence of swearword (with / without) as factors. For the background variables of age, gender, self-assessed L2 proficiency, appropriateness of swearing, frequency of swearing, educational level, offensiveness and English learning environment a repeated *linear regression analysis* was conducted to test possible significant predictors for attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product, purchase intention and emotional response.

Results

The means and standard deviations of the dependent variables in function of the version of the advertisement (swear / no swear) for advertisements in L1 can be found in Table 3, the same results for advertisements in L2 are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of all dependent variables in function of version for advertisements in the native language ($N = 133$).

	Swear ($N = 68$)		No Swear ($N = 65$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Attitude towards ad	3.17	0.90	3.26	0.88
Product Attitude	3.96	1.11	4.13	1.12
Purchase Intention	3.05	1.23	3.28	1.26
Emotional Response	4.75	0.65	5.02	0.81
Offensiveness	4.51	1.42	3.32	1.62

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of all dependent variables in function of version for advertisements in the foreign language ($N = 132$).

	Swear ($N = 60$)		No Swear ($N = 72$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Attitude towards ad	3.19	0.84	3.23	0.85
Product Attitude	3.98	1.03	4.00	1.01
Purchase Intention	2.99	1.17	3.02	1.07
Emotional Response	4.87	0.64	5.03	0.69
Offensiveness	4.13	1.25	3.54	1.50

Attitude towards the advertisement

A two-way analysis of variance with version (swear word and no swear word) and language of the advertisement (L1 and English as L2) as between-subjects factors did not show a significant main effect of version ($F(1, 261) < 1$) and language ($F(1, 261) < 1$) on attitude towards the advertisement. The interaction effect between the version of the advertisement and language was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$).

Purchase intention

For purchase intention, a two-way analysis of variance with version and language of the advertisement as between-subjects factors did not show a significant main effect of version ($F(1, 261) < 1$) and language ($F(1, 261) = 1.22, p = .270$). The interaction effect between the version of the advertisement and language was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$).

Attitude towards the product

Furthermore, a two-way analysis of variance with version and language of the advertisement as between-subjects factors showed no significant main effects were found for version ($F(1, 261) < 1$) and language ($F(1, 261) < 1$) on attitude towards the product. The interaction effect between the version of the advertisement and language was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$).

Emotional response

In terms of emotional response, a two-way analysis of variance with version and language of the advertisement as between-subjects factors did show a significant main effect of version ($F(1, 261) = 6.21, p = .013$). Participants indicated that towards advertisements with no swear words ($M = 5.03, SD = 0.55$) evoked a stronger emotional response than towards advertisements containing swear words ($M = 4.81, SD = 0.75$). For language, no significant main effect was found ($F(1, 261) < 1$) and the interaction effect between the version of the advertisement and language was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$).

Offensiveness

For offensiveness, a two-way analysis of variance with version and language of the advertisement as between-subjects factors showed a significant effect of version ($F(1, 261) = 24.63, p < .001$) on the perceived offensiveness of the advertisement. Participants perceived advertisements with swearwords as more offensive ($M = 4.81, SD = 0.75$) than advertisement without the presence of a swear ($M = 4.81, SD = 0.75$). The analysis of variance showed no significant main effect of language ($F(1, 261) < 1$) and no interaction effect between version and language ($F(1, 261) = 2.80, p = .095$). To check possible limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research, it was interesting to see if there were any differences regarding offensiveness of the swearwords between the three advertisements, which could have influenced the total result of offensiveness.

A paired-samples t-test has shown significant differences between the advertisements about chewing gum and beer ($t(264) = 10.61, p < .001$), chewing gum and coffee ($t(264) = 14.10, p < .001$) and beer and coffee ($t(264) = 3.65, p < .001$).

Participants perceived the advertisement about chewing gum ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.97$), more offensive than the advertisements about coffee ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.99$) and beer ($M = 3.51, SD = 2.18$). Moreover, the advertisements about beer ($M = 3.51, SD = 2.18$) were perceived as more offensive than the advertisement about coffee ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.99$).

Predictor Variables

To test possible significant predictor variables for advertisements containing swear words, a series of linear regression analysis were conducted for ads with swear words.

A multiple linear regression analysis showed that the variables tested, age, gender, self-assessed L2 proficiency, appropriateness of swearing, frequency of swearing, educational level, offensiveness and English learning environment, explained 25% of the variance in attitude towards the advertisement for advertisements with swearwords ($F(8, 119) = 6.32, p < .001$). The perceived offensiveness was shown to be significant predictor for attitude towards the advertisement ($\beta = -.36, p < .001$). The attitude towards the advertisement decreases with .36 *SD* for every increase of 1 *SD* of offensiveness, given that all other variables are kept constant. The variables of age ($\beta = -.07, p = .476$), gender ($\beta = .11, p = .189$), self-assessed L2 proficiency ($\beta = .14, p = .127$), frequency of swearing ($\beta = .14, p = .161$), perceived appropriateness ($\beta = .17, p = .081$), educational level ($\beta = -.11, p = .154$) and English learning environment ($\beta = .01, p = .892$) were no significant predictors of the attitude towards the advertisement.

For attitude towards the product, a multiple linear regression analysis showed that the variables tested, age, gender, self-assessed L2 proficiency, appropriateness of swearing, frequency of swearing, educational level, offensiveness and English learning environment, explained 16% of the variance in attitude towards the product for advertisements with swearwords ($F(8, 119) = 4.05, p < .001$). The perceived offensiveness ($\beta = -.30, p = .001$) and Age ($\beta = -.21, p = .039$) were shown to be significant predictor for attitude towards the product. The attitude towards the product decreases with .30 *SD* for every increase of 1 *SD* of offensiveness and decreases with .21 *SD* for every 1 *SD* increase of age, given that all other variables are kept constant. The variables gender ($\beta = .09, p = .299$), self-assessed L2 proficiency ($\beta = .11, p = .241$), frequency of swearing ($\beta = .15, p = .163$), perceived appropriateness ($\beta = -.02, p = .860$),

educational level ($\beta = .02, p = .854$) and English learning environment ($\beta = -.01, p = .957$) were no significant predictors of the attitude towards the product.

For purchase intention, a multiple linear regression analysis showed that the variables tested, age, gender, self-assessed L2 proficiency, appropriateness of swearing, frequency of swearing, educational level, offensiveness and English learning environment, did not explain the variance in purchase intention for advertisements with swearwords ($F(8, 119) = 1.77, p = .090$).

For emotional response, a multiple linear regression analysis showed that the variables tested, age, gender, self-assessed L2 proficiency, appropriateness of swearing, frequency of swearing, educational level, offensiveness and English learning environment, explained 21% of the variance in attitude towards the product for advertisements with swearwords ($F(8, 119) = 5.18, p < .001$). The perceived offensiveness ($\beta = -.38, p < .001$) and age ($\beta = -.22, p = .027$) were shown to be significant predictors for the emotional response. The emotional response decreases with $.38 SD$ for every increase of $1 SD$ of offensiveness and decreases with $.22 SD$ for every $1 SD$ increase of age, given that all other variables are kept constant. The variables of gender ($\beta = -.02, p = .795$), self-assessed L2 proficiency ($\beta = -.10, p = .257$), frequency of swearing ($\beta = .07, p = .526$), perceived appropriateness ($\beta = .12, p = .244$), educational level ($\beta = .12, p = .139$) and English learning environment ($\beta = .07, p = .412$) were no significant predictors of the emotional response.

Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this study has been the quantification of possible effects of having a swearword appear in advertisement in a person's native or foreign language on attitude towards the advertisement and product, the purchase intention, recall of the product and brand and the emotional response towards the advertisement.

After analysing the results, it has become clear that the version of the advertisement, with or without swear, does not affect the effectiveness of the advertisement. Therefore, the hypothesis that advertisements containing swear words are more effective (H_1) should be refuted. This finding does not match the results of earlier studies by Baker and Broadus (2014) and Westerholm (2017), who did find a significant positive relation between the presence of swearwords and the appreciation of the ad.

The non-significant results found in this study could be explained by the influence of the perceived offensiveness of the advertisements that participants had.

As the analyses have shown, the attitude towards the advertisement and attitude towards the product decreases significantly when the respondents perceive advertisements as more offensive. The results also showed that advertisements with swears were significantly more offensive than ads without swears, so it can be concluded that the offensiveness is explained by the presence of swears. It is possible that some swears included in this study were perceived as more offensive, which would then influence the effectiveness negatively. This is supported by the analyses of the differences in offensiveness between advertisements with swearwords, as they resulted to be significantly different from each other. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that all advertisements with swearwords are equally effective as normal ads, as the attitude towards the advertisement and product is influenced significantly by the perceived offensiveness of the swearwords.

Furthermore, as expected, the results did show that the language of the advertisement, either the native or foreign language of the consumer, does not influence the effectiveness of the advertisement. This result confirms the hypothesis that there would be no differences between advertisements in the native or foreign language (H_2).

Beforehand, it was expected that participants would show a more emotional response to advertisements containing profane language. The results have shown that this claim cannot be accepted, as advertisements containing non-swearwords evoked a stronger emotional response than advertisement with swear words. Moreover, the findings showed that the emotional response for advertisements in the respondent's L1 and L2 was not significantly different.

H₃, which expected a stronger emotional response for advertisements containing swear words would evoke stronger emotions, with L1 differing significantly from L2, can therefore be rejected. This is not in line with the findings by Dewaele (2004), which showed that swearwords evoke a stronger emotional response in someone's native language.

The lack of differences between the use of a native or foreign language on both appreciation and emotional response, could be explained by the suggestion that the swears used in the foreign language advertisement might have been too comprehensible or too similar to the native swear words. This claim can be supported by Nederstigt and Hilberink-Schulpen (2017), who suggested that in advertisements, similar languages could be less appreciated than non-cognate languages. The results of the present study suggest that this claim could also be made for native / non-native swears in advertising. English swears like 'damn' and 'idiot' are commonly used by L_x/L₂ English speakers (Dewaele, 2016, p. 122) and are identical to their Dutch and German equivalents. This could mean that the effect of the swear word is likely to have been comparable in both the fully L1 ads and in the ads with a foreign language, as the swears are similar and may not have been perceived as 'foreign'. This suggestion is supported by the finding that proficiency in English was found to be a non-significant predictor of attitude towards the ad, which was in line with the findings of Nederstigt and Hilberink-Schulpen (2017).

Therefore, it can be said that one of the limitations of this study are the swear words used in the foreign language, or even the use of English as a foreign language as a whole. As said before, the swearwords that were used for the foreign language, were very similar to the native swears. The participants in this study were fairly proficient in English ($M = 5.35$) and as displayed by the EE English Proficiency Index (2019), the majority of people in Western countries such as The Netherlands (First on the EPI) and Germany (Tenth on the EPI) are very proficient in English. Hence, as Dutch and Germans are used to being exposed to simple English language, it can be argued that the surprise effect that normally would be created by the use of a foreign language in advertising is reduced when the consumers are accustomed to the language. For future research, it is recommendable to use more complex sentences and swear words in the foreign language that are recognizable as swears, without them being as similar to the native ones as in the design of this study. As Nederstigt and Hilberink-Schulpen (2017) have demonstrated, more complex foreign language, in combination with a lower proficiency of the language, could lead to a better appreciation of the advertisement, even if the phrase is not understood. It would be interesting to test if this is also the case for profane language in advertising.

Another limitation of the study is the sample of participants that was tested in the experiment. With the dominance of a higher educational level in the sample of this study, it is hard to generalize the results to the entire population (Dutch and Germans). A larger sample with various educational levels (and forms of acquisition) could provide different results, because, as said by Dewaele (2016, p. 125) “the context of acquisition of English, ..., had a lasting effect on the understanding of meaning and the frequency of use of more than half of the words”. Moreover, the analysis showed that age was significant as a predictor for both attitude towards the product and emotional response. The participants in this design were fairly young ($M = 33$), whereas it is probable that older generations would react differently to swear words. Further research on profane language in advertising should test a sample with a wider spread of age, as the results of this suggests that age predicts the appreciation of the advertisements.

Finally, as seen in the results, the perceived offensiveness differed significantly per advertisement. In particular, the chewing gum advertisement was perceived as highly offensive. As offensiveness proved to be a predictor of attitude towards the advertisement and product, it is likely that the gum advertisement influenced the overall mean of these variables too negatively. It would be an objective for future studies to quantify the offensiveness of swearwords in different languages, as findings of such a research can be used in further investigations on the topic of swearing in advertising and differences in offensiveness between swears could be considered when constructing the design for the experiment. This could be helpful to avoid the use of swears that are over offensive and influence the appreciation of the advertisements exorbitantly negatively. Unfortunately, a $3 \times 2 \times 2$ design, with the three different advertisements as additional between-subjects factors, was beyond the scope of the present study. Such a design, where the different advertisements with different grades of offensiveness would be analysed separately, could also help to explain the results.

Forthcoming studies could provide a more detailed explanation on the matter investigated in this study, by using different complexities of the foreign language, testing a larger sample and by investigating the effects of different grades of offensiveness of swearwords.

The present study does not coincide with previous findings on this matter, as it has not proven the positive effects of the use of swears in advertising that were found by Baker and Broadus (2014) and Westerholm (2017) and it could not verify Dewaele's (2004) finding that swears in L1 would evoke a stronger emotional response. However, by finding that the differences in effects of swears in foreign or native language advertising are non-significant, this study has addressed some of the lacking information of foreign language use in swearing in advertising.

In conclusion, although this study has its limitations, the results have demonstrated that the use of swearwords in advertising does not have the desired effect, neither in the L1 nor in the L2 of the consumer. However, advertisements with swears are not evaluated worse than ads without swears, so advertisers could still choose to use profane language in advertising as an attention-grabber. Nevertheless, advertisers should be careful with the use of profane language, as the effectiveness of the advertisement will decrease for consumers who perceive the advertisement as offensive, both in their native language and in English as a foreign language.

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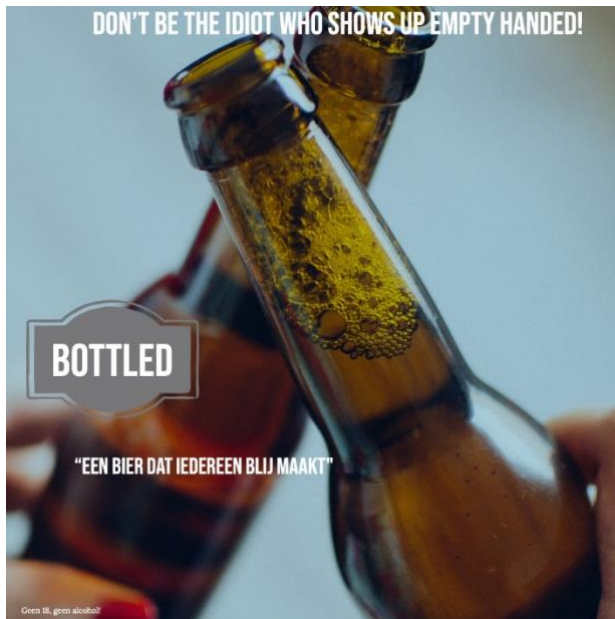
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Appendix

Annex 1. Advertisement Beer



Brand: Bottled

Complementary frase: Een bier dat iedereen blij maakt / Ein Bier das jedem Freude bereitet

Slogans:

Dutch

Swear – Wees niet de idioot die met lege handen aankomt!

No swear – Wees niet diegene die met lege handen aankomt!

German

Swear – Sei kein Idiot der mit leeren Händen erscheint!

No swear – Sei nicht die Person die mit leeren Händen erscheint!

English

Swear – Don't be the idiot who shows up empty handed!

No swear – Don't be the person who shows up empty handed!

Annex 2. Advertisement Coffee



Brand: Bremers Koffie / Bremers Kaffee

Complementary frase: -

Slogans:

Dutch

Swear – Drink je verdomde ochtendhumeur weg

No swear – Drink je ochtendhumeur weg

German

Swear – Trink deine verdammte Morgenlaune weg

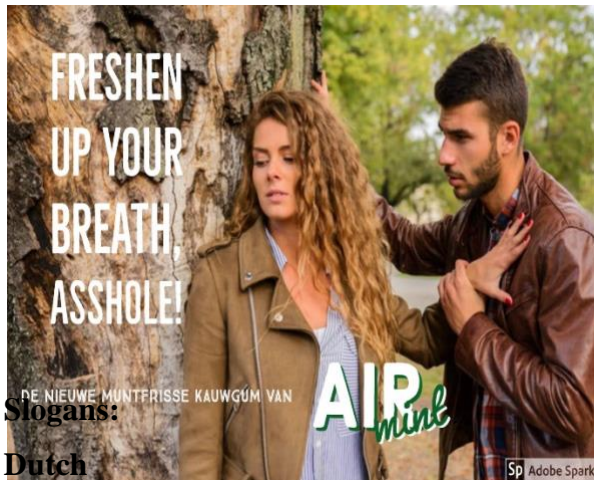
No swear – Trink deine Morgenlaune weg

English

Swear – Drink your damn morning mood away

No swear – Drink your morning mood away

Annex 3. Advertisement Gum



Swear – Verfris je adem, klootzak!

No swear – Verfris je adem!

German

Swear – Frisch deine Atem auf, Arschloch!

No swear – Frisch deine Atem auf!

English

Swear – Freshen up your breath, asshole!

No swear – Freshen up your breath!

Brand: Airmint

Complementary frase: De nieuwe muntfrisse kauwgum van... / Ein Bier das jedem Freude bereitet

Annex 4. Questionnaire

Dear participant,

we invite you to participate in a questionnaire about advertising. It will take no more than 10 minutes to fill it in. Your participation will be anonymous and the results will only be used for this research by the Department of Communication and Information Sciences at Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands). Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

The questionnaire has three parts: First, you will see six different advertisements, then we invite you to answer a couple of questions about these advertisements and finally a couple of questions about yourself.

Clicking on the 'I Agree' button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in this study, please decline participation by leaving this webpage.

Thank you very much for your help!

Attitude to the ad

- I like this ad
- This ad is entertaining
- This ad is useful
- This ad is important
- This ad is interesting
- This ad is informative
- I would like to see this ad again
- This ad is Good

→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *totally disagree* - *totally agree*

Attitude to the product

- I like this product
- This product is useful
- This product is interesting
- This product is good
- I like to use this product

→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *totally disagree* - *totally agree*

Purchase intention

- My willingness to buy this product is high
- I am likely to buy this product
- I would intend to buy this product
- I have a high intention to buy this product

→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *totally disagree* - *totally agree*

Perceived offensiveness: I consider this ad ...

→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *not at all offensive* - *extremely offensive*

Emotional response

- This ad makes me happy
- This ad makes me excited
- This ad makes me angry
- This ad irritates me
- This ad makes me feel guilty
- This ad makes me feel ashamed
- This ad makes me sad

→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *totally disagree* - *totally agree*

Recall

- Please indicate which brands you remember from the ads that you saw. Also, do you remember which products were featured?

Aim of the study:

- What do you think the aim of this study is?

Demographic variables

First language:

- Dutch
- German
- Other

Age:

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Don't want to say

Education level: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Primary education
- Secondary education
- Vocational training
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- No finished education

Context of acquisition: In which type of context did you acquire your English language skills?

- o Naturalistic
- o Instructed
- o Mixed

Self-assessed proficiency in English: Please indicate how you would assess your English for the following skills

- o Speaking
- o Writing
- o Reading
- o Listening

→ 7-point semantic differentials anchored by *poor - excellent*

Swearing behaviour: How often do you swear?

→ 7-point semantic differentials anchored by *never – very frequently*

Attitude towards swearing: In general, I find the use of swear words ...

→ 7-point semantic differentials anchored by *very inappropriate – very appropriate*

Statement of Own Work

Student name: Pablo van Maren Diaz
Student number: s1004625
Course code and name: LET-CIWB351-IBC-2019-SCRSEM2-V Bachelor's Thesis
Supervisor(s): F. van Meurs & M. v/d Meulen
Number theme group : Theme 6

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DECLARATION:

I certify that this assignment/report is my own work, based on my personal study and/or research and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication

Signed:



Date: 01-07-2020