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Bachelor's Thesis

The effects on consumers' responses towards the advertisement when swear words are used in consumers' first or second language

Author: Iris Bruurs

Student number: S1010419

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Coordinators: Frank van Meurs and Marten van der Meulen

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University: Radboud University

What is the effect on consumers' responses towards the advertisement when swear words are used in consumers' first language or second language?

Abstract

In today's society, consumers are bombarded with advertisements, making it impossible to pay attention to all advertisements. To break through this advertising clutter, marketers are using shock advertising (Skorupa, 2014). One type of shock advertising is the use of swear words. How swear words in advertisements are perceived is influenced by language. However, no research has been done on the effects on consumers when advertisements use swear words in a person's first or second language. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects on consumers' responses towards the advertisement when swear words are used in a person's first language or second language. For the study an experiment was conducted using different questionnaires in the participants' first or second language and containing swear words or no swear words. The results show that whether or not advertisements contain a swear word, has no effect on product and advertisement attitude, purchase intention, and recall of the brand and the product. However, advertisements without swear words cause a more positive emotional response when perceived in consumers' first language. Whether advertisements are presented in consumers' first or second language has no effect at all on product and advertisement attitude, emotional response, purchase intention, and recall of the brand and the product. It can thus be concluded that in general, the content of the advertisement is more important than the language of the advertisement and whether the advertisement contains a swear word or not.

Keywords: advertisements, swear words, shock advertising, first and second language

Introduction

In today's society, advertisers bombard consumers with advertisements and appeals from the moment they wake up until the moment they fall asleep. It is estimated that consumers receive from 100 to more than 1,000 advertisements per day (Tellis, 2004, p. 3). This causes that advertisements have the ability of greatly influencing consumers' thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and eventually decisions (Tellis, 2004, p. 3). As a result, it can be stated that advertising plays an essential role in today's society and economy (Tellis, 2004).

Due to this advertisement overload, it is practically impossible for consumers to pay attention to all advertisements they are exposed to. For this reason, consumers learn to ignore most advertisements (Skorupa, 2014, p. 69). However, advertisers have found several ways to attract consumers' attention, including the use of humour, fear, music, emotions, or rationality (Skorupa, 2014, p. 69). Another way to break through this advertising clutter is the use of shock advertising. One of the main aims of shock advertising is to draw the attention of the target group to the message of the advertisement (Skorupa, 2014, p. 69).

Shocking advertising content can be defined as "that which attempts to surprise an audience by deliberately violating norms for societal values and personal ideas" (Dahl et al., 2003, p. 3). In shock advertising, "shocking content, including disgusting images, sexual reference, impropriety, moral offensiveness and religious taboos, is presented and described" (Skorupa, 2014, p. 69). An example of a brand which uses a shock advertising campaign is the Italian fashion brand United Colors of Benetton, which started to use shocking content for their advertising campaigns. The brand uses advertisements showing famous world leaders kissing each other, such as Barack Obama and Chinese leader Hu Jintao, with the accompanying text "*UNHATE*", as can be seen in Figure 1 (designboom, 2011). Benetton's objective of this campaign is to raise attention and to stimulate the dialogue (Benetton Group, 2011).

Several studies have been carried out investigating the effects of shock advertisements. Nevertheless, the evidence considering shock advertisement can be considered conflicting.



Figure 1: Benetton UNHATE campaign features kissing world leaders

One type of shock advertising is the use of swear words. Whereas the use of swear words is perceived as unacceptable and rude under some circumstances, it is considered normal, human and even popular in other situations (Rassin & Muris, 2005). Knowing whether swear words are evaluated as inappropriate, or as normal and popular, is of great importance to advertisers because it influences what effects advertisements containing swear words will have on consumers, and eventually their behaviour. However, research has found different outcomes. For example, Mortimer (2007) has found that emphasis, intimacy, personality, humour, shock and offence are outcomes created by swear words, while Jay (2009) states the social-physical situation and degree of formality is highly important regarding how a swear word used in advertising is evaluated. Due to different findings on the effectiveness of swear words in advertisements, it can be stated this field needs further investigation as well.

How swear words in advertisements are perceived is also influenced by language. Several studies have shown that swearing may be perceived differently in a consumers' first language than in their second language. Each language of a bilingual may represent experiences in slightly different ways (Altarriba & Morier, 2006). However, no research has been done on the effects on consumers when advertisements use swear words in a person's first or second language. Therefore, the research question analysed in this study will be: *What is the effect on consumers' responses towards the advertisement when swear words are used in consumers' first or second language?*

This study has a theoretical aim to contribute to developing theories related to what the effects of swear words are when perceived in the consumer's first or second language. The

practical aim of this study is to help advertisers to obtain a better understanding of when to use swear words and in what language they are most effective.

Theoretical framework

In this section, the most relevant terms considering the research will be discussed. Firstly, shock advertising, then swear words in advertising, then the difference between perceiving advertisements with a swear word in a person's first or second language, and finally the existing research gap will be discussed.

Shock advertising

Shock advertising or 'shockvertising' offends its audience through "norm violation, encompassing transgressions of law or custom, breaches of a moral or social mode, or things that outrage the moral or psychical senses", with the intent to shock (Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003, p. 2). Both commercial and non-profit organisations use shock advertising including disgusting images, sexual references, profanity/obscenity, vulgarity, impropriety, moral offensives and religious taboos, with the intent to draw the consumers' attention to the advertising message, to retain it in the consumers' memory and to make the target audience think about the advertising message (Skorupa, 2014, p. 69).

Several studies have been carried out investigating the effects of shock advertisements. Nonetheless, the evidence of different studies can be considered conflicting. Dahl et al. (2003) have investigated the effects on advertising attention, recall and recognition in an HIV/AIDS prevention context. The results show that shocking advertising is more effective than non-shocking advertising in terms of attention, recall and recognition. Also, the shock appeal investigated in this research has resulted to be effective at stimulating participants to remember advertising information and to show behaviours relevant to the message, in this case acknowledging the risk of AIDS acquisition and obtaining information regarding safe sex behaviour. Furthermore, they have examined that shock is effective because norm violation surprises the audience and produces additional cognitive processing. Thus, in a cluttered advertising environment, shocking advertising seems to cause that the persuasive message will be noticed by consumers (Dahl et al., 2003, p. 10).

In addition, shocking advertisements are more likely to be remembered than traditional advertisements (Machová, Huszárík, & Toth, 2015). Also, Parry, Jones, Stern, and Robinson, (2013) have investigated the effects of shock advertising in profit and non-profit

organisations. They affirm that shocking advertising is effective at capturing the consumers' attention and that if it is used correctly, shock advertising can change consumers' attitudes. However, they claim that the level of persuasion is dependent on the sector and the cultural characteristics of the target audience (Parry et al., 2013, p. 119).

A study carried out by Urwin and Venter (2014) investigated the effects of advertisements that tested impropriety, moral offensiveness, sexual references, disgusting images and religious taboos on recall. However, Urwin and Venter (2014) have found that the majority of the audience of shock advertising did not remember anything about the advertisement or only remembered the imagery after having seen the advertisement. Therefore, they affirm that shock advertising is unable to imprint the brand into the minds of the target audience (Urwin & Venter, 2014, p. 211). As a result, they claim that shock advertising may no longer fulfil its purpose. Accordingly, it can be stated that because of these contradictory findings on the effectiveness of shock advertising, further research into the topic is needed.

Swear words in advertising

One type of shock advertisement is the use of swear words. The use of swear words in advertising can be regarded as norm violation (Alden, Mukherjee & Hoyer, 2000). Furthermore, it can be considered as incongruity, which can be defined as “the extent to which ad content differs from generally expected beliefs, attitudes and/or behaviours” (Alden et al., p. 2).

Various studies have been carried out to examine the effects of swear words in advertising. Mortimer (2007) has investigated why swear words are used in advertising. She proposes that swearwords may be used to create six different outcomes: emphasis, intimacy, personality, humour, shock and offence (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1597). However, it is stated that several contextual moderators, being audience demography, warmth, playfulness, ease of resolution, product, medium, and severity of swear words, may have an influence on the consumer's final perception of the advertisement (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1597). Also, the functions of the use of swear words are “highly dependent on context, which includes social norms, formality, status differentials and social expectations related to speaker categories” (Andersson & Trudgill, 2007, p. 289).

Jay (2009) emphasizes the importance of the social-physical situation and the degree of formality of speech in which swear words are used. For example, a swearword may not be judged offensive in a casual conversation but can be considered offensive by the same people

in a formal situation like a formal dinner (Jay, 2009, p. 155). This implies that the involvement and the formality of the product advertised may be of influence on the effectiveness of swear words used in advertisements.

According to Westerholm (2017), advertisements with swear words have a positive effect as long as they are not too offensive. Also, swear words have a positive effect on advertising, as long as they are used in the appropriate context and chosen with care regarding the tone of the advert as well as the product advertised. Thus, due to the different findings, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of swear words in advertisements needs further investigation. Furthermore, the effectiveness of swear words in advertisements should be measured in the appropriate context, and for the right product and audience.

Difference in perceiving advertisements with a swear word in a person's L1 or L2

Several studies have shown that swearing may be perceived differently in a person's first language than in a person's second language. According to Altarriba, Bauer, and Benvenuto (1999), language is a central means through which emotions are labelled and expressed afterwards. In the case of bilinguals, more than one language is involved in coding emotional events and in learning how to label those emotional experiences. Therefore, each language of a bilingual may represent experiences in slightly different ways (Altarriba & Morier, 2006).

Bhatia (2019) affirms that the process of decision-making by consumers is sensitive to language emotionality. First language plays a central role in emotionality as the linguistic effects on coding emotionality, appeals and consumer decision-making are essential to the successfulness of an advertisement. The positive emotional grounding of the advertisement is critical for brand attitude and brand loyalty (Bhatia, 2019, p. 447).

Dewaele (2004) states that perceived emotionality of swear words is the highest in a person's first language and gradually lower in languages learned at a later moment (Dewaele, 2004, p. 204). In addition, language learners who learn their language(s) in a naturalistic context perceive swear words as more emotional in that language than instructed language learners (Dewaele, 2004, p. 204).

Another study carried out by Dewaele (2016) shows that English second language users differ in their understanding of meaning, perception of offensiveness and self-reported frequencies of emotion-laded words, and thus swear words, compared to native English users (Dewaele, 2016, p. 14). This can be the case because native English users had life-long exposure to these words across a wide variety of situations with various interlocutors. By

contrast, English second language users would typically have started to hear, and use swear words at a later age, and if they studied the second language at school, they would have had less exposure to these words less chance to use them in authentic communication (Dewaele, 2016, p. 14).

Moreover, English second language users use relatively milder words more frequently while native English users use taboo words more frequently (Dewaele, 2016, p. 124). For example, the results of the study by Dewaele (2016) have shown that first language users reported higher use of words as “bitch”, “slut” and “cunt”, and second language users reported higher use of “fool”, “stupid” and “silly”, which can be considered as milder words (Dewaele, 2016, p. 119). Furthermore, it is stated that English second language users overestimate the offensiveness of most emotion-laden words, which could be a consequence of the classroom context in which they may have been learned (Dewaele, 2016, p. 125).

Research gap existing research

Several studies have been carried out examining the effects of the use of shock advertising and swear words in advertising. However, the findings of these studies appear to be contrasting. Furthermore, various studies have found differences in how advertisements are perceived in a person’s native or second language. Nevertheless, up until now, no research has been done on the effects on consumers when advertisements use swear words in a person’s native language or a person’s second language. Also, it seems that no research has been carried out examining how Dutch and German participants perceive swear words in advertising, and whether it is perceived in their first or second language makes a difference. Therefore, the research question analysed in this study will be: *What is the effect on consumers’ responses towards the advertisement when swear words are used in consumers’ first or second language?*

By examining what the effects of swear words are when perceived in the consumer’s first or second language, the study hopes that advertisers can obtain a better understanding of when to use swear words and in what language they are most effective. Considering this knowledge can be helpful for advertisers to gain the target group’s attention and to communicate their advertising message in a way that will be remembered by the consumer.

As mentioned before, it has been proven that shocking advertising is more effective than non-shocking advertising in terms of attention, recall and recognition (Dahl et al., 2003) and that it is more likely to be remembered than traditional advertisements (Machová et al., 2015). Therefore, it is expected that advertisement with swear words will lead to a better

product attitude, advertisement attitude and eventually a higher purchase intention, cause a higher emotional response and will be better recalled than advertisements without swear words.

Furthermore, it has been proven that native English users use more swear words than second language users (Dewaele, 2016) and that perceived emotionality of swear words is the highest in a person's first language and gradually lower in languages learned at a later moment (Dewaele, 2004). Also, language learners who learn their language(s) in a naturalistic context perceive swear words as more emotional in that language than instructed language learners (Dewaele, 2004). Therefore, it is also expected that advertisements in consumers' first language will lead to a better product attitude, advertisement attitude and eventually a higher purchase intention will cause a higher emotional response and will be better recalled than advertisements presented in consumers' second language.

Because participants might have had pre-existing attitudes towards existing brands or products being advertised, like towards New York Pizza or Benetton, three completely new advertisements were created. For each advertisement, a fictitious product name and additional information were added to increase the realism of the ad.

As mentioned before, Westerholm (2017) stated that swear words have a positive effect on advertising as long as they are chosen with care regarding the product advertised. Therefore, type of product was an important variable that needed to have an appropriate link with the swear word used. Low-involvement and informal products were chosen to be advertised because it was expected that low-involvement products for which the consumer did not need to reflect much on before purchasing it, would be most suitable for this type of advertising. The swear words used in the different advertisements are presented in Figure 3. The advertisements can be found in Appendix A.

	English	Dutch	German
Swear word in the advertisement for beer	Idiot	Idiot	Idiot
Swear word in the advertisement for chewing gum	Asshole	Klootzak	Arschloch
Swear word in the advertisement for coffee	Damn	Verdomde	Verdamnte

Figure 3: Swear words for each advertisement in English, Dutch and German

For the advertisement for beer, the corresponding text was “Don’t be the idiot that arrives empty handed!” (Figure 4), for the advertisement for chewing gum it was “Freshen up your breath, asshole” (Figure 5) and for the advertisement for the coffee it was “Drink your damn morning mood away” (Figure 6). These texts were translated into Dutch for the questionnaires in which the advertisements were in Dutch and were translated into German for the questionnaires in which the advertisements were in German. The complete translations of the advertisements can be found in Appendix A.



Figure 4: The advertisement for beer



Figure 5: The advertisement chewing gum



Figure 6: The advertisement for reusable bottles

For the advertisement without a swear word for beer the corresponding text was “Don’t be the person who shows up empty handed!”, for the advertisement without a swear

word for chewing gum it was “Freshen up your breath!” and for the advertisement without a swear word for coffee it was “Drink your morning mood away!” Also, these texts were translated into Dutch for the questionnaires in which the advertisements were in Dutch and were translated into German for the questionnaires in which the advertisements were in German. The complete translations of the advertisements can also be found in Appendix A.

Additionally, three different filler advertisements were created for the questionnaire to make sure that the swear words the advertisements were less noticeable and to prevent participants from guessing the purpose of the study. The three filler advertisements consisted of advertisements for toilet paper, tea and shampoo and conditioner.

After having finished the questionnaire, a pre-test was carried out to determine the effectiveness of the questionnaire before it was used. The questionnaire was tested on a small sample of 9 respondents, to identify any existing problems. The main result of the pre-test was that it took participants too long to fill in the whole questionnaire. The questionnaire was supposed to take about 10 minutes, but it took the participants about 20 minutes to fill it in. It was thought that if the questionnaire would take 20 minutes more participants would not finish it than when the questionnaire would take 10 minutes. Therefore, it was decided to leave out the filler advertisements for the questionnaire containing advertisements with swear words.

Subjects

In total, 265 participants completed the questionnaire. The mother tongue of 135 (50.9%) participants was German and of 130 (49.1%) participants was Dutch. To analyse the results of participants of two different nationalities would provide generalisability. Several demographic factors were asked for, including the participants' first language, gender, age, self-assessed proficiency in English, age at which English was learned, context of acquisition and educational level.

111 (41.9%) participants indicated to be male, 152 (57.4%) indicated to be female, 1 participant (0.4%) indicated to be other and 1 (0.4%) participant did not want to say.

The youngest participant was 18 years old and the oldest participant was 72 years old, which resulted in a range of 54. The mean age of the participants was relatively young, namely 28.68 ($SD = 13.14$) years. Participants had to be above 18 years old because one of the products advertised was beer, and participants younger than 18 years old are not allowed to buy or consume this product.

All participants needed to have a certain level in proficiency in English, as English should have been their second language and they needed to understand advertisements presented in English. The average proficiency in English of the Dutch and German participants was high ($M = 5.35$, $SD = .92$). 257 (97%) participants learned English when aged 18 or younger. 13 (4.9%) participants acquired their English language skills in a naturalistic context, for example because their family taught them. 119 (44.9%) participants acquired their English language skills in an instructed context, for example at school. 133 (50.2%) participants acquired their English language skills in a mixed context.

The highest level of education completed or attended of most participants was a bachelor's degree (50.2%), following a master's degree (19.6%), vocational training (15.1%) or secondary education (14.0%).

128 (48.3%) participants were exposed to advertisements with a swear word and 137 (51.7%) participants were exposed to advertisements without a swear word.

As can be seen in Table 1, 133 (50.2%) participants were exposed to advertisements in their first language, being Dutch or German, and 132 (49.8%) participants were exposed to advertisements in their second language, being English. Of the 133 participants who were exposed to advertisements in their first language, 68 participants were exposed to advertisements with a swear word and 65 were exposed to advertisements without a swear word. Of the 132 participants who were exposed to advertisements in English, 60 participants were exposed to advertisements with a swear word and 72 participants were exposed to advertisements without a swear word.

Table 1. The distribution between whether participants were exposed to advertisements in participants' first language or second language and whether they were exposed to advertisements with or without a swear word

	Native language $n = 133$	Second language $n = 132$	Total $n = 265$
With a swear word	68	60	128
Without a swear word	65	72	137

A Chi-square between gender and the two conditions of the presence of a swear word in the advertisements showed that there was no significant relationship for the participants who were shown advertisements in their first language ($\chi^2(2) = 1.219$, $p = .544$) and for the

participants who were shown advertisements in their second language ($\chi^2 (2) = .922, p = .631$).

Also, a Chi-square between educational level and the two conditions of the presence of a swear word in the advertisements showed that there was no significant relationship for the participants who were shown advertisements in their first language ($\chi^2 (3) = 3.318, p = .345$) and for the participants who were shown advertisements in their second language ($\chi^2 (5) = 1.594, p = .902$).

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of the age on the two conditions of the presence of a swear word in the advertisements for the sample which was exposed to advertisements in their first language ($F (1, 131) = 2.107, p = .149$) and for the sample which was exposed to advertisements in their second language ($F (1, 130) < 1$).

Design

For the study, a 2x2 between-subject design was used. This was done because in this way participants would not have known what the study was about while filling it in. Accordingly, the subjects were exposed to one level of ‘Language of the advertisement’ which could be ‘First language of the participant’ and ‘Second language of the participant’ and to one level of ‘Presence of a swear word in the advertisement’ which could be ‘Swear word’ and ‘No swear word’. Half of the respondents were exposed to advertisements in their first language being Dutch or German, and the other half of the respondents were exposed to advertisements in their second language, being English. Also, half of the respondents were exposed to advertisements with swear words and the other half the respondents were exposed to advertisements without swear words, which was the control group of the study.

Instruments

The questions about the dependent measures in the questionnaire covered attitude to the ad, attitude to the product, purchase intention, emotional response and recall.

A study by Finstad (2010) compared 5-point Likert scales to 7-point Likert scales in his study and concluded that “7-point Likert items provide a more accurate measure of a participant’s true evaluation and are more appropriate for electronically-distributed and otherwise unsupervised usability questionnaires” (Finstad, 2010, p. 104). For these reasons, accompanying the fact that this study was carried out using an online questionnaire, mostly 7-point Likert scales were used to analyse most dependent measures.

Advertisement attitude was measured using different statements taken from Villegas (2002). The statements consisted of ‘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 answer options ranged from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree’ and were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The reliability of ‘advertisement attitude’ comprising twenty-four items was good: $\alpha = .92$.

Product attitude was also measured using different statements taken from Villegas (2002). The statements consisted of ‘I like this product’, ‘This product is useful’, ‘This product is interesting’, ‘This product is good’ and ‘I would like to use this product’. The answer options also ranged from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree’ and were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The reliability of ‘advertisement attitude’ comprising fifteen items was good: $\alpha = .92$.

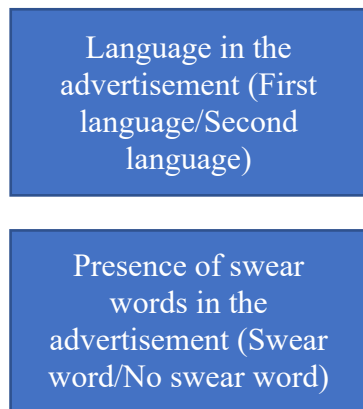
Purchase intention was measured using different statements taken from Che In and Ahmad (2018). The statements consisted of ‘My willingness to buy this product is high’, ‘I am likely to buy this product’, ‘I would intent to buy this product’ and ‘I have a high intention to buy this product’. The answer options ranged from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree’ and were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The reliability of ‘purchase intention’ comprising twelve items was good: $\alpha = .92$.

Emotional response was measured using different statements taken from Erickson and Ritter (2001). The statements consisted of ‘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 answer options ranged from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree’ and were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The last five statements were reserve coded. The reliability of ‘emotional response’ comprising twenty-one items was good: $\alpha = .86$.

Lastly, **recall** was measured by two open questions adapted from Singh, Rothschild and Churchill (1988). The question first question measuring recall of the brand was ‘Please indicate which brands you remember from the ads that you saw.’. The interrater reliability of the variable ‘recall of the product’ was good: $\kappa = .92, p < .001$. The second question measuring recall of the product was ‘Also, do you remember which products were featured’. The interrater reliability of the variable ‘recall of the product’ was also good: $\kappa = .91, p < .001$.

The whole questionnaire including the different advertisements can be found in Appendix A. The different dependent and independent variables are shown in a schedule in Figure 7.

Independent variables



Dependent variables

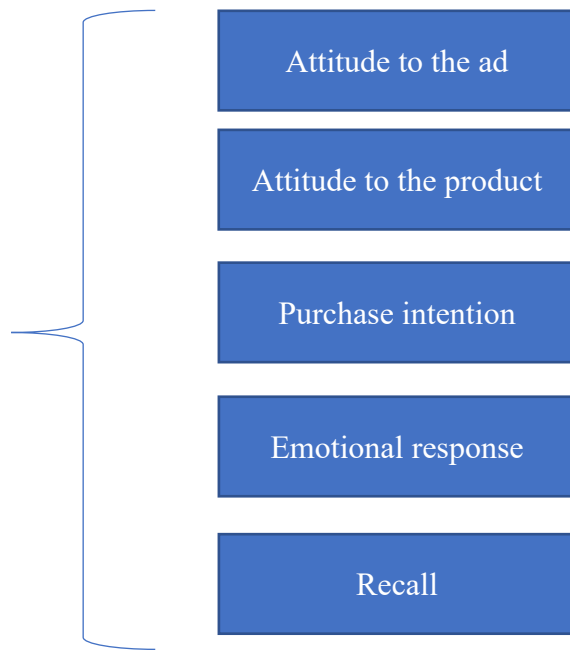


Figure 7: Schedule of the independent and dependent variables of the study

Procedure

The questionnaire used for the study was provided online. The period in which participants could fill in the survey was from May 15th until May 24th. By using an online questionnaire, a large group of participants could be reached. Also, the questionnaire was distributed using different social media, like WhatsApp, email and Facebook. The experiment was conducted on an individual basis and the objective of the study was not told to the participants.

The questionnaire started with an introductory text, stating that the questionnaire would be anonymous and that it would take the participant approximately 10 minutes to fill it in. Furthermore, it stated that the study was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. Afterwards, the three advertisements were shown to the respondents. The questions regarding attitude to the ad, attitude to the product, purchase intention, emotional response and recall were presented underneath the three different advertisements.

After the different advertisements and its accompanying questions were presented to the participants, questions were asked regarding the participant's first language, gender, age, educational level, context of acquisition (Dewaele, 2004), age at which English was learned (Dewaele, 2004), self-assessed proficiency in German/Dutch (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008), self-assessed proficiency in English (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008), swearing behaviour (adapted from Dewaele, 2007), attitude towards swearing and product usage. The questions

about swearing behaviour and attitude towards swearing were asked at the end because otherwise it could have been possible that the participants found out the purpose of the study. The last question of the questionnaire was ‘What do you think the aim of this study is?’, to examine whether participants were able to find out the purpose of the study. Responses to these items had no effect on the results of the study and therefore are not discussed in the results section.

At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were thanked for their time and effort for filling in the questionnaire.

Statistical treatment

To examine whether there were differences between attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product, purchase intention and recall between the version with a swear word and without a swear word and between the advertisements in the first and the second language of the participants, six two-way ANOVA's were used. The two-way ANOVA's were used to compare the means and to test whether there was interaction between the variables. When significant results were found for the two-way ANOVA's, one-way ANOVA's were carried out to examine what exactly this difference was.

Results

Advertisement attitude

A two-way analysis of variance with version (with swear word or without swear word) and language of the ad (first language or second language) as factors showed no significant main effect of version on advertisement attitude ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, language of the ad was not found to have a significant main effect on advertisement attitude ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between version and language of the ad was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the version of the advertisement and the use of the native or second language of the participants on advertisement attitude (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive)

Version of the advertisement	Advertisement attitude
<i>n</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 60)	3.19(.84)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 68)	3.17(.89)
Total (<i>n</i> = 128)	3.18(.87)
No swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 71)	3.23(.85)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 65)	3.26(.89)
Total (<i>n</i> = 137)	3.24(.86)
Total	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 132)	3.21(.85)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 133)	3.22(.88)
Total (<i>n</i> = 265)	3.21(.86)

Product attitude

A two-way analysis of variance with version (with swear word or without swear word) and language of the ad (first language or second language) as factors showed no significant main effect of version on product attitude ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, language of the ad was not found to have a significant main effect on product attitude ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between version and language of the ad was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the version of the advertisement and the use of the native or second language of the participants on product attitude (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive)

Version of the advertisement	Product attitude
<i>n</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 60)	3.98(1.03)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 68)	3.96(1.11)
Total (<i>n</i> = 128)	3.97(1.07)
No swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 72)	4.00(1.01)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 66)	4.13(1.12)
Total (<i>n</i> = 137)	4.06(1.06)
Total	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 132)	3.99(1.02)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 133)	4.04(1.11)
Total (<i>n</i> = 265)	4.02(1.07)

Purchase intention

A two-way analysis of variance with version (with swear word or without swear word) and language of the ad (first language or second language) as factors showed no significant main effect of version on purchase intention ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, language of the ad was not found to have a significant main effect on purchase intention ($F(1, 261) = 1.223, p = .270$). The interaction effect between version and language of the ad was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the version of the advertisement and the use of the native or second language of the participants on advertisement attitude (1 = very low purchase intention, 7 = very high purchase intention)

Version of the advertisement	Purchase intention
<i>n</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 60)	2.99(1.17)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 68)	3.05(1.23)
Total (<i>n</i> = 128)	3.02(1.20)
No swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 72)	3.02(1.07)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 65)	3.28(1.26)
Total (<i>n</i> = 137)	3.14(1.17)
Total	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 132)	3.01(1.11)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 133)	3.16(1.25)
Total (<i>n</i> = 265)	3.08(1.18)

Emotional response

A two-way analysis of variance with version (with swear word or without swear word) and language of the ad (first language or second language) as factors showed a significant main effect of version on emotional response ($F(1, 261) = 6.211, p = .013$). The advertisements without swear words ($M = 5.03, SD = .75$) were shown to cause a more positive emotional response than advertisements with swear words ($M = 4.81, SD = .65$). The other means and standard deviations can be found in Table 5.

The file was split by version, so a distinction was made between the version with swear words and without swear words. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect for language of the advertisement on emotional response for the version with swear words ($F(1, 126) < 1$) and for the version without swear words ($F(1, 135) < 1$). Also, the file was split by language of the ad, so a distinction was made between whether the advertisements were shown in the participants' first language or the participants' second language. A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect for version of the advertisement on emotional response for the version in the participants' first language, which was German or Dutch ($F(1, 131) = 4.268, p = .041$) and showed no significant effect for the version in the participants' second language, which was English ($F(1, 130) = 2.069, p = .153$). The

advertisements in the first language of the participants without swear words ($M = 5.02$, $SD = .81$) were shown to cause a more positive emotional response than the advertisements in the first language of the participants with swear words ($M = 4.75$, $SD = .65$).

Language of the ad was not found to have a significant main effect on emotional response ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between version and language of the ad was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the version of the advertisement and the use of the native or second language of the participants on emotional response (1 = very negative emotional response, 7 = very positive emotional response)

Version of the advertisement	Emotional response
<i>n</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Swear word	
English as L2 ($n = 60$)	4.87(.64)
L1 ($n = 68$)	4.75(.65)
Total ($n = 128$)	4.81(.65)
No swear word	
English as L2 ($n = 72$)	5.03(.69)
L1 ($n = 65$)	5.01(.81)
Total ($n = 137$)	5.03(.75)
Total	
English as L2 ($n = 132$)	4.96(.67)
L1 ($n = 133$)	4.88(.74)
Total ($n = 265$)	4.92(.71)

Recall of the brand

A two-way analysis of variance with version (with swear word or without swear word) and language of the ad (first language or second language) as factors showed no significant main effect of version on recall of the brand ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, language of the ad was not found to have a significant main effect on recall of the brand ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between version and language of the ad was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 6.

Table 6. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the version of the advertisement and the use of the native or second language of the participants on recall of the brand (1 = very low recall, 7 = very high recall)

Version of the advertisement	Recall of the brand
<i>n</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 60)	1.78(1.44)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 68)	1.68(1.34)
Total (<i>n</i> = 128)	1.73(1.38)
No swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 72)	1.76(1.41)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 65)	1.88(1.31)
Total (<i>n</i> = 137)	1.82(1.35)
Total	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 132)	1.77(1.42)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 133)	1.77(1.32)
Total (<i>n</i> = 265)	1.77(1.37)

Recall of the product

A two-way analysis of variance with version (with swear word or without swear word) and language of the ad (first language or second language) as factors showed no significant main effect of version on recall of the product ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, language of the ad was not found to have a significant main effect on recall of the brand ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 7.

The interaction effect between version and language of the ad was statistically significant ($F(1, 261) = 4.434, p = .036$). The file was split by version, so a distinction was made between the version with swear words and without swear words. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect for language of the advertisement on recall of the product for the version with swear words ($F(1, 126) = 2.035, p = .156$) and the version without swear words ($F(1, 135) = 2.419, p = .122$). Also, the file was split by language of the ad, so a distinction was made between whether the advertisements were shown in the participants' first language or the participants' second language. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect for version of the advertisement on recall of the product for the version in the participants' first language, which was German or Dutch ($F(1, 131) = 2.472, p = .118$) and for the in the participants' second language, which was English ($F(1, 130) = 1.980, p = .162$).

Table 7. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the version of the advertisement and the use of the native or second language of the participants on recall of the product (1 = very low recall, 7 = very high recall)

Version of the advertisement	Recall of the product
<i>n</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 60)	3.18(1.35)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 68)	3.49(1.04)
Total (<i>n</i> = 128)	3.34(1.20)
No swear word	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 72)	3.49(1.13)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 65)	3.15(1.37)
Total (<i>n</i> = 137)	3.33(1.26)
Total	
English as L2 (<i>n</i> = 132)	3.35(1.24)
L1 (<i>n</i> = 133)	3.32(1.22)
Total (<i>n</i> = 265)	3.34(1.23)

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to examine what the effects on consumers' responses towards the advertisement are when swear words are used in a person's first language, in this case German or Dutch or second language, in this case English.

The hypothesis that advertisements with swear words cause a higher emotional response, will be better recalled, will have a better product and advertisement attitude and eventually a higher purchase intention than advertisements without swear words is mainly rejected. The results show that whether advertisements contain a swear word or not, has no effect at all on product and advertisement attitude, purchase intention, and recall of the brand and the product. The difference that was found was advertisements in the first language of the participants without swear words cause a more positive emotional response than advertisements in the first language of the participants with swear words. In consumers' second language, it makes no difference whether advertisements contain swear words or not with regard to emotional response.

The second hypothesis, which stated that advertisements in consumers' native language would be perceived as more emotional, would be better recalled, would have a better product attitude, advertisement attitude and a higher purchase intention, is completely rejected. The results show that whether advertisements are presented in consumers' native or second language has no effect at all on product and advertisement attitude, emotional response, purchase intention, and recall of the brand and the product.

To conclude, the overall hypothesis that both the language in which an advertisement is perceived and the use of a swear word would have effects on consumers' responses towards the advertisements, is mainly rejected. The only difference found was that advertisements without swear words cause a more positive emotional response than advertisements with swear words.

Discussion

As mentioned in the conclusion, whether advertisements contain a swear word or not has no effect at all on product and advertisement attitude, purchase intention and recall of the brand and the product. The only difference between how advertisements with and without swear words are perceived, is that advertisements perceived in consumers' first language without swear words cause a more positive emotional response than advertisements perceived in consumers' first language with swear words. The results of this study are generally not in line with the findings of Dahl et al. (2003) who state that shocking advertising is more effective than non-shocking advertising in terms of attention, recall and recognition and with Machová et al. (2015), who have examined that shocking advertisements are more likely to be remembered than traditional advertisements. Moreover, Parry et al. (2013) have confirmed that shocking advertising is certainly effective at attracting the consumers' attention, which is also not in line with the results found. However, that the participants were not affected by swear words for the majority of the variables is supported by Urwin and Venter (2014), who state that shock advertising is unable to imprint the brand into the minds of the target audience. It can thus be affirmed that the findings of this study support the results of the research by Urwin and Venter (2014), implying that shock advertising, and thus the use of swear words in advertising, may no longer fulfil its purpose to attract the consumers' attention.

As stated before, the use of swear words is highly dependent on context (Andersson & Trudgill, 2007, p. 289) and swear words may have a positive effect on advertising as long as they are chosen with care regarding the tone of the advertisement and the product advertised (Westerholm, 2017). It could be the case that because the context of the advertisement and the use of swear words did not fit, the use of swear words in advertising in this study had almost no effect.

Also, the mean age of the participants was relatively young, namely 28.68 years. It could also be the case that younger consumers are more tolerant and used to swear words in general than older consumers, which results in the swear words presented in the advertisements showing almost no effects.

As mentioned before, whether advertisements are presented in consumers' first or second language has no effect at all on product and advertisement attitude, emotional response, purchase intention, and recall of the brand and the product. This is not in line with Bhatia (2019), who has examined that first language plays a central role in emotionality

which is critical for brand attitude. These findings are also not in line with Dewaele (2004) who states that perceived emotionality is the highest in a person's first language. Dewaele (2004) has also examined that language learners who learn their language in a naturalistic context perceive swear words as more emotional in that language than instructed language learners. The findings are also not in line with Dewaele (2016) who affirms that second language users differ in their understanding of meaning, perception of offensiveness and self-reported frequencies of emotion-laded words, and thus swear words, compared to native language users. This might be because of the fact that in general, Dutch and German participants have a high proficiency in English and therefore understood the advertisements almost as if they were presented in their first language. The average proficiency in English of the Dutch and German participants was high, namely 5.35 ($SD = .92$) while the English users in the study of Dewaele (2016) rated their proficiency in English lower, namely 4.4 ($SD = .73$). This can be a reason why Dewaele (2016) did find differences between first and second language users, and this research did not.

It can be concluded that consumers are not affected by swear words for most of the variables, and it makes no difference whether advertisements are presented in consumers' first or second language. This can be practically relevant for advertisers, as it provides the knowledge that the content of the advertisement is more important than the language of the advertisement and whether the advertisement contains a swear word or not. This knowledge can help advertisers to communicate their advertising message in a way that will be remembered by the consumer.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it has not been examined how strong or offensive the different swear words in the different advertisements have been perceived by the participants. It could have been the case that 'asshole' was perceived as more offensive than 'damn' or 'idiot'. It could have been examined whether the different swear words showed different effects, but that has not been done. Therefore, the generalisability of the different swear words used in the advertisements can be considered questionable.

Secondly, the participants of the study were relatively young and highly educated. Therefore, this sample represents the population of European students in terms of age and level of education and is thus not a reflection of society in general, but it is a reflection of mostly university students.

Future research should test whether the swear words presented in the advertisements are considered equally offensive by the participants. When the swear words in the advertisements are perceived as equally strong and offensive, this will provide

generalisability. Age and level of education can influence the participants' responses. In the future, other studies will need to attempt to obtain well-balanced samples between age and level of education to provide a better representation of the entire population.

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Appendix A. Online questionnaire

Introduction and consent

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!

Should you want more information on this study, please contact m.holten@student.ru.nl.

Dependent variables

- Attitude to the ad (taken from Villegas, 2002, p. 101)
 - 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 *strongly disagree – strongly agree*
- Attitude to the product (based on Villegas, 2002, p. 101)
 - 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 *strongly disagree – strongly agree*
- Purchase intention (taken from In & Ahmad, 2018, p. 4)
 - 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 *strongly disagree – strongly agree*
- Perceived offensiveness: I consider this ad... (based on Christy & Haley, 2008)
→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *not at all offensive - extremely offensive*
- Emotional response (based on Erickson & Ritter, 2001, p. 155)
 - 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 *strongly disagree – strongly agree*
- Comprehension: This ad is... (adapted from Van Enschot & Hoeken, 2015)
→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *difficult to understand - easy to understand*

- Perceived source credibility (adapted from Nan, 2013)
 - The advertiser has expertise in the product advertised?
→ scale anchored in *low – high*
 - The advertiser is trustworthy
→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *strongly disagree – strongly agree*
- Perceived honesty
 - This ad is honest
→ 7-point scale anchored in *strongly disagree – strongly agree*
- Recall (adapted from Singh, Rothschild, & Churchill, 1988).
 - Please indicate which brands you remember from the ads that you saw. Also, do you remember which products were featured?

Demographic variables

- Attitude 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? (based on Dewaele, 2004, p. 211)

- Naturalistic
- Instructed
- Mixed
- Context of acquisition: At what age did you learn English? (based on Dewaele, 2004, p. 207)
 - 0 - 12 (before puberty)
 - 12 - 18 (during puberty)
 - 18 + (after puberty)
- Self-assessed proficiency in German/Dutch: Please indicate how you would assess your German/Dutch for the following skills (based on Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008)
 - Speaking
 - Writing
 - Reading
 - Listening→ 7-point semantic differentials anchored by *poor - excellent*
- Self-assessed proficiency in English: Please indicate how you would assess your English for the following skills (based on Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008)
 - Speaking
 - Writing
 - Reading
 - Listening→ 7-point semantic differentials anchored by *poor - excellent*
- Product usage: How frequently do you consume beer/chewing gum/tea/shampoo/coffee/toilet paper?
→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *never – very often*
- Swearing behaviour: How often do you swear? (adapted from Dewaele, 2017, p. 336)
→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *never – very frequently*
- Attitude towards swearing: In general, I find the use of swear words...
→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *very inappropriate - very appropriate*

Advertisements

Chewing gum advertisements

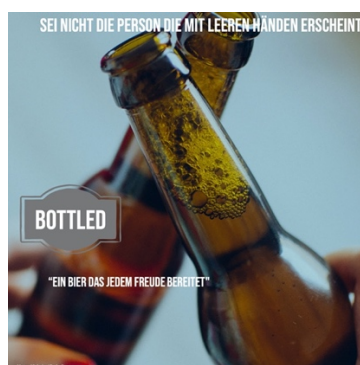
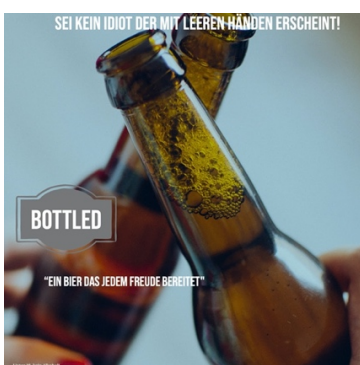
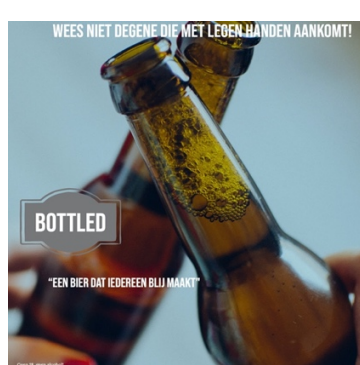
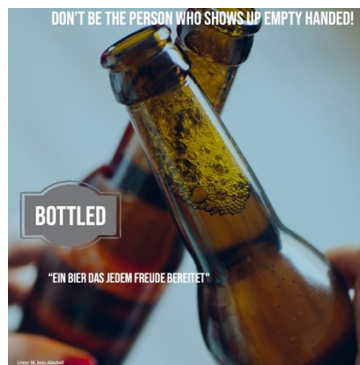
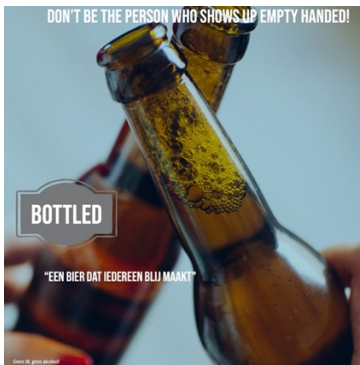
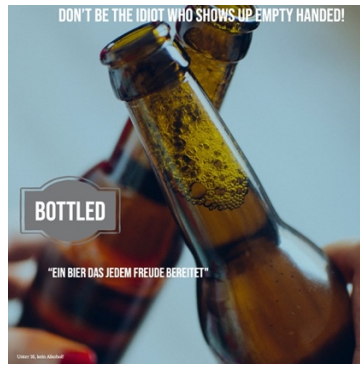


Coffee advertisements





Beer advertisements



Appendix B. Statement of Own Work

Print and sign this *Statement of own work* form and add it as the last appendix in the final version of the Bachelor's thesis that is submitted as a hard copy to the first supervisor.

Student name: Iris Bruurs

Student number: S1010419

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual

(<http://www.ru.nl/stip/english/rules-regulations/fraud-plagiarism/>) and with

Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work 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.

Signature: 

Place and date: 3-7-2020