

“Jij” and “u” in Dutch and “du” and “Sie” in German: Comparing formal and informal second person pronouns in a market research



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In an online experiment among native speakers of Dutch and German young adults, the influence of formal and informal second person pronouns in a market research evaluating hedonic products was investigated. A total of 119 participants were provided a questionnaire in which four products (perfume, necklace, watch, hat) were evaluated. The participants were provided a questionnaire in their mother tongue (Dutch or German) including either formal or informal second person pronouns. After having seen a picture of a product, participants evaluated each product on several seven-point Likert scales regarding attitude towards the product, consumer involvement, and purchase intention. There was no significant difference between formal and informal second person pronouns in the evaluation of hedonic products in a market research, neither for Dutch young adults nor for German young adults. We did find a difference between the evaluations of Dutch and German young adults. German young adults evaluated the products in the market research more negatively than Dutch young adults. This difference between Dutch and German evaluations might be attributed to the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Germany. The findings of this study might be useful for organizations and marketing departments when conducting market research for hedonic products in the Netherlands or in Germany.

Introduction

Consumer involvement and positive attitudes towards a brand are often obtained via brand messaging. Organizations can easily enrich their consumers' experience with a brand through strategic public-relations activities (Cruz et al., 2017). As a result of the rapid growth of internet and social media, more and more brands decide to advertise their products or services through online marketing. Organizations and stores advertise their products and services via their website, their social media account and through influencers who recommend the product or service. Online marketing is a relatively cheap, but effective means of enhancing consumer awareness (Cruz et al., 2017). An effective marketing strategy aligns with the needs of the target group (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). Different audiences may act upon marketing strategies differently. Preferences with regard to marketing strategies are not only determined by personal preferences, but through multiple factors, such as gender, age, educational level and the national culture (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). For instance, consumers in collectivistic cultures prefer brand messages directed at their in-group, whereas consumers in individualistic cultures prefer brand messages in the interest of the individual (Cruz et al., 2017).

Only recently, researchers have started to examine the effects of function words, pronouns for instance, on brand-to-consumer communication. Cruz et al. (2017) investigated the influence of second person pronouns on consumer involvement by analyzing brand posts on social media. The researchers looked at the number of likes, shares and comments for brand posts created by ten different brands. The findings indicated that the presence of second person pronouns in brand messaging on social media significantly enhanced consumer involvement. When consumers were addressed directly with “you” they were more likely to respond to the brand post by liking, sharing, or commenting on the post (Cruz et al., 2017).

Whereas English relies on “you” as the only second person pronoun, many languages, like Dutch, French, German and Spanish vary between two forms of addressing, a formal and an informal second person pronoun. For example, a distinction is made between “u” and “je” in Dutch, “vous” and “tu” in French, and “Sie” and “du” in German. Brown and Gilman (1960) were the first to study the differences between formal and informal second person pronouns. They refer to the formal form of addressing as the V-form and the informal form of addressing as the T-form, based on the Latin *vos* and *tu*. At first, Brown and Gilman (1960) found that the formal form of addressing was mostly used to express power and to address superiors and the informal form of addressing to address inferiors. Later on, they found that, during the nineteenth century, an increasing number of people used the V-form to emphasize solidarity instead of power. The formal form of addressing was now perceived as respectful rather than distant.

Even though many languages use two forms of addressing, a formal and an informal form, there is no universal agreement on the correct use of formal and informal pronouns. Research has shown that languages apply the V-form and the T-form in different social situations. For instance, the corpus analysis by Levshina (2017) revealed considerable variation with regard to the use of formal and informal second person pronouns across different languages. Levshina (2017) analyzed more than two hundred translated film subtitles in ten different languages and she looked at different social and demographic variables of the speaker and the hearer that could possibly influence the decision for a formal or informal pronoun, e.g. age, power, class, and gender. The translated subtitles revealed that the V-form was used most often in French, German, and Russian and the T-form was the most frequent one in Greek, Swedish, and Dutch. These findings partly correspond to the findings of the study by Den Hartog et al. (2022) who analyzed the different forms of address in more than 400 recruitment advertisements from multinational companies. Their findings revealed that informal second person pronouns were used more often than formal second person pronouns

in Netherlandish Dutch, Belgian Dutch, and Spanish recruitment advertisements. Formal pronouns were used more often in French recruitment advertisements. There appeared to be no difference between formal and informal second person pronouns in German recruitment advertisements.

The informal form of addressing appears to be more common in Dutch (Levshina, 2017; Den Hartog et al., 2022). The preference for informal second person pronouns over formal second person pronouns in Dutch was confirmed by Schoenmakers et al. (2023). There appeared to be no differences between informal and formal pronouns for attitude towards the product, buying intention, and the estimation of the price. However, they did find a difference between formal and informal pronouns for attitude towards the advertisement. The T-form led to a more positive attitude towards the advertisement than the V-form in product slogans. Not only did they find that advertisements including informal pronouns were evaluated more positively than formal pronouns, they also found that advertisements including formal pronouns were evaluated more negatively than advertisements including no pronoun. These findings indicate that the use of formal pronouns in product advertisements possibly leads to more negative attitudes towards the brand, even compared to advertisements without a pronoun of address.

The effects of formal or informal second person pronouns do not only differ with regard to the language used, but the effects can also depend on the social situation in which the communication takes place. As discussed earlier, Levshina (2017) looked at the different social situations in which the formal and informal pronouns were mainly used. It appeared that for Dutch listeners class was an important variable with regard to using formal pronouns, as was the case in Bulgarian, Finnish, Greek, and Polish. Speakers using these languages often use formal pronouns to address someone from a higher social class. German speakers would rather address someone with a formal pronoun in public places like the office. What is remarkable is that young Germans are often addressed with formal second person pronouns in the office and addressed with informal second person pronouns outside of the office. With regard to family affairs, informal pronouns are preferred over formal pronouns in both Dutch and German (Levshina, 2017).

In general, the formal form of addressing is more common in formal social situations than the informal form of addressing. For instance, De Hoop et al. (2023) found that in application procedures, both invitation and rejection letters using the formal form of addressing were preferred over letters using the informal form of addressing. They found that form of addressing had a small but significant effect on the attitude towards the organization

and the recruiter. These findings are partly in agreement with the findings of the master's thesis by Küppers (2018) that indicated a preference for formal pronouns in responses to complaints on social media. Küppers (2018) investigated the influence of the form of addressing on likeability of a brand. German and Dutch participants were asked to evaluate webcare conversations that used formal and informal pronouns in their reactions to compliments or complaints from customers. Contrary to the hypotheses, Küppers (2018) found that likeability of a brand did not increase when informal pronouns were used to respond to the client in the webcare conversations and neither did it decrease when formal pronouns were used. With regard to compliments, no preference for formal or informal pronouns was found. These findings applied to webcare conversations in both German and Dutch. The findings by De Hoop et al. (2023) and Küppers (2017) do not correspond to the findings by Den Hartog et al. (2022) who found that informal pronouns are used more frequently in Dutch. De Hoop et al. (2023) state that even though the informal form of addressing is more common in Dutch according to Den Hartog et al. (2022), the formal form of addressing might be preferred in more formal situations, like application procedures. The same principle applies to the webcare conversations in the small-scale study Küppers (2018).

The difference between formal and informal second person pronouns in advertising has not been extensively studied yet (Schoenmakers et al., 2023). Leung et al. (2022) found that the informal second person pronoun was perceived as warmer and the formal second person pronoun was perceived as more competent. They examined the influence of formal and informal second person pronouns on consumer responses to brands, distinguishing between brands that are perceived as warm and brands that are perceived as competent. Their findings indicated that companies originating from warm countries receive more positive consumer responses when informal pronouns are used in a marketing strategy and companies originating from competent countries receive more positive consumer responses when formal pronouns are used (Leung et al., 2022). Consumers' preferences with regard to the form of addressing in marketing campaigns can vary greatly between different product categories. Given that hedonic products are relatively expensive, brands often need a considerable amount of promotion to increase their sales. However, compared to utilitarian products, hedonic products are not frequently advertised via Internet, but only via personal recommendations through email or by post. Hedonic brands often refuse to use online brand messaging, as the use of free and simple promotions is not compatible with the aim of selling expensive and luxury products (Yu et al., 2017).

Product advertisements are often evaluated in a market research to improve promotional material for future campaigns. However, the role of formal and informal pronouns in market research is not yet clear. In a market research, participants are asked to give their opinion on certain products, services or ideas. Schoenmakers et al. (2023) conducted an experiment in which product advertisements with a slogan including either an informal or formal second person pronoun were evaluated in a market research. This is a common way to examine the influence of a certain condition on product evaluation. The product advertisements are then treated as stimulus material. However, the market research itself can also be used as the stimulus material, by phrasing the questionnaire according to different conditions. The effects of the phrasing of the questionnaire can be investigated this way, which might be useful when creating a questionnaire.

There have been numerous studies that have analyzed the difference between formal and informal second person pronouns in Dutch (Den Hartog et al., 2022; De Hoop et al., 2023; Küppers, 2018; Levshina, 2017; Schoenmakers et al., 2023). This study aims to resolve the discrepancy between the studies of De Hoop et al. (2023), Küppers (2018), and Schoenmakers et al. (2023). De Hoop et al. (2023) conclude that the formal form of addressing is preferred in formal situations like application procedures, whereas Schoenmakers et al. (2023) found that Dutch product slogans are evaluated more positively when they include informal second person pronouns instead of formal second person pronouns. Küppers (2018), in contrast, did not find a difference between formal and informal second person pronouns in webcare conversations, with regard to likeability of a brand. It appears that there is great variety with regard to the choice and the preference for formal and informal second person pronouns in European languages (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Den Hartog et al., 2022; Levshina, 2017). Despite the linguistic resemblance between Dutch and German, being Germanic languages, there appear to be substantial differences between Dutch and German regarding the use of formal and informal second person pronouns. Küppers (2018) showed that Germans do not have a preference for the formal or informal form of addressing in webcare conversations, which was similar to the findings in Dutch. However, Levshina (2017) argues that the informal form of addressing is more common in Dutch subtitles and the formal form of addressing is more common in German subtitles. In accordance with the findings of Levshina (2017), Den Hartog et al. (2022) demonstrates that informal second person pronouns are more common in Dutch recruitment advertisements than formal second person pronouns, whereas there is no difference in terms of frequency between formal and informal second person pronouns in German. It is therefore important to

investigate whether the research design influences the discrepancy in the results, as Levshina (2017) and Den Hartog et al. (2022) performed a corpus study instead of an experiment.

The purpose of this study is to compare the use of formal and informal second person pronouns in Dutch and in German in a market research evaluating hedonic products. The method of this study will partially replicate the method of Schoenmakers et al. (2023), but with some important adaptations. Schoenmakers et al. (2023) included slogans on the product pictures that addressed the consumer either formally, informally or not personally. In this study, participants are not addressed directly in the product advertisements, but the questions in the questionnaire are treated as stimulus material to investigate the effects of the phrasing of the questions in a market research. As a result, the participants are not aware of the research objective as they are evaluating products. Additionally, we will not include a control group in which the participants of the market research are addressed impersonally, as was the case in Schoenmakers et al. (2022), since products in a market research can hardly be evaluated without addressing the consumer. Moreover, the experiment was performed in Dutch and German to compare the findings with regard to the effects of formal and informal second person pronouns in a market research. Although the Dutch and German language resemble one another, their choice for formal or informal second person pronouns differs. Based on the findings by Levshina (2017), who found a preference for informal second person pronouns in Dutch and a preference for formal second person pronouns in German, we hypothesized the following:

H₁: In a market research, German young adults evaluate hedonic products more positively when they are addressed with formal pronouns.

H₂: In a market research, Dutch young adults evaluate hedonic products more positively when they are addressed with informal pronouns.

Method

Materials

The independent variables of this study were form of addressing (formal or informal pronoun) and language (Dutch or German). The questions in the questionnaire evaluated four hedonic products including a fictional brand name. The products presented were perfume, a hat, a necklace, and a watch (see Appendix A). The fictional brand names were ‘Dolberg’, ‘Rodyna’, ‘Cammarato’, and ‘Lonbay’ and they were randomly assigned to the products to avoid biases with regard to the brand name. Participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire after having seen one picture of a hedonic product. This questionnaire was written in their

mother tongue, either in German or Dutch, and included either formal or informal pronouns. The products included in the experiment were perfume, a necklace, a watch, and a hat. Both feminine as well as masculine hedonic products were included in the experiment to minimize personal preference by female and male participants. We assume perfume and jewelry are generally perceived as feminine products and a watch and a hat are generally perceived as rather masculine products. As the experiment compares formal and informal forms of addressing in Dutch and German, four different questionnaires were created; a questionnaire in Dutch including formal pronouns, a questionnaire in Dutch including informal pronouns, a questionnaire in German including formal pronouns, and a questionnaire in German including informal pronouns. The products used in the experiment were the same for the four conditions.

Subjects

A total of 128 participants took part in the study, of which 74% were female and 25% were male. 1% of the participants indicated that they preferred not to say their gender. Gender was distributed equally among the Dutch and German participants who were provided either formal or informal second person pronouns in the experiment ($\chi^2(6) = 10.26, p = .114$). Participants of the study were between 18 and 30 years old. This age group was chosen to assure internal validity. Participants between 18 and 30 years old have about the same experience regarding the participation in market researches. Moreover, they have a similar attitude towards certain products, for instance, people under thirty are unlikely to buy an expensive car. The majority of the participants was between 18 and 22 years old (70%), against 26% of the participants who were between 23 and 26 years old and 5% of the participants who were between 27 and 30 years old. Age was distributed equally among the Dutch and German participants who were provided either formal or informal second person pronouns in the experiment ($\chi^2(6) = 4.57, p = .600$). 55% of the participants were from the Netherlands and 38% originated from Germany. Nine participants indicated to have a mother tongue different than Dutch or German and, therefore, they were excluded from the study. Within the group of Dutch participants, the majority (27%) obtained a Bachelor's degree at University or University of Applied Sciences, compared to 13% of the German participants. Within the group of German participants, the majority (19%) obtained a Gymnasium diploma, compared to 10% of the Dutch participants. Education level was distributed equally among the formal and informal second person pronoun condition for both Dutch ($\chi^2(6) = 8.24, p = .221$) and German ($\chi^2(6) = 2.45, p = .874$) participants. To examine whether the group of

participants were interested in the purchase of hedonic products, the frequency of buying hedonic products was analyzed. A majority of 45% buys hedonic products once or twice a month, 32% buys hedonic products once or twice a year, 14% buys hedonic products once or twice a week, and 2% buys hedonic products many times a week. Only one participant indicated to never buy hedonic products. Frequency of buying hedonic products was distributed equally among the Dutch and German participants who were provided either formal or informal second person pronouns in the experiment ($\chi^2 (12) = 11.07, p = .523$).

Design

In order to test the hypotheses and the research question, this study's design is a 2 (form of addressing: formal/informal) x 2 (language: Dutch/German) between-subjects design.

Instruments

The dependent variable of the study was consumer response to the product, which was divided into attitude towards the product, consumer involvement, and purchase intention. Attitude towards the product was measured using the seven-point Likert scales developed by Cruz et al. (2017) and included five statements: 'Based on your first impression, how would you evaluate the product?' (*uninteresting – interesting*), 'Does the product appeal to you?' (*not appealing – appealing*), 'Do you think the product is visually attractive?' (*not attractive – attractive*), 'To what extent do you need the product?' (*unnecessary – necessary*), and 'If you possessed the product, how often would you use it?' (*never – often*). The reliability of attitude towards the product comprising five items was good: $\alpha = .88$. Consequently, the mean of all four items was used to calculate the compound variable 'attitude towards the product', which was used in the further analysis. Consumer involvement was measured in the present study using the seven-point Likert scales (*definitely – definitely not*) developed by Zaichkowsky (1985) and included five statements: 'Would you be interested in more product options of this brand?', 'Would you be interested in customer reviews?', 'Did you, while forming an opinion about this product, compare the product with other similar products?', 'Do you think the product is different from other brands in the same category?', and 'How likely is it that you recommend this product to family and friends?'. The reliability of consumer involvement comprising five items was acceptable: $\alpha = .70$. Consequently, the mean of all four items was used to calculate the compound variable 'consumer involvement', which was used in the further analysis. With regard to purchase intention, one statement anchored by a seven-point Likert scale (*likely – unlikely*) was measured using one 7-point

Likert scale developed by Cordell et al. (1996): ‘How likely is it that you will buy the product?’.

Procedure

The experiment took place online and the questionnaire was distributed via Qualtrics. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. First, the participants were provided information including the nature and the risks of the study and they were asked to give their consent. Participants were informed about the purpose of the experiment after the experiment took place. In the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were requested some personal information (age, origin, level of educational, interest in hedonic products). Participants were then shown a picture of a product containing a brand name and they were asked questions regarding attitude towards the product, consumer involvement, and purchase intention. The same occurred for four products. In total, the participants answered eleven seven-point Likert scales per product. Afterwards, participants were informed about the purpose of the experiment and they were thanked for their participation. Participants were not incentivized. The experiment took about 10 minutes.

Statistical treatment

Based on the above considerations, multiple two-way analyses of variance were performed with form of addressing and language as factors.

Results

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of formal and informal second person pronouns in market research on attitude towards a product, consumer involvement, and purchase intention. Moreover, this study examined the differences between Dutch and German participants.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and *n* for product attitude, consumer involvement, and purchase intention (1 = negatively evaluated, 7 = positively evaluated)

	Dutch		German	
	Informal	Formal	Informal	Formal
	<i>n</i> = 32	<i>n</i> = 38	<i>n</i> = 28	<i>n</i> = 21
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Product attitude	3.75 (0.76)	3.46 (0.82)	3.11 (0.70)	2.88 (0.72)
Consumer involvement	3.31 (0.67)	3.08 (0.74)	2.93 (0.72)	2.72 (0.79)
Purchase intention	2.50 (0.80)	2.48 (0.90)	2.03 (0.66)	1.75 (0.64)

Product attitude

A two-way analysis of variance with second person pronoun and language as factors showed a significant main effect of language on attitude towards the product ($F(1, 116) = 18.46, p < .001$). Dutch participants of the market research ($M = 3.60, SD = .80$) were shown to have a more positive attitude towards the product than German participants of the market research ($M = 3.01, SD = .70$). Second person pronoun was not found to have a significant main effect on attitude towards the product ($F(1, 116) = 3.25, p = .074$). The interaction between language and second person pronoun was not statistically significant ($F(1, 116) < 1$).

Consumer involvement

A two-way analysis of variance with second person pronoun and language as factors showed a significant main effect of language on consumer involvement ($F(1, 116) = 6.86, p = .010$). Dutch participants of the market research ($M = 3.19, SD = .71$) were shown to be more involved than German participants of the market research ($M = 2.86, SD = .76$). Second person pronoun was not found to have a significant main effect on consumer involvement ($F(1, 117) = 3.00, p = .086$). The interaction between language and second person pronoun was not statistically significant ($F(1, 116) < 1$).

Purchase intention

A two-way analysis of variance with second person pronoun and language as factors showed a significant main effect of language on purchase intention ($F(1, 116) = 16.49, p < .001$). Dutch participants of the market research ($M = 2.49, SD = .85$) were shown to be more likely to buy the product than German participants of the market research ($M = 1.92, SD = .66$). Second person pronoun was not found to have a significant main effect on purchase intention

($F(1, 116) = 1.14, p = .288$). The interaction between language and second person pronoun was not statistically significant ($F(1, 116) < 1$).

Discussion

The current study was set out to examine the influence of formal and informal second person pronouns in a market research in Dutch and in German on product attitude, consumer involvement and purchase intention. We hypothesized that German young adults would evaluate hedonic products more positively when addressed with formal second person pronouns and that Dutch young adults would evaluate hedonic products more positively when addressed with informal second person pronouns. The findings of this study do not support the hypotheses given that there is no significant difference between formal and informal second person pronouns, not in Dutch nor in German. Nevertheless, a difference was found between Dutch and German young adults evaluating hedonic products. Dutch young adults evaluate hedonic products more positively than German young adults regardless of the form of addressing.

Based on previous research (Levshina, 2017; Den Hartog et al., 2022), the fact that we did not find a difference between formal and informal second person pronouns in both Dutch and German is against our expectations. Levshina (2017) found that informal second person pronouns were used more often in Dutch, whereas formal second person pronouns were used more often in German. There are several possible reasons for the discrepancy between Levshina's (2017) findings and our findings. The first explanation is that there is a shift going on from formal to informal second person pronouns in Germany. It could be the case that Germans nowadays are more tolerant to informal second person pronouns, compared to the last decade. The findings by Levshina (2017) could be outdated in a sense that the subtitles that were collected in the corpus analysis were taken from films that were released between 2009 and 2015. There might have been a gradual change to a decreased preference for the formal form of addressing. A second possible explanation is the fact that the people that participated in the experiment were young adults aged between 18 and 30 years. It is therefore possible that younger German people either have no preference with regard to the forms of addressing, or that an increasing number of German young adults has got used to informal second person pronouns. With regard to the discrepancy in the findings with regard to Dutch people, the findings can be explained by the fact that Dutch people prefer the formal form of addressing in more formal occasions (De Hoop et al., 2023). A market research is considered a rather formal situation.

Our findings partially correspond to the findings by Den Hartog et al. (2022) who found that there is no difference with regard to the frequency of formal and informal second person pronouns in German recruitment advertisements. Contrarily, our findings did not correspond to the findings by Den Hartog et al. (2022) indicating that the informal form of addressing is more frequent in Dutch recruitment advertisements. The fact that the informal form of addressing is more likely to be used in a vacancy can be explained by the fact that employers and recruiters assume that Dutch job seekers appreciate being approached with informal second person pronouns way when applying for a job. As Den Hartog et al. (2022) performed a corpus analysis and looked at the frequency of formal and informal second person pronouns, we cannot conclude whether the informal form of addressing is indeed preferred by job seekers.

The findings of this study are in line with the findings of Schoenmakers et al. (2023) who found no difference between formal and informal second person pronouns when analyzing attitude towards the product and purchase intention in Dutch. Our study most closely resembled the study by Schoenmakers et al. (2023) as they analyzed the influence of formal and informal second person pronouns in product advertisements. Therefore, it is not surprising that our findings are similar to the findings by Schoenmakers et al. (2023). Nevertheless, Schoenmakers et al. (2023) did find an effect for attitude towards the advertisement. This contradiction can be explained by the fact that they included a slogan in the product advertisement. Schoenmakers et al. (2023) found that informal second person pronouns in the slogan of the advertisement had a more positive influence on the attitude towards the advertisement. As we did not include a slogan, we did not investigate the influence of the form of addressing on the attitude towards the advertisement. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the form of addressing on product evaluations in a market research, and therefore the attitude towards the advertisement was not taken into consideration.

In addition, our findings can be explained by the fact that people tend not to pay attention to the form of addressing that is used in the questionnaire, when evaluating hedonic products in a market research. This might be the reason for the non-presence of substantial differences between formal and informal second person pronouns in Dutch and German. Participants are focused on giving their opinion about a product and therefore do not consider the way in which the questions are phrased. The same phenomenon appears to be the case in other social situations. Küppers (2018) found a similar effect as the study by Schoenmakers et al. (2023), but in the case of the evaluation of webcare conversations. Küppers (2018) found

no difference between formal and informal second person pronouns with regard to likeability of a brand in webcare conversations in both Dutch and German. Again, although previous studies demonstrate that the informal second person pronoun is more common in Dutch written documents (Levshina, 2017; Den Hartog et al., 2022), it appears that the informal form of addressing does not always positively influence the evaluations of a product or brand by Dutch people.

Although the hypotheses were not confirmed, we did find a substantial difference between the evaluations of Dutch and German young adults. Dutch young adults evaluated hedonic products more positively than German young adults. The difference between Dutch and German young adults evaluating hedonic products in a market research can be explained by the general cultural differences between Dutch and German people. Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions suggest that the German national culture is more masculine than the Dutch national culture. German people value competition, achievement, and success, but also quality is an important value in the German society (Hofstede, 1980). As quality is important, it can be concluded that German people are not easily satisfied with the appearance and the functioning of a product. They might be more critical when evaluating a product or service, compared to Dutch people who are considered more feminine according to Hofstede's (1980) dimensions. Moreover, as participants of the experiment filled in the questionnaire in either Dutch or German, it could be the case that the questions or adjectives used in the questionnaire differ semantically. This means that words do not hold the exact equivalent when they are translated to another language. For instance, the question 'Does the product appeal to you?' (not appealing – appealing) is answered with 'Het spreekt mij niet aan – Het spreekt mij aan' in Dutch and 'Ich mag es nicht – Ich mag es' in German which could mean that the questions in the questionnaire are interpreted differently. This can be considered a limitation of the study.

The difference between Dutch and German young adults evaluating hedonic products in a market research might also be caused by the sample size of the study. Although we tried to create a sample size that is representative and diverse enough, we collected data through convenience sampling. This may indicate that the sample we collected might not be generalizable, as would be the case with a random sampling method. With a sample size of 119 Dutch and German participants, our findings are considered generalizable. However, the number of German participants was lower than the number of Dutch participants, that is to say the results of 49 German and 70 Dutch young adults were taken into consideration. This difference in the data might have caused the discrepancy between Dutch and German

participants. Future studies should include more participants to improve generalizability. The fact that participants were provided only four days to fill out the questionnaire might have affected the number of participants. Moreover, in future studies more age groups should be analyzed to investigate the effects of formal and informal second person pronouns on older adults, elderly, or even on children. The form of addressing might be perceived differently in other age groups. It could be the case that, even though our findings demonstrate that young adults from 18 to 30 years old do not evaluate hedonic products more positively or negatively when they are addressed with formal second person pronouns, elderly evaluate hedonic products more positively when they are addressed with formal second person pronouns. Findings with regard to different age groups can be useful for future market researches, as products or brands aimed at an older or younger target group may be evaluated differently due to the form of addressing.

This study analyzed the differences with regard to formal and informal second person pronouns in market research between Dutch and German young adults. This limits the analysis of the formal and informal form of addressing to only two European countries, and only two cultures that are fairly similar (Hofstede, 1980). Due to the geographic proximity, the national culture of the Netherlands and Germany are very similar. Although the two countries differ with regard to the masculinity dimension, they both focus on the individual, have low power distance, are risk-avoidant, and long-term oriented (Hofstede, 1980). Future research should therefore investigate and compare two countries that differ in several areas. It could be the case that there are substantial differences between two countries that are not as similar to each other. Furthermore, the future analysis could compare more than two countries which could provide a greater intercultural understanding. Relevant findings could contribute to future international marketing strategies.

As brand names were included in this study to make the product appear more realistic, they could have influenced the evaluation of the product. The brand names that were used in the study were fictional and non-existent. However, participants could have had a certain preference for a brand name that might have affected the results. Some brand names might be easier to pronounce in Dutch or German, and therefore they may be preferred over other brand names. Moreover, some brand names may lead to personal inferences, as some participants may know a product or person with a name that is almost similar. Whereas this study investigated the effects of the formal and informal form of addressing on attitude towards the product, it would be worthwhile studying the effects on attitude towards the brand

as the evaluation of the brand name is then taken into consideration. In this study, the brand name was only used to make the product advertisement appear realistic.

Furthermore, the participants of the study were not provided a time limit, and thus, they were allowed to take as much time as they wanted to fill out the questionnaire. As participants are provided time to think about the evaluation of a product, the evaluation might be different than their first impression. This could also imply that some participants were provided more time to evaluate the products in the market research. Future studies should therefore set a maximum time limit to guarantee that all participants have equal time to fill in the questionnaire.

The aim of this study was to demonstrate the effect of formal and informal second person pronouns on product evaluations assessed in a market research, and to investigate the differences between Dutch and German young adults evaluating hedonic products. A difference between the formal and informal form of addressing in a market research evaluating hedonic products in Dutch and German was not found. The findings of this study provide insights into the formulation of a market research and may contribute to the formulation of future market researches. Marketeers and salesmen can benefit from the findings of this study. With regard to the language of the questionnaire, a difference was found between Dutch and German young adults. German young adults evaluated hedonic products in a market research more negatively than Dutch young adults. This difference was not previously investigated and might be attributed to cultural differences between the Dutch and the German society. Findings of this study can provide a useful starting point for future studies. Future studies could investigate the effects of formal and informal second person pronouns in other social situations.

Literature

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Appendix A. Product pictures



Appendix B. Statement of Own Work

Statement of own work – BA thesis

By signing this declaration, the undersigned
[first name, surname and student number],

Margje Michels, s1055082

Bachelor's student at the Radboud University Faculty of Arts,

declares that the submitted BA thesis is entirely original and was written exclusively by himself/herself, and without the use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT. The undersigned has indicated explicitly and in detail where all the information and ideas derived from other sources can be found by referencing all sources used, both in the text and in the bibliography.

By signing this declaration, the undersigned also declares that the research data presented in this thesis were collected by the undersigned himself/herself using the methods described in this thesis.

Place and date:

Deurne, June 9th 2023

Signature:

