



Buy this damn product

Effects of swear words in a foreign language in advertising.

Abstract: Nowadays, we are surrounded by advertisements that try to grab our attention. Each day, we are exposed to an estimated 3.000 advertisements (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchandra, 2003, p. 268). Over the past years, advertisers came up with many different ways to break through advertising clutter and attract our attention (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1593). Shock advertising is one of way which has become popular among advertisers (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchandra, 2003). The use of swear words in advertising is one tool to grab the attention of an audience using shock (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1593). In addition to the use of swear words in advertising, also the use of English in advertising has an increased presence in many European countries nowadays (Wilton & De Houwer, 2011). However, no research has been found on the effects on consumers when advertisements use swear words in the individual's mother tongue (L1) or in a foreign language (L2). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of swear words and to test whether there are any differences for advertisements that are in the individual's L1 (Dutch or German) and L2 (English).

To study the effects on consumers of advertisements that use swear words in the individual's mother tongue or in a foreign language, the present research conducted a between-subject experiment among 265 Dutch and German participants. In an online questionnaire, participants were exposed to four advertisements in either their mother tongue or English, which either included or excluded the use of a swear word. Interestingly, the results show that the emotional response is higher for advertisements that do not include a swear word than for advertisements with a swear word. Further research is needed to check for effects on attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product, purchase intention, brand recall and, product recall.

Key words: Shock advertising, swear words, mother tongue, foreign language.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays we can no longer walk through the streets without being confronted with advertisements that try to grab our attention. Neither can we put on the television without being presented with a dozen of products that, according to the advertisers, are worth buying nor open up a regional newspaper without advertisements trying to convince us to do grocery shopping at our local supermarket. As consumers, we are exposed to approximately 3.000 advertisements each day (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchandra, 2003, p. 268). Over the past decades, advertisers came up with a numerous list of ways to break through the clutter and attract our attention (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1593).

Shock is one of the attention-grabbing ways many advertisers opt for (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchandra, 2003). According to Dahl, Frankenberger and Manchandra (2003, p. 268), shock advertising is an advertising appeal that normally is seen as one that deliberately, rather than inadvertently, startles and offends its audience. The research states that by using shocking advertisement content, the creator's aim is to surprise the public by deliberately violating norms for societal and personal ideas. The clothing enterprise Benetton is a great example of a company that often uses shock in their advertisements. Instead of focussing on neither a product nor a desired behaviour, the company uses controversial images in their advertisements in order to create awareness for themes that are considered to be of universal social importance (Hubbard, 1993). However, not only the choice of images that are used in advertising can influence the attention-grabbing.

The use of swear words in advertising is another form of shock advertising that seeks attention by surprising its audience (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1593). There are numerous ways to define a swear word. Deweale (2004) defines swear words as multifunctional, pragmatic units which assume the expression of emotional attitudes as well as various discourse functions. However, that same study considers swear words as linguistic devices to both affirm in-group membership and establish boundaries and social norms for language use. Given that there are many different ways to define a swear word, there also are several different reasons to use them in advertising. Besides generating surprise and to shock, according to Mortimer (2007), they might also be used to create humour, to emphasize, to show intimacy/trust and to reinforce brand personality.

In addition to the use of swear words in advertising, nowadays, also the English language has an increased presence in many European countries (Wilton & De Houwer, 2011). For instance, there is a Dutch wine merchant that labels its white wine “Just fucking good wine” (Van der Meulen & Van Meurs, 2020). This means the advertisers did not only choose to use swear words as a tool of shock advertising, but also choose to promote their product in a foreign language. There are many reasons why companies decide to include a foreign language in their advertisements. The most important reasons for this so-called code-switching are attracting attention, evoking the country of origin related to the used foreign language, evoking a sense of internationalism, modernity and prestige and, evoke belongingness (Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2020).

However, no research has been found on the effects on consumers when advertisements use swear words in the individual’s mother tongue (L1) or in a foreign language (L2). Therefore, it is of scientific relevance that both the effects of swear words in advertising and whether there exists a difference between how these are evaluated in the L1 and L2 are investigated. Subsequently, the social relevance of this study is that companies can use the results in order to improve their own advertisements. The data collected in this research will present the advertisers with information on what style of language to use for which target group.

2.1 Theoretical foundation

In the present study, there are several concepts that are important to look into before starting the actual study. The first one is shock advertising, a concept which is the main theme of the present research. That means, materials that belong to the category of shock advertising are used in order to test for its effects on the participants. The second one is swear words, the most important aspect of the study. The present study compares the evaluation of advertisements with and without swear word use. Thirdly, bilingualism will play a large role in the research. In this study it is tested whether there exist any differences between the perception of advertisements in an individual’s mother tongue (Dutch or German in this case) and in a foreign language (English in this case). Lastly, it is important to know about emotional resonance when it comes to languages. The present study tests

whether there is a difference in how individuals perceive swear words in their mother tongue and in a foreign language.

Shock advertising is an advertising appeal which deliberately challenges the values and norms of a society (Mortimer, 2007). According to Dahl, Frankenberger and Manchandra (2003, p. 269), the most important aspect of shock advertising to break through advertising clutter and grab the attention of its target group is norm violation. The research states that there are three different categories in which one can put the way in which the norm is violated in order to generate the offensive reaction: encompassing transgressions of law or custom (e.g., obscenity, indecent sexual references), breach of a moral or social code (e.g., vulgarity, profanity), or aspects that cause outrage to the moral or physical senses (e.g., disgusting images, unreasonable violence). In 2003, a study by Dahl, Frankenberger and Manchandra investigated the effects of advertisements using three different executional tools, namely: shock, fear and, informational. The results of this study showed that the shock appeal lead to more attention, a better recall and better recognition than the other approaches. However, it is important to note that the advertisements used in the study of Dahl, Frankenberger and Manchandra were public policy advertisements instead of commercial advertisements. Evidently, shock is more accepted as an executional tool in public policy advertisements (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1593). However, Brown and Schau (2001) claim that also commercial advertisers may use shock advertising because it is an effective way to grab attention and to stimulate a second look of it's audience. Mortimer (2007, p. 1593) writes that evidence has been found which claims that the norm violation aspect of shock advertising enables an advertisement to break through advertising clutter and that amplifying the motivation to process the information leads to a more positive effect on information processing in terms of elaboration on its audience.

The use of swear words is one of the executional tools to shock an audience using the language of an advertisement to break through advertising clutter (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1594). Earlier research has been conducted on the effects of the use of swear words in advertising. For example, the study of Baker and Broadus (2014) partially supported their hypothesis which stated that the use of swear words in advertising will lead to a more positive attitude of the participants towards the advertisement. However, as mentioned in Mortimer (2007, p. 1594), the use of bad language in advertising is also one of the most

important reasons for an advertisement to be perceived as offensive. Moreover, women showed to perceive these advertisements using indecent language way more offensive than men. Therefore, it is important to note the demography of an audience when creating an advertisement (Mortimer, 2007, p. 1594). This is supported by the strategy of clothing enterprise, Benetton, mentioned earlier. Benetton's advertisements are based on research connected to demographic and psychographic data about their target group's profile. Due to this research, the enterprise is able to use knowledge about their target audience's perceptions, values and attitudes in order to trigger their attention (Hubbard, 1993).

Language use is one of the aspects in which advertisers have to take their target group into consideration (Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2020). In 2011, Wilton & De Houwer showed that English has an increased presence in many European countries nowadays and therefore, also the number of bilinguals is increasing. Nicoladis and Montanari (2016) define a bilingual speaker as an individual who knows two languages. Earlier research has been conducted on the use of swear words among bi- and multilinguals.

The emotional resonance of languages within bi- and multilingual speakers is highly inconsistent (Deweale, 2004). Emotional resonance in language means that the emotional force of words causes to evoke different emotions on its reader (Scripted, 2014). According to Deweale (2004), the effects on the evoked emotions differ in an individual's L1 and L2. He states that individuals tend to have a stronger emotional resonance to languages learned early in life than to languages learned after puberty, which seem to have a weaker emotional hold on the individuals. Deweale (2004, p. 207) describes a research conducted on the fluctuations in reactions to emotion words in both the native as the foreign language of bilinguals. The results of this study showed that for late L2 learners taboo words and childhood reprimands lead to a higher psychological arousal in their native language than in their second language. According to the investigators of the study, the cause is that the individuals have more emotional connotations, given the proliferation of neural connections in early and middle childhood, in their native language. This might be the reason why some native speakers avoid using words with a negative emotional force in public and why non-native speakers mostly seem reluctant in using them (Deweale, 2004, p. 204).

2.2 Research question

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of swear words as a tool of shock advertising and to test whether there are any differences in emotional resonance for advertisements that are in the individual's L1 (Dutch or German) and L2 (English). Therefore, the central question of this research is formulated as followed: What are the effects on consumers' responses towards advertisements when these use swear words in their native language (L1) or a foreign language (L2)?

2. Method

2.1 Materials

The research included two independent variables: *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use*. These independent variables are also shown in an analytical model in Figure 1. The first variable, *Language of the advertisement*, decided whether the participants were exposed to an advertisement in their mother tongue (L1) or a foreign language (L2). In the present study, their mother tongue language was either Dutch or German and the foreign language was English. The reason for including both Dutch and German participants is because also the group of investigators was made up of both Dutch and German investigators. Therefore, including both nationalities made it easier to collect a large group of participants, which increased the representativeness of the final results. Dutch and German are Germanic languages and, therefore, words are more likely to be alike in both linguistical and semantical manner. This means, it would not be a big problem to find swear words that have the same form as well as similar meaning. Also, in general, Dutch and German people share many aspects regarding their culture and therefore, same norms and values (Hofstede, 1984). This made it less likely that the differences in culture would interfere with the participants' attitude towards the materials used in the study. The second variable, *Swear word use*, determined whether the participants would assess an advertisement with or without a swear word. The present study compared whether there was a difference between advertisements in the individual's L1 and L2 and between advertisements with and without the use of a swear word. Table 1 gives an overview of the four conditions that were implemented in eight different advertisements for each product with *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* as factors.

Table 1. The four conditions that were implemented in eight different advertisements for each product with Language of the advertisement and Swear word use as factors

	Country	Language of the advertisement	Swear word use
Condition 1	The Netherlands	Dutch (L1)	With
	Germany	German (L1)	With
Condition 2 (control)	The Netherlands	Dutch (L1)	Without
	Germany	German (L1)	Without
Condition 3	The Netherlands	English (L2)	With
	Germany	English (L2)	With
Condition 4 (control)	The Netherlands	English (L2)	Without
	Germany	English (L2)	Without

Each condition showed a self-designed advertisement of three low-involvement products by a non-existent brand. These advertisements are presented in Appendix I. According to Kobayashi et al. (2009, p. 67), consumers often take the value of a brand name into consideration when making their purchasing decisions. However, he states, consumers find it hard to evaluate the value of a brand name they encounter for the first time. Therefore, to exclude attitude created beforehand, it was necessary to make sure the all brands included in the advertisements were unknown. The reason for choosing low-involvement products only, was based on the findings of an earlier study of Westerholm (2017). He stated that the use of swear words in advertisements for products that do not evoke strong emotions have a smaller effect on participants' attitudes towards the advertisements than for products that do evoke strong emotions. In this research, the following three products were advertised: chewing gum, coffee beans and beer. In the present study these products are seen as low-involvement products because they are relatively cheap and do not last for a longer period of time.

The text that was included in the advertisements was the main aspect of the study. In deciding what words were put down, it was important to note the translatability. The sentences had to be both semantically and emotionally more or less equal in Dutch, German

and English in order to make sure no other influences played a role. Swear words that meet these conditions are damn (*verdomd, verdammt*) and idiot (*idiot, Idiot*). The third swear word that was used in the study is asshole (*klootzak, Arschloch*). This swear word has the same meaning and impact in all three languages.

2.2 Subjects

In total, the study counted 265 participants. In the condition with swear word use 128 (48.3 %) participants took part and in the condition without any swear word there were 137 (51.7 %) participants. From these 265 participants, 129 (48.7 %) were Dutch and 136 (51.3%) were German. A Chi-square test showed there was no significant relation between mother tongue and language of the advertisement ($\chi^2 (1) = 0.308, p = .579$) and neither between mother tongue and swear word use ($\chi^2 (1) = 0.006, p = .939$).

Participants were asked questions about their proficiency in both their L1 and L2. Most of the participants rated their L1 proficiency skills on the aspects of speaking, writing, reading and listening as *very good* or higher (on average 80.7 %).

From these 265 participants, 111 (41.9 %) were male, 152 (57.4 %) female, 1 (0.4 %) other and, 1 (0.4 %) did not want to say. Therefore, the distribution between men and women was equal enough to check for possible differences between both sexes. A Chi-square test showed there was no significant relation between gender and language of the advertisement ($\chi^2 (3) = 2.005, p = .571$) and neither between gender and swear word use ($\chi^2 (3) = 2.127, p = .546$).

Since one of the advertisements was about alcohol, participants below the minimum drinking age had to be excluded. However, no participants had to be excluded, since the age range was from 18 until 72 years old ($M = 28.7, SD = 13.14$). An independent-samples *t*-test showed there was no significant difference between age and the language of the advertisement ($t (263) = 0.160, p = .873$) and neither between age and swear word use ($t (263) = 0.649, p = .517$). It can be argued that among this group differences regarding swearing behaviour may exist. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study it was more important to have a larger group of participants than to divide the group more specifically.

Another aspect that could influence participants' attitudes towards swear words in advertising is educational level. The highest level of education the participants completed or

currently attended ranged from primary education to Doctoral Degree. Table 2 shows the distribution of the highest completed or current education level of the participants. A Chi-square test showed there was no significant relation between educational level and language of the advertisement ($\chi^2 (5) = 4.924, p = .425$) and neither between educational level and swear word use ($\chi^2 (5) = 2.540, p = .770$).

Table 2. Distribution of highest completed or current education level

Educational level	Frequency	Percent
Primary education	1	0.4
Secondary education	37	14.0
Vocational training	40	15.1
Bachelor's Degree	133	50.2
Master's Degree	52	19.6
Doctoral Degree	2	0.8
Total	265	100.0

As mentioned earlier, Deweale (2004) showed that there is a difference in emotional resonance between speakers who learned their second language before and after puberty. Therefore, it was also important to know at what stage of life the participant learned their second language, English in this case, in order to make sure each participant had the same emotional resonance towards the language. However, most of the participants learned English either before puberty (52.1 %) or during puberty (44.9 %) and only a few had learned the language after puberty (3.0 %). Therefore, it was supposed that differences in emotional resonance would not have an influence on the results. An independent-samples *t*-test showed there was no significant difference between the age at which the L2 was acquired and the language of the advertisement ($t (263) = 0.486, p = .628$) and neither between the age at which the L2 was acquired and swear word use ($t (263) = 0.714, p = .476$).

The majority of the participants rated their English proficiency skills on the aspects of speaking, writing, reading and listening as *good* or higher (on average 83.1 %). It was important that the participants' had a certain proficiency in English, to make sure there was no difference due to comprehension of the materials.

Furthermore, a Chi-square test showed there was no significant relation between swearing behaviour and language of the advertisement ($\chi^2 (6) = 4.233, p = .645$) and neither between swearing behaviour and swear word use ($\chi^2 (6) = 5.062, p = .536$). Also, a Chi-square test showed there was no significant relation between attitude towards swearing and language of the advertisement ($\chi^2 (6) = 4.144, p = .657$) and neither between attitude towards swearing and swear word use ($\chi^2 (6) = 7.963, p = .241$).

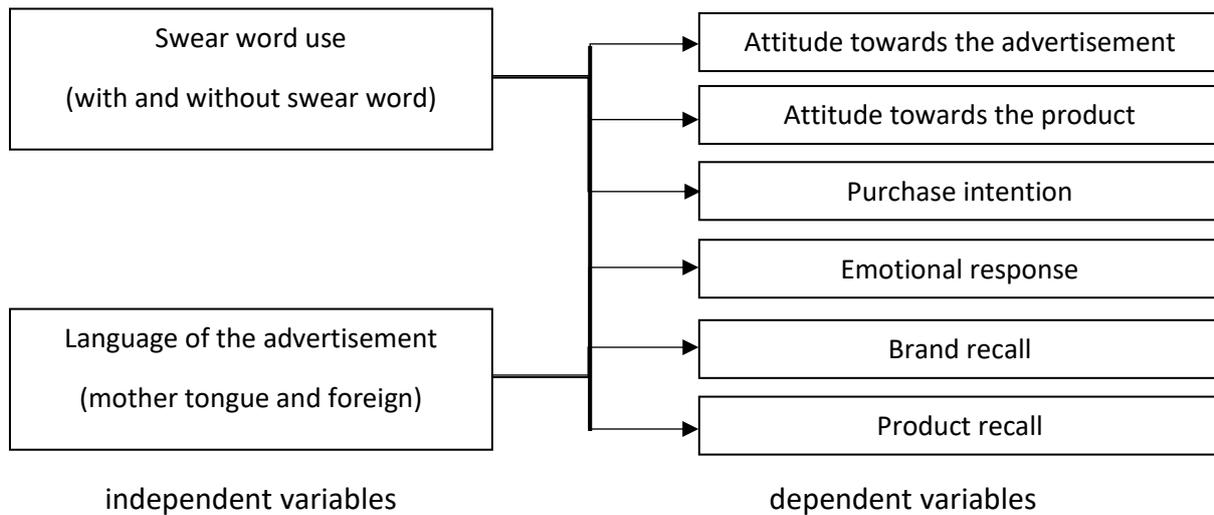
2.3 Design

In order to investigate the effects on consumers' responses towards advertisements when these use swear words in their mother tongue or a foreign language, the study was a between-subjects design. The research consisted of a 2x2 research design, with *Language of advertisement* and *Swear word use* as variables. The variable *Language of the advertisement* had two levels: L1 (either Dutch or German) and L2 (English). The variable *Swear word use* also had two levels: with and without swear word. Control groups were exposed to the conditions in which no swear word was used.

2.4 Instruments

The aim of this study was to test six different dependent variables among the participants in order to advise companies on what type of language to use in their own advertisements, namely: attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product, purchase intention, emotional response, brand recall and, product recall. These dependent variables are shown in an analytical model in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Analytical model of Independent and Dependent Variables



Attitude towards advertisement

Participants were asked about their opinion towards the advertisement, to measure whether participants reckon they liked the advertisement or not. The attitude towards the advertisement was measured in the present study using the scale developed by Villegas (2002, p. 101), using eight statements on a 7-point Likert scale rating from “Totally disagree” to “Totally agree”. The reliability of ‘Attitude towards the advertisement’ comprising eight items was excellent: $\alpha = .92$. The eight items were:

- I like this advertisement
- This advertisement is entertaining
- This advertisement is useful
- This advertisement is important
- This advertisement is interesting
- This advertisement is informative
- I would like to see this advertisement again
- This advertisement is good

Attitude towards product

After being asked about their opinion on the advertisements, the participants were asked about their attitude towards the product that was advertised, again using a scale developed by Villegas (2002, p. 101). Participants were presented with five statements and were asked to indicate their opinion on a 7-point Likert scale rating from “Totally disagree” to “Totally agree”. The reliability of ‘Attitude towards product’ comprising five items was excellent: $\alpha = .92$. The five items were:

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

Purchase intention

In the present study, the way in which the advertisement affected the purchase intention was measured using the scale developed by In and Ahmad (2018, p. 4). Participants were asked to indicate their purchase intention of the product advertised with four statements on a 7-point Likert scale rating from “Totally disagree” to “Totally agree”. The reliability of ‘Purchase intention’ comprising four items was excellent: $\alpha = .92$. The four items were:

- 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

Emotional response

The emotional response was measured in the present study using the scale developed by Erickson and Ritter (2001, p. 155). The participants were presented with seven statements about their evoked feelings and were asked to indicate them on a 7-point Likert scale rating from “Totally disagree” to “Totally agree”. The reliability of ‘Attitude towards product’ comprising seven items was good: $\alpha = .86$. The seven items were:

- This advertisement makes me happy
- This advertisement makes me excited

- This advertisement makes me angry
- This advertisement irritates me
- This advertisement makes me feel guilty
- This advertisement makes me ashamed
- This advertisement makes me sad

Brand recall

In the present study, Brand recall was measured using the scale developed by Singh et al. (1988, p. 75). The participants were presented with an open-ended question that asked whether they could remember the three brands that were presented in the advertisements they had been exposed to. And if so, to name these three brand names. The interrater reliability of the variable 'Brand recall' was good: $\kappa = .92$, $p < .001$.

Product recall

Just like the previous variable, in the present study the variable Product recall was measured using the scale developed by Singh et al. (1988). The participants were asked to name the three products they had recently been exposed to. The interrater reliability of the variable 'Product recall' was good: $\kappa = .91$, $p < .001$.

Demographic details

In the second part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked several demographic questions in order to test for differences in effects on participants with different demographic details.

The first two, as mentioned and explained earlier, were mother tongue and age. Mother tongue had three possible answers: Dutch, German and, Other. Since the research only included native Dutch and German participants, the participants who filled out the option 'Other' had to be excluded. However, no participant indicated to have another nationality. For age, the question was open-ended. In this case, the participants of all participants who were under the age of 18 had to be taken out. Again, no participant had to be excluded. Also, the participants were asked to indicate their gender and educational level.

The following questions would give more information about the participants' language acquisition and skills. Firstly, based on questions from Deweale (2004, p. 207), the participants were asked at what age they had learned English with interval levels: 0 – 12, 12 – 18 and, 18 +. Secondly, they were asked to rate their self-proficiency in their mother tongue (Dutch or German) for the aspects speaking, reading, writing and, listening using the scale developed by Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008). This scale consists of 7-points of semantic differentials anchored from *poor* to *excellent*. The last question on this aspect, using the same measurement scale, asked the participants to rate their self-proficiency in English.

The following two questions were about the participants' own swearing behaviour, adapted from questions from Deweale et al. (2017, p. 336). First, participants were asked to indicate how often they swear on a 7-points Likert scale anchored from *never* to *very frequently*. Secondly, they were asked to indicate their general opinion on swear word use on a 7-points Likert scale anchored from *very inappropriate* to *very appropriate*.

In order to measure to what extent the participants remembered the advertisements they had been exposed to, they were asked whether they could remember the non-existent brand names and products they had been exposed to and if so, to name these. In case the participant indicated that he remembered them, he was given one point. For each correct brand or product an extra point was given. Minor spelling or product mistakes were accepted, since the advertisements themselves did not specifically mention the products. For example, 'coffee' was accepted instead of 'coffee beans'.

2.5 Procedure

To recruit subjects for the study, acquaintances of the investigators were asked to participate. Each participant was asked to individually fill out an online questionnaire without giving them any information concerning the aim of the study. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix II.

The questionnaire started with an introduction about the expected duration to fill it out, the composition of the questionnaire and, the conditions of participating. The participants were asked to give their consent for participating in the study.

In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked about their attitude towards the advertisements, attitude towards the products, purchase intention and, emotional response.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked several demographic questions. The reason for asking for the participants' demographic questions at the end of the questionnaire was to enlarge the time between the exposure to the advertisements and the recall questions and to prevent the participants' from guessing the focus of the study while answering the questions about the advertisements.

The questionnaire took about ten to fifteen minutes to complete.

2.6 Statistical treatment

In order to study the effects on consumers' responses towards advertisements including swear words in their mother tongue or their foreign language, two-way analysis of variance with Language of the advertisement and Swear word use as factors were performed for each of the dependent variables (i.e.: Attitude towards the advertisement, Attitude towards the product, Purchase intention, Emotional response, Brand recall and, Product recall).

3. Results

3.1 Effects on Attitude towards the advertisement

A two-way analysis of variance with *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* as factors did not show a significant main effect of *Language of the advertisement* on *Attitude towards the advertisement* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, *Swear word use* was not found to have a significant main effect on *Attitude towards the advertisement* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* was not statistically significant ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations for *Attitude towards the advertisement* in function of *Swear word use* and *Language of the advertisement* are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for Attitude towards the advertisement in function of Swear word use and Language of the advertisement (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

Swear word use	Language of the advertisement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
With	L1	3.17	0.90	68
	L2	3.19	0.84	60
	Total	3.18	0.87	128
Without	L1	3.26	0.88	65
	L2	3.23	0.85	72
	Total	3.24	0.86	137
Total	L1	3.22	0.88	133
	L2	3.21	0.85	132
	Total	3.21	0.86	265

3.2 Effects on Attitude towards the product

A two-way analysis of variance with *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* as factors did not show a significant main effect of *Language of the advertisement* on *Attitude towards the product* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, *Swear word use* was not found to have a significant main effect on *Attitude towards the product* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* was not statistically significant ($F(2, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations for *Attitude towards the product* in function of *Swear word use* and *Language of the advertisement* are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for Attitude towards the product in function of Swear word use and Language of the advertisement (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

Swear word use	Language of the advertisement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
With	L1	3.96	1.11	68
	L2	3.98	1.03	60
	Total	3.97	1.07	128
Without	L1	4.13	1.12	65
	L2	4.00	1.01	72
	Total	4.06	1.06	137
Total	L1	4.04	1.11	133
	L2	3.99	1.01	132
	Total	4.06	1.07	265

3.3 Effects on Purchase intention

A two-way analysis of variance with *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* as factors did not show a significant main effect of *Language of the advertisement* on *Purchase intention* ($F(1, 261) = 1.223, p = .270$). Also, *Swear word use* was not found to have a significant main effect on *Purchase intention* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* was not statistically significant ($F(2,$

261) < 1). The means and standard deviations for *Purchase intention* in function of *Swear word use* and *Language of the advertisement* are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations for the Purchase intention in function of Swear word use and Language of the advertisement (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

Swear word use	Language of the advertisement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
With	L1	3.05	1.23	68
	L2	2.99	1.17	60
	Total	3.02	1.20	128
Without	L1	3.28	1.26	65
	L2	3.02	1.07	72
	Total	3.14	1.17	137
Total	L1	3.16	1.25	133
	L2	3.01	1.11	132
	Total	3.09	1.18	265

3.4 Effects on Emotional response

A two-way analysis of variance with *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* as factors did not show a significant main effect of *Language of the advertisement* on *Emotional response* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). *Swear word use* was found to have a significant main effect on *Emotional response* ($F(1, 261) = 6.211, p = .013$). The emotional response was significantly higher for the advertisements without swear words ($M = 5.03, SD = 0.75$) than for the advertisements with swear words ($M = 4.81, SD = 0.65$). The interaction effect between *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* was not statistically significant ($F(2, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations for *Emotional response* in function of *Swear word use* and *Language of the advertisement* are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Means and standard deviations for Emotional response in function of Swear word use and Language of the advertisement (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

Swear word use	Language of the advertisement	Mean	SD	n
With	L1	4.75	0.65	68
	L2	4.87	0.64	60
	Total	4.81	0.65	128
Without	L1	5.02	0.81	65
	L2	5.03	0.69	72
	Total	5.03	0.75	137
Total	L1	4.88	0.74	133
	L2	4.96	0.67	132
	Total	4.92	0.71	265

3.5 Effects on Brand recall

A two-way analysis of variance with *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* as factors did not show a significant main effect of *Language of the advertisement* on *Brand recall* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, *Swear word use* was not found to have a significant main effect on *Brand recall* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* was not statistically significant ($F(2, 261) < 1$). The means and standard deviations for *Brand recall* in function of *Swear word use* and *Language of the advertisement* are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Means and standard deviations for Brand recall in function of Swear word use and Language of the advertisement (0 = no recall, 4 = complete recall)

Swear word use	Language of the advertisement	Mean	SD	n
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With	L1	1.68	1.34	68
	L2	1.78	1.44	60
	Total	1.73	1.38	128
Without	L1	1.88	1.31	65
	L2	1.76	1.41	72
	Total	1.82	1.36	137
Total	L1	1.77	1.32	133
	L2	1.77	1.42	132
	Total	1.77	1.37	265

3.6 Effects on Product recall

A two-way analysis of variance with *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* as factors did not show a significant main effect of *Language of the advertisement* on *Product recall* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). Also, *Swear word use* was not found to have a significant main effect on *Product recall* ($F(1, 261) < 1$). The interaction effect between *Language of the advertisement* and *Swear word use* was statistically significant ($F(1, 261) = 4.434, p = .036$). The means and standard deviations for *Product recall* in function of *Swear word use* and *Language of the advertisement* are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Means and standard deviations for Product recall in function of Swear word use and Language of the advertisement (0 = no recall, 4 = complete recall)

Swear word use	Language of the advertisement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
With	L1	3.49	1.04	68
	L2	3.18	1.35	60
	Total	3.34	1.20	128
Without	L1	3.15	1.37	65
	L2	3.49	1.17	72
	Total	3.33	1.26	137

Total	L1	3.32	1.22	133
	L2	3.35	1.24	132
	Total	3.34	1.23	265

The data file was split by *Swear word use*. For the advertisements with a swear word, a one-way of variance showed there is no significant effect of *Language of the advertisement* on *Product recall* ($F(1, 126) = 2.035, p = .156$). The means and standard deviations for *Product recall* for advertisements with a swear word in function of *Language of the advertisement* are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Means and standard deviations for Product recall for the advertisements with swear word in function of Language of the advertisement (0 = no recall, 4 = complete recall)

Language of the advertisement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
L1	3.49	1.04	68
L2	3.18	1.35	60
Total	3.34	1.20	128

For the advertisements without a swear word, a one-way of variance showed there is no significant effect of Language of the advertisement on Product recall ($F(1, 135) = 3.771, p = .122$). The means and standard deviations for *Product recall* for advertisements without a swear word in function of *Language of the advertisement* are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Means and standard deviations for the Product recall for the advertisements without swear word in function of Language of the advertisement (0 = no recall, 4 = complete recall)

Language of the advertisement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
L1	3.15	1.13	65
L2	3.49	1.37	72

Total	3.33	1.26	137
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The data file was split by *Language of the advertisement*. For the advertisements in the L1, a one-way of variance showed there was no significant effect of *Swear word use* on *Product recall* ($F(1, 131) = 3.651, p = .118$). The means and standard deviations for *Product recall* for advertisements in the L1 in function of *Swear word use* are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Means and standard deviations for Product recall for the L1 advertisements in function of Swear word use (0 = no recall, 4 = complete recall)

Swear word use	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
With	3.49	1.04	68
Without	3.15	1.37	65
Total	3.32	1.22	133

For the advertisements in the L2, a one-way of variance showed there was no significant effect of *Swear word use* on *Product recall* ($F(1, 130) = 3.000, p = .162$). The means and standard deviations for *Product recall* for advertisements in the L2 in function of *Swear word use* are shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Means and standard deviations for Product recall for the L2 advertisements in function of Swear word use (0 = no recall, 4 = complete recall)

Swear word use	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
With	3.18	1.34	60
Without	3.49	1.13	72
Total	3.35	1.24	132

4. Conclusion and discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of swear words as a tool of shock advertising and to test whether there were any differences in emotional resonance for advertisements that were in the individual's L1 (Dutch or German) and L2 (English).

The results of studying the effects on consumers' responses towards advertisements including swear words in their mother tongue or their foreign language showed that there is a significant effect of swear word use in advertising on the emotional response. The emotional response was significantly higher for advertisements without swear words than for the advertisements with swear words. However, no significant effects were found of swear word use on attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product, purchase intention, brand recall and, product recall. Neither any significant effects were found of language of the advertisement on attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product, purchase intention, emotional response, brand recall and, product recall. Also, no interaction effect was found between language of the advertisement and swear word use.

Interestingly, findings of the present study suggest that the use of swear words in advertising leads to a significant lower emotional response. However, this is in contrast with the findings of research mentioned in Mortimer (2007, p. 1594) which proved that the use of swear words in advertising are one of the most important reasons for an advertisement to be perceived as offensive. Also, the finding of the present study is in contrast with what one would expect considering that norm violation is one of the most important aspects of shock advertising and thus, the use of swear words (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchandra, 2003, p. 269). One would expect that the violation of a norm would lead to a higher emotional response. Furthermore, Brown and Schau (2001) claimed that forms of shock advertising effectively grab one's attention, which seems less likely if the use of swear words leads to a lower emotional response.

The present study did not find a significant effect of language of the advertisement on the emotional response. This is in contrast with the findings of a study by Deweale (2004)

that claimed that the emotional resonance for mother tongue language is significantly higher than for a foreign language.

The present study did also not find a significant effect of swear word use on the attitude towards the advertisement. However, this is in contrast with Baker and Broadus' findings in 2014, which stated that the use of swear words in advertising leads to a more positive attitude towards the advertisement. Also, the findings of the present study are in contrast with Mortimer (2007, p. 1594) who reported that the use of swear words in advertising leads to a more negative attitude towards the advertisement.

Also, the present study did not find a significant effect of language of the advertisement on the attitude towards the product. This is in contrast with Hornikx and Van Meurs (2020) who reported that the most important reasons for using a foreign language in advertising are attracting attention, evoking the country of origin related to the used foreign language, evoking a sense of internationalism, modernity and prestige and, evoke belongingness.

The present study did also not find a significant relation between gender and how the use of swear words in the advertisements was perceived. However, this is in contrast with the findings of a study discussed in Mortimer (2007, p. 1594) which claimed that women perceived the advertisements with swear words way more negatively than men.

4.1 Limitations and recommendations

This study has potential limitations. One limitation of the present study regarding the selection of participants was that the Dutch and German participants were seen as one group. However, it is likely that also differences can be found within this group. Even though Hofstede (1984) claimed that in general Dutch and German people share many aspects regarding their culture and therefore, share the same norms and values, there also exist many differences among both nationalities which might cause differences within the group of L1 speakers in the present study. Therefore, future research could also investigate whether there exist any significant differences between the effects of shock advertising on the Dutch and German participants. Also, for future research, it could be interesting to

expand the group sample to other countries as well. According to Hofstede (1984), for example, the Spanish culture differs significantly from the Dutch culture. Therefore, they do not share the same norms and values, which makes it more likely that the reaction of Spaniards on shock advertising will differ significantly from the Dutch. Also, religion could be taken into account in the selection of participants for further research. Presumably, participants who are followers of a religion will have a different attitude towards swearing.

A second limitation was that in the present research only a diminutive percentage of the participants indicated that they had learned English after puberty. In 2004, Deweale stated that individuals tend to have a stronger emotional resonance to languages learned at an early stage of life than to languages learned after puberty, which seem to have a weaker emotional hold on the individuals. However, in the present study it could not be tested whether there indeed was a difference in emotional response for participants who had learned English at an early age or after puberty, because of the distribution of age at which the participants had acquired their English proficiency skills. Thence, for further research, more participants who learned English after puberty have to be included to check on the differences in effects on their emotional response.

Regarding the advertisements, a third limitation of the present research was that the swear word asshole (*klootzak*, *Arschloch*) includes a loss in translation on behalf of its form, which is obviously different in all three languages, and that the swear word belongs to the same category of word types as idiot. Even though, the semantics and impact of this swear word are the same, this loss in translation on behalf of its form might have had an influence on the results. That this swear word belongs to the same word category as another included swear word, was also a limitation because linguistically it would have been more interesting to compare for effects between the swear words of different categories of word types as well. Therefore, for further research, it might be better to find a third swear word that does not only have the same meaning and impact in all three languages, but also has a similar form and belongs to a different word type category. Another recommendation for further research is to include filler advertisements in the questionnaire. Including filler advertisements enlarges the time between the exposure to the material and the recall questions and also reduces the possibility that participants in the condition with swear word advertisements guess the aim of the experiment. Also, future research could investigate

whether there are any significant differences in how the various advertisements are perceived and what causes these differences.

A fourth limitation was that in the present study, participants were asked about their opinion on general attitudes towards the advertisement. However, in 2007, Mortimer claimed that swear words were used in advertising to generate surprise, to create humour, to emphasize, to show intimacy/trust, to reinforce brand personality and, to shock the audience. This means, that asking for specified attitudes towards the advertisements probably had given a more meaningful insight than asking for the participants' general attitude towards the advertisement. Therefore, for further research, it might be interesting to ask the participants' about the expected attitudes towards swear word use in advertising. In this case, for example, that would mean asking whether the advertisement was humorous, surprised them or showed trust.

A fifth limitation of the present study was that this study asked the participants about their opinion on the products without being specific. Hence, it was not clear whether this attitude towards the product was their opinion on the product in general or their opinion on the specific product shown. Therefore, for further research, it might be best to ask the participants on their opinion towards the products before showing the advertisements first. By asking the same question again after the exposure to the advertisements in a slightly different way, it can be tested whether the advertisement had an either negative or positive influence on their attitude towards the product.

According to the findings of the present study, advertisers are recommended to not use any swear words in their advertisements in order to evoke an higher emotional response on their audience. On behalf of the language of the advertisements, no recommendations based on the findings of the present study can be given to advertisers.

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6. Appendix I

Gum advertisements

Version 1. Dutch advertisement without swear word use



Version 2. Dutch advertisement with swear word use



Version 3. English advertisement without swear word use published in the Netherlands



Version 4. English advertisement with swear word use published in the Netherlands



Version 5. German advertisement without swear word use



Version 6. German advertisement with swear word use



Version 7. English advertisement without swear word use published in Germany



Version 8. English advertisement with swear word use published in Germany



Coffee beans advertisements

Version 1. Dutch advertisement without swear word use



Version 2. Dutch advertisement with swear word use



Version 3. English advertisement without swear word use published in the Netherlands



Version 4. English advertisement with swear word use published in the Netherlands



Version 5. German advertisement without swear word use



Version 6. German advertisement with swear word use



Version 7. English advertisement without swear word use published in Germany



Version 8. English advertisement with swear word use published in Germany



Beer advertisements

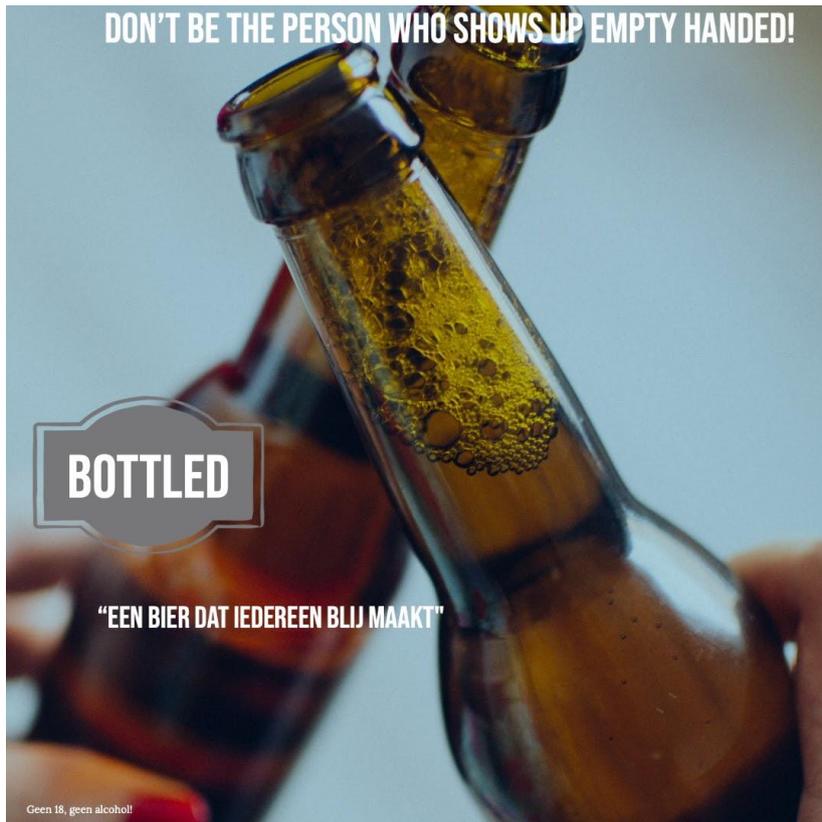
Version 1. Dutch advertisement without swear word use



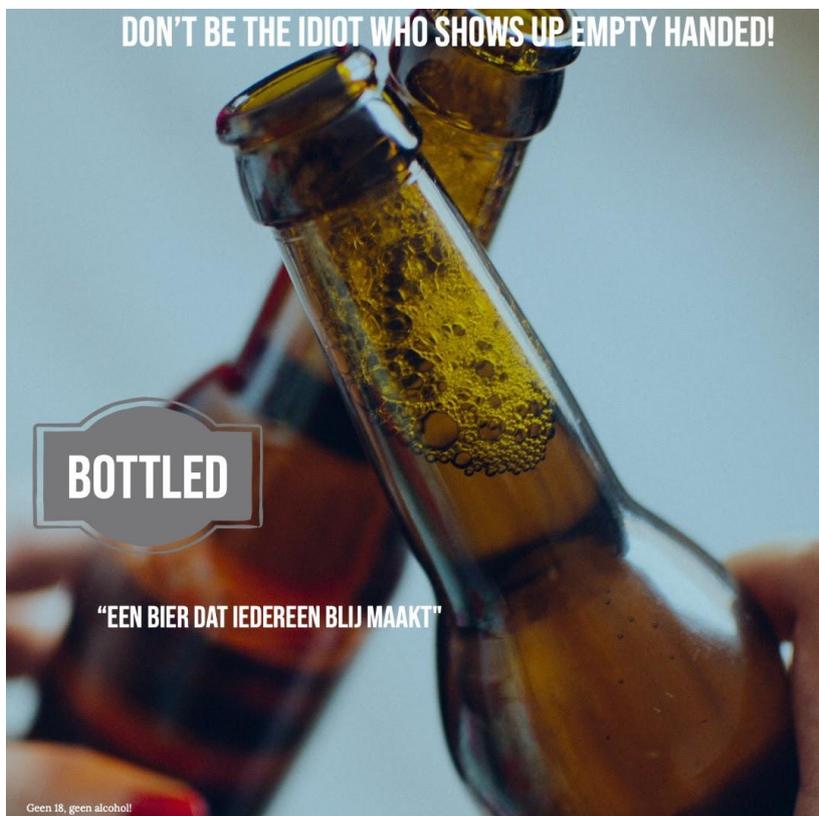
Version 2. Dutch advertisement with swear word use



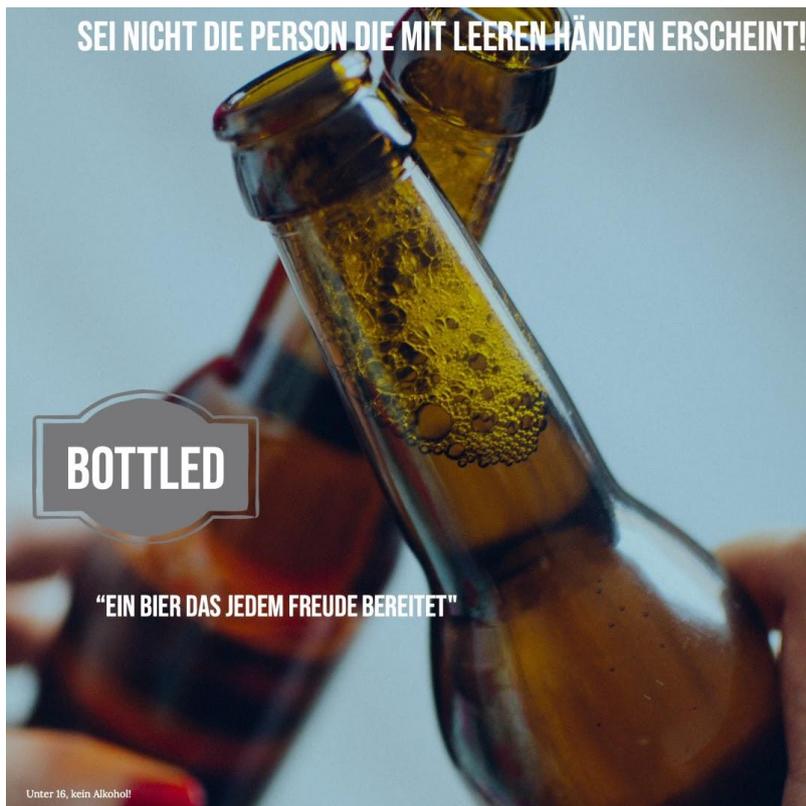
Version 3. English advertisement without swear word use published in the Netherlands



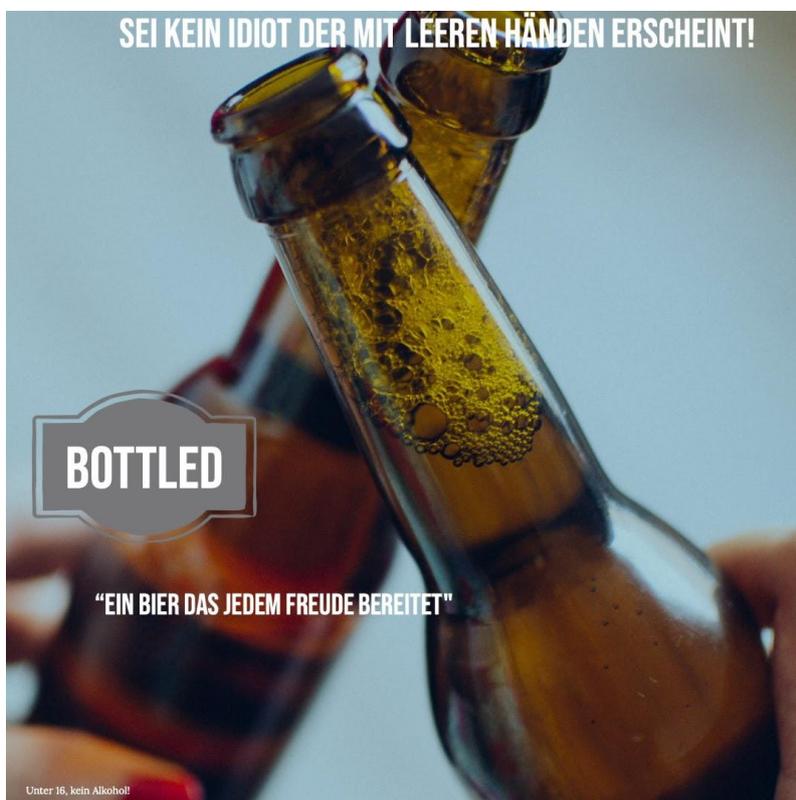
Version 4. English advertisement with swear word use published in the Netherlands



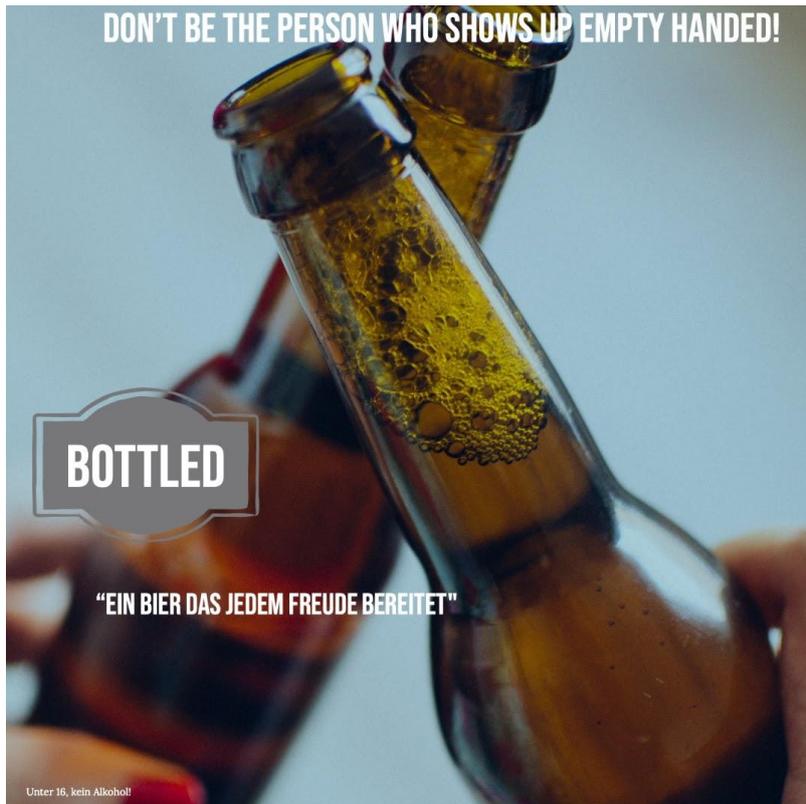
Version 5. German advertisement without swear word use



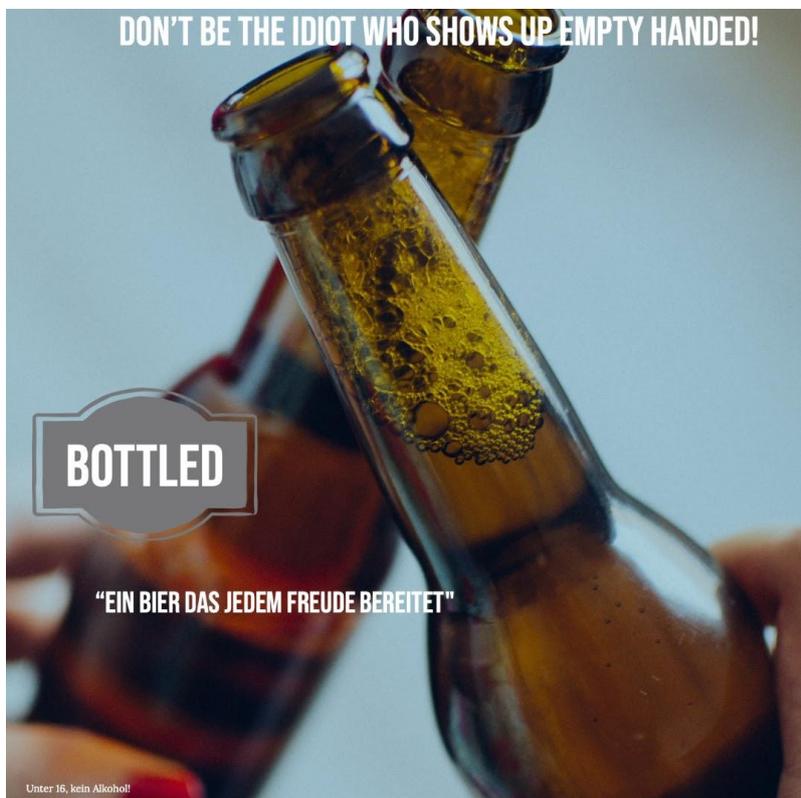
Version 6. German advertisement with swear word use



Version 7. English advertisement without swear word use published in Germany



Version 8. English advertisement with swear word use published in Germany



7. Appendix II

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 **two parts**: First, you will see three different advertisements and we would like you to answer a couple of questions about these advertisements. Finally, we will ask you a couple of questions about yourself.

Clicking on the '**I Agree**' button below you indicate that:

- You have read the above information
- You agree to participate voluntarily
- 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 need more information on this study, please contact xxxxxxx

I have read the information above and agree with the conditions.

- I agree
- I disagree

Part I

The following eight questions will ask you to indicate your opinion about this chewing gum / coffee beans / beer advertisement that will be published in The Netherlands / Germany next month.

“Advertisement”

Q1. Please read the following statement carefully and indicate your opinion.

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

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

Q2. Please read the following statement carefully and indicate your opinion.

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

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

Q3. Please read the following statement carefully and indicate your opinion.

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

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

Q4. Please read the following statement carefully and indicate your opinion.

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

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

Part II

Q1. Please indicate your mother tongue.

- Dutch
- German
- Other

Q2. Please indicate your age.

—

Q3. Please fill in the gender you associate yourself with.

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

Q4. What is the highest level of education you have completed or are currently attending?

- Primary education
- Secondary education
- Vocational training
- Bachelor's Degree

- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- No finished education

Q5. At what age did you learn English?

- 0 – 12 years old
- 12 – 18 years old
- 18 + years old

Q6. Please indicate how you would assess your German / Dutch for the following skills

- Speaking
- Writing
- Reading
- Listening

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

Q7. Please indicate how you would assess your English for the following skills

- Speaking
- Writing
- Reading
- Listening

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

Q8. How often do you swear?

- I swear...

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

Q9. Please indicate your opinion on the statement below.

- In general, I find the use of swear words...

→ 7-point Likert scale anchored in *Absolutely inappropriate – Absolutely appropriate*

Q10. Please indicate which brands you remember from the three advertisements you just saw.

Q11. Also, do you remember which three products were featured?

Q12. What do you think the aim of this study is?
