

CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE EFFECTS ON THE PERCEPTION OF SOURCE HONESTY AND FORCEFULNESS IN ADVERTISING: A COMPARISON OF HONG KONG CHINESE BILINGUALS AND ANGLO CANADIANS

Roy Toffoli, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
Michel Laroche, Concordia University, Canada

ABSTRACT

The first objective of this research was to examine how Hong Kong Chinese (HKC) and Anglo Canadians differ in their perception of the honesty and forcefulness of a message source in an informational advertisement. Another aim was to examine the reaction of bilingual HKC subjects to an advertisement and questionnaire administered in the second language as well as the native language. A number of studies point to the Chinese as being more sensitive to a message source and to assertive and argumentative sales "pitches" than North Americans. This should translate into a more negative perception of the honesty of the source as well as a greater perception of forcefulness in the ad for the HKC, in contrast to their Anglo-Canadian counterparts. On the issue of language effects for bilingual HKC subjects, some research points to an accommodation effect, with HKC exposed to the English language treatment responding more like English subjects than HKC exposed to the Chinese instrument (Ralston, Cunniff, and Gustafson, 1995). Other work (Grosjean, 1992) would imply that response to advertising copy and cues would be influenced by cognitive structures developed while learning both languages. Thus, a "hybrid" perceptual pattern very different from both cultures would be expected.

An experiment was carried out with subjects drawn from colleges and universities in both Canada and Hong Kong. The dependent variables captured were source honesty, perception of forcefulness of the ad, judgment of the principal attribute of the pen, and attitudes toward the brand and the advertisement. Cognitive responses were also captured. Results confirmed that Anglo Ss perceived significantly greater source honesty and less forcefulness in the ad compared to the Chinese exposed to the native language treatment. Results on the attitude toward the primary attribute, and the brand, though not significant, were in the anticipated direction. It was also found that the Ss exposed to the Chinese language treatment had significantly lower cognitive response favorability scores for the cognitions representing simple repetition of message and product information compared to their Anglo counterparts. This is believed to be a manifestation of the greater perception of "hard sell" of the former.

Findings on the comparison of the English language and Chinese language treatments for the HKC subjects revealed that the former perceived significantly greater honesty on the part of the source, significantly less perception of forcefulness on the part of the source, and developed significantly greater attitudes toward the primary attribute and attitude toward the brand than the latter, similar to their Anglo counterparts. As for attitude toward the ad, no significant difference was found, although the English treatment had a higher attitude than the Chinese treatment. None of the differences in the cognitive response favorability scores proved to be significant. These results are consistent with the previous research on cultural accommodation, namely, that subjects who were exposed to experimental instruments in their second language adopted the values and cognitive processes of the culture associated with that language. It would appear that the effect due to the adoption of Western attitudes and values as Chinese learned their second language, coupled with the greater meaning and structure ratings perceived by them in English words and syntax may be more important than the "hybrid" effect due to the cognitive and linguistic processes arising from learning two languages.

REFERENCES

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