Original Article

The varying influence of spokesperson's accent in communication effectiveness: A comparative study in two different regions of Mexico

Received (in revised form): 9th March 2011

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ABSTRACT This study examines the communication effectiveness of a spokesperson with an American-Spanish Accent (ASA) and a Mexican-Spanish Accent (MSA) in two different locations of Mexico. These cities were selected based on their high or low exposure of the US culture (that is, high exposure is assumed if the city was close to the US border and/or coastal city). We used Tajfel's Theory to hypothesize the relationship between spokesperson's accent and consumers' purchase intentions in that location. The theory posits that the most influential spokesperson will be the person who speaks with the standard accent for a given region but what is considered standard accent changes based on cultural influences of different groups. To test the hypothesized relationships, we used a sample of 1058 student subjects who observed an advertisement with different accented spokespersons. Consistent with the theory, the results of this study indicate that consumers that are less exposed to the US culture (inland Mexico cities) had more favorable views about the spokesperson that had an MSA than a spokesperson with an ASA. Moreover, consumers in the cities close to the US border and coastal areas had equally favorable views for both accents. The implications for the marketers are discussed.

Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing (2011) 19, 55–65. doi:10.1057/jt.2011.5;
published online 18 April 2011

Keywords: spokesperson accent; effectiveness; cultural influences; Mexican locations

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a universal tool of communication for all people across countries and cultures.¹

Moreover, language is considered an important component of cultures. Communities and cultures develop and use shared verbal and non-verbal communications within a country or geographical regions (that is, dialects and accents).² Different dialects and accents provide clues to the receiver a variety of information about the characteristics of a speaker. Since communities are perceived to vary in status,³ a spokesperson's accent can influence perceptions of the speaker's social status, education and credibility.⁴

Marketing literature provides limited number of studies that have investigated the effects of accent on salesperson persuasiveness in the United States,⁵ in Central America⁶ and in Mexico.⁷ More recently, researchers⁸ investigated consumer responses to English accent variations and concluded that the accent effects were strong enough to offset the country of origin, gender and product involvement effects in advertisements. These studies provide some insights about why standard accents are perceived to be more credible than non-standard accents. Some of these studies recommended that marketers should use spokespersons with standard accents to improve communication effectiveness.⁹ In practice, some promotional messages are purposely delivered in non-standard accents, because they are frequently considered to be effective in capturing respondents' attention. However, other promotional messages may inadvertently use non-standard/spoken accents that may not be appropriate for the intended target audiences (for example, Spanish language telemarketing to Mexican-American using spokespersons with Puerto Rican accents). In other words, what might be considered standard in certain parts of a given country may not be considered standard in other parts because of the influence of neighboring countries. A more precise understanding of how the spoken accent influences spokesperson communication effectiveness would be essential for both marketing theory and practice.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain more understanding about the relationship between accent and communication effectiveness by exploring the impact of a spokesperson's accent on consumer purchase intentions in

different locations of a country. To this end, we have selected three Mexican cities that had different proximity to the US border and differing levels of exposure to the US culture. Using Tajfel's social categorization,¹ social identity and social comparison theory (CIC), the objective of the study is to investigate the impact of spokesperson accent on consumer purchase intentions on different locations with different language standards. More specifically, this study investigates the role of American-Spanish Accent (ASA) and a Mexican-Spanish Accent (MSA) on spokesperson communication effectiveness in two different locations of Mexico.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spokesperson accent

Researchers⁵ emphasized the role of spokesperson accent in marketing communication and argued that the issue has been overlooked in the current marketing literature (although studies investigating the role of accent has received more attention in the social psychology and linguistics literature). For example, a number of researchers have noted that speech style, including accents appear to have a powerful impact on the ratings of respondents over a broad range of characteristics associated with the presenter.^{10–12} Garcia¹³ emphasized that individuals usually categorize others based on speech characteristics (for example, accent and speech style) in different contexts. Using the theory of social categorization and conceptualization of inter-group relations and psychological distinctiveness,¹⁴ Garcia¹³ presented empirical evidence that the speech characteristics of a person played a fundamental role in how he or she was evaluated by others. Accordingly, he concluded that speech characteristics should be considered just as significant factor as other evaluation parameters such as race, age, social class, profession and the way of dressing.

The varying influence of a person's accent is also contextual and depends on factors such as setting and cultural characteristics of the audience. Edwards,¹⁵ for instance, reported that a number of investigations in English-speaking countries (for example, the United States, Canada, Britain

and Australia) found that presenters with a standard accent or dialect are perceived by a native audience to exhibit more traits of (a) competence, as indicated by intelligence, confidence, ambition and industriousness, and (b) status/prestige, as indicated by professionalism. On the other hand, presenters with non-standard accents are perceived as having more traits of (a) personal integrity, as indicated by sincerity, reliability and generosity, and (b) social attractiveness, as indicated by friendliness and warmth.^{10,16} Berechree and Ball¹⁷ noted in their study that greater competence and social attractiveness ratings are displayed for the Cultivated Australian accent (British pronunciation) by host country nationals as opposed to the two other dialect varieties – Broad Australian accent and General Australian accent. In addition, Carranza and Ryan¹⁸ found comparable results in an investigation of responses to Spanish and English presenters. In their study, English was viewed more favorably than Spanish on the dimensions of integrity, attractiveness and status by natives of England. Additional support for such findings has been noted in investigations of speech patterns in Canada¹⁹ for indigenous versus foreign-accented presenters.^{20–21}

In another study, researchers⁶ reported that a sales pitch presented in Guatemalan Spanish to a Guatemalan audience evokes more favorable judgments on all measured dimensions than the same sales pitch with a foreign-accented Spanish. Furthermore, Tsalikis *et al*⁵ found that an American spokesperson with a standard American-English accent has an advantage over a Greek-American spokesperson with a Greek-English accent when addressing an English-speaking audience in the United States. In addition, these authors concluded that there was no significant interaction between respondents' exposure to an accent and the evaluation of the accent. Many of the respondents in this study had parents who were recent immigrants from Cuba; thus, Spanish-English accents were quite common in their households. It was expected that this would result in empathy and perhaps preference for the non-standard English accented spokesperson by these respondents. Consequently, the results of the study are important because they indicate that

acculturation may have taken place along the language pronunciation dimension regardless of the family background. This observation is consistent with the findings of Callan *et al*²¹ that a progressive minority group members may prefer the accent of the dominant majority, especially in the contexts where advantages associated with the majority is salient (that is, accent characteristic associated with status, education, social class and success).

Other researchers²² argued that an ASA is expected to have a more favorable impact than an MSA on border city residents, who speak the Tex-Mex code switching language (speakers change from one language to another in the midst of their conversations perhaps because the individual wishes to express solidarity with a particular social group and establish rapport between the speaker and the listener). Mexican-Americans who predominantly speak either English or Spanish rate both Spanish and English accents higher than non-standard versions of either language. On the other hand, Mexican-Americans who speak the code-switching English-Spanish mixture known as Tex-Mex, prefer either Tex-Mex, or Spanish-accented English to either standard Mexican Spanish or standard American English alone. More recently, researchers⁸ studied consumer responses to different variations of English accents in Singapore. They concluded that the Standard English accent outperformed the Singaporean English accent (Singlish) in terms of spokesperson credibility, attitude toward the ads/brand and purchase intentions but they also reported that Singaporean accent outperformed in terms of attention to the advertisement.

Audience characteristics

Putrevu's Selectivity Hypothesis²³ states that gender differences in information processing occur because men have a greater tendency to react to the overall message theme (that is, selective processors) and women have a greater tendency to engage in detailed elaboration of the message (that is, comprehensive processors). In addition, Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran²⁴ reported that female information processing is elaborate and imaginative rather than the single concept focus

that characterizes male thought. Furthermore, Entwisle and Garvey²⁵ reported that women use a more 'imagery-laced' and creative interpretation of information cues. In addition, men and women were reported by Fischer and Arnold,²⁶ to give different weights to salient attributes and information sources²⁷ when they evaluate products. Mochis' Social Role Theory²⁸ suggests that women have a greater tendency to accept marketplace-related communications from social agents; however men tend to discount the information. This tendency enables women to consider external world information, rather than the men primary focus on more isolated concepts and removing everything that does not focus on the issue.²⁹ Consequently, men appear to focus on the information about the product and women would take into consideration their knowledge of the endorser in their evaluation of the product.

Edwards and LaFerle³⁰ noted that congruency theory suggests that models in an advertisement are often more effective when the characteristics of the model are perceived as similar to the consumer. In addition, Kelman³¹ reported that individuals are more likely to adopt a message when the sender is similar to themselves. In addition, McGuire³² reported that source familiarity, similarity and perceived attractiveness positively impacts message effectiveness. Consequently, it is expected that congruency effects in relation to gender may also be present.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

On the basis of socialization, culture, values and so on, individuals categorize others along such dimensions as speech, style, accent and race.^{1,33–35} These attributes appear to have consequential impact on the ratings assigned to presenters.^{36–37}

Tajfel's social categorization,¹ social identity and social comparison theory (CIC) is an inter-group evaluation-based model that explains how an individual uses the group to determine his/her self-concept. According to the theory, the individual first categorizes the social environment into separate social categories, such as race or accent. As the individual has an association or

relationship with some of these social categories, this subset defines the individual. That is, the individual has a social identification with those particular social categories. Thus, the second stage to Tajfel's theory postulates that some function of the individual's set of social identifications creates the individual's social identity. Social categorizations, therefore, define an individual's social identity and part of the individual's self-concept through a systematic category selection process. Tajfel³⁸ reported that social identity is '...that part of the individual self-concept which derives from [the person's knowledge] of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership' (p. 225). The third stage of the theory, social comparison, suggests that a positive social identity for the individual is obtained by the value and emotional importance of the individual's group standing relative to other reference groups along some salient dimensions. Commins and Lockwood³⁹ stated that: *The social group is seen to function as a provider of positive social identity for its members through comparing itself with, and distinguishing itself from, other comparison groups along salient dimensions which have a clear value differential* (pp. 281–282). Hence, advertisers who use presenters with a positive identity along the salient dimensions of the group with which the target consumers identify will be expected to have a positive influence on members of the target market, with other elements held constant. Using Tajfel's theory, we hypothesize that a spokesperson with an ASA will have a more favorable influence on consumer purchase intentions in a Mexican border city than spokespersons with an MSA.

Hypothesis 1: A spokesperson with an ASA will have a more positive impact on the purchase intentions of consumers living in coastal cities and cities close to the US border than a spokesperson with an MSA.

However, Tajfel's theory would implicate that an MSA spokesperson would be expected to have a more favorable impact on consumers purchase intentions in cities with less exposure to

US culture or inland cities. Accordingly, we hypothesize that

Hypothesis 2: A spokesperson with an MSA will have a more positive impact on consumer purchase intentions in cities with less exposure to US culture and inland cities than a spokesperson with an ASA.

METHODOLOGY

Although the focus of this study is to examine the role of spokesperson accent in border versus inland cities of Mexico, we also incorporated the possible effects of gender (spokesperson and audience gender) in our investigation. There are numerous studies in the marketing literature that report the differential impact that spokesperson's gender has on the audience. In addition, there are a number of investigations that report the difference in the receptivity between men and women on the basis the gender of the spokesperson. As a result, the gender (both spokesperson and audience) is introduced as another factor in considering the impact of an accent on a border versus inland cities. Therefore, a $2 \times 3 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial experimental design was used with spokesperson accent (ASA and MSA), Mexican cities (Reynosa, Monterrey and Guadalajara), spokesperson gender (men versus women) and audience gender (men versus women) as the between-subject factors.

Pretest of accent

There were 31 (15 men and 16 women) respondents who were used to determine an accent recognition factor. Four accents (from two men and two women) were used to determine whether the students could distinguish an American-English-Spanish-accented speaker from a Mexican-Spanish-accented speaker. A simple frequency of recognition measure was used for the analysis. The recognition factor in each case was more than 95 per cent. As a result, two American-English-Spanish-accented speakers (one male participant, one female participant) and two Mexican-Spanish-accented speakers (one male participant, one female participant) were selected for the study. The Mexican-Spanish speaker

accents used for Mexican respondents were presented by native Spanish speakers from Monterrey and Reynosa, Mexico, whereas the American Spanish English accent was presented by an Anglo-American who spoke Spanish and were located in the Southwestern part of the United States.

Data collection procedures

The product/service used in the study was automobile insurance. This service was chosen because both students and non-students use it. At the taping session, a hypothetical promotional pitch for the company was prepared with an ASA and an MSA. Two American men and two American women, and two Mexican men and two Mexican women were used for authenticity. Each person read aloud the message several times, and the most natural renditions were chosen by the researcher. 'Naturalness' was considered in terms of message flow and realistic sales pitch. Each of the recordings lasted approximately 55 seconds. Four commercials were produced by using different spokesperson genders and two different Spanish accents (two levels of salesperson gender and two levels of accents). To eliminate any variation in the audience evaluation caused by changes in voice quality, the same two accents (MSA and ASA) were presented by using voice-overs for the spokespersons. This procedure was feasible because the commercials showed the spokesperson sitting at a desk and thinking about the sales pitch he or she would make to potential customers. The spokesperson was not moving his or her lips; rather, the thoughts were 'heard' by the audience. Although we could have used audio only as the sales pitch instead of a video with voice-over as we were not manipulating any other characteristics of the spokesperson, we decided that video of a salesperson along with a voice-over would create a more realistic perception of a salesperson and improve sensory richness. Audio was consistent with visual information but controlled all other voice characteristics to isolate the spokesperson's accent. Furthermore, the data-collection procedure used in this study was a part of a larger study whose validity has been well-established in the literature.^{5,7,9,50}

A total of 1058 respondents were exposed to the tapes in a university classroom setting. All 1058 Mexican students viewed the tapes in their classrooms in Reynosa, Monterrey and Guadalajara. Convenience sampling was used as the data collection procedure in the study. Although the convenience sampling has its disadvantages, because of the nature of this study (for example, product applicable to students, location decision and test of accents) along with challenges of collecting a true random sample in international studies influenced our decision to use convenience samples. The students were told that they would view or hear a spokesperson presenting a message, and that they would be asked to give their impressions of the spokesperson. As the service or product used for the study was automobile insurance, the students were required by law to have the insurance. As a result, automobile insurance was not considered a problem in comparing the students. The students were run in groups of about 25. The use of a student sample and the nature of convenience sampling are usually criticized because of its potential to influence the representativeness of the sample. However, we argue that the use of a student sample in this study is appropriate because this segment of the population is in essence an ideal target market for automobile insurance. Moreover, as this study was designed to investigate the hypothesized relationship between two variables using Tajfel's theory, the use of student subjects is usually an appropriate sample. In addition, it is a requirement to have automobile insurance to drive in Mexico.

Questionnaire

After viewing the tapes, respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of the following measurement areas: a three-item semantic differential scale measuring respondent purchase intentions and several demographic/classification questions.

Measurement of terms

The purchase intention construct was the dependent variable used to measure the effect of the independent variables. The following operational

definitions of the constructs and variables were used for this investigation: (1) spokespersons' accents – a panel of 31 students was used to determine the recognizability of the MSA and ASA, (2) purchase intentions – operationalized by using the average of three-item semantic differential scale: inquiring about purchasing, consider purchasing and actually purchased.^{40–41}

Reliability of the measures

The Cronbach alpha for purchase intentions was 0.83. According to Nunnally,⁴² the value of reliability measure was strong enough to support the use of an average purchase intentions measure in the instrument.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

An analysis of the demographic characteristics shows that the sample used in the study consisted of 1058 students (100 per cent), of whom 512 (48.4 per cent) were men and 540 (51.0 per cent) were women, and six were not accounted for because of missing data. Of the respondents, 91.7 per cent were between the age group 18–24 years, 4.8 per cent were between the age group 25–29 years, 1.6 per cent was between the age group 30–44 years, 0.1 per cent was between the age group of 45–54 years, and the remaining 0.4 per cent was more than 55 years old, and 1.5 per cent was not accounted for because of missing data. All respondents were bilingual and their primary language was Spanish. Majority of the respondents listed their ethnic background as Mexicans (95.4 per cent).

Hypotheses testing

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the hypotheses. The two levels of spokesperson accents were used in the study with three levels for the cities audiences. Tajfel¹ theory is based on the desire of the individual to be a part or to identify with the group that sets the standard for a given location. Consequently, respondents are expected to be most influenced by spokespersons who are members of the group that is considered as 'standard'. The hypothesis evaluated the impact of a native versus non-native spokesperson's accent on the purchase intentions of consumers

from their host cities (that is, Reynosa, Monterrey and Guadalajara). The results of the ANOVA indicated that the two-way interaction term between spokesperson accent and city was significant, $F=7.99$, $P<0.0004$ (Table 1).

Table 2 shows that an analysis of the means indicates that a spokesperson with an ASA did not have a more favorable influence on a border Mexican city consumer purchase intention than a spokesperson with an MSA (P -value was insignificant for Reynosa). However, as hypothesized, a spokesperson with an ASA had a more positive impact on purchase intentions in Guadalajara than a spokesperson with an MSA (4.19 versus 3.89, $P<0.0016$). As Guadalajara is a Costal Mexican City, an ASA is more likely to

be heard with enough frequencies on a personal basis because of heavy US tourism and in the form of broadcast media on an international basis, which might have elevated it to be a 'standard accent' level, along with the Tex-Mex, code switching logic.²² These findings are consistent with Tajfel for an ASA spokesperson to have a more positive impact on purchase intentions than an MSA spokesperson (supporting the first hypothesis) when the accent is considered as the standard accent. Similarly, Table 2 shows that a spokesperson with an MSA had more positive impact on consumer purchase intentions in Monterrey, which may be considered an inland city and with a lesser degree of exposure to the US culture.

Further analyses of the two-way interaction means indicate that a female spokesperson had a more positive impact on purchase intentions of both men and women than a male spokesperson (mean 4.03 versus 3.71, $P<0.02$; 4.16 versus 3.98, $P<0.05$). The three-way interaction terms of spokesperson accent, city and the gender of the audience is significant, $F=3.86$, $P<0.02$.

An analysis of the means indicated that a spokesperson with an MSA had a more favorable impact on women in Reynosa than on men (4.26 versus 3.83, $P<0.01$). In addition, a spokesperson with an ASA had a more favorable impact on women in Guadalajara than an MSA on women in Guadalajara (4.21 versus 3.83, $P<0.0002$). Moreover, the strength of the purchase intentions was higher when the audience gender characteristics matched the gender of the spokesperson in all cities tested. The relationship is illustrated more clearly in Figure 1. This finding supports the argument made by Kelman³¹ that individuals are more likely to adopt a message when the sender is similar to themselves and McGuire's³² conclusion on the source familiarity, similarity and perceived attractiveness positively impacts message effectiveness.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SPOKESPERSON EFFECTIVENESS

The results of this study indicate that standard language pronunciation may be advantageous in

Table 1: ANOVA results

Source	Degrees of freedom	F-value	Significance
Accent	1	0.12	0.7342
City	2	1.13	0.3235
SS	1	0.07	0.7904
SA	1	5.36	0.0209
Accent $\times$ city	2	7.99	0.0004***
Accent $\times$ SS	1	6.53	0.0108**
Accent $\times$ AS	1	0.00	0.9897
City $\times$ SS	2	5.10	0.0063**
City $\times$ SA	2	0.58	0.5608
SS $\times$ SA	1	8.98	0.0028**
Accent $\times$ city $\times$ SS	2	2.30	0.1003
Accent $\times$ city $\times$ SA	2	3.86	0.0215**
Accent $\times$ SS $\times$ SA	1	3.27	0.0707
City $\times$ SS $\times$ SA	2	0.83	0.4345
Accent $\times$ city $\times$ SS $\times$ SA	2	0.68	0.5067

Purchase intentions mean=3.00, ***significant at $P<0.0001$, **significant at $P<0.01$, *significant at $P<0.05$.

Notes: Accent – Spokesperson accent (American-Spanish or Mexican-Spanish); City – Mexican Cities (Reynosa, Monterrey and Guadalajara); SS – Sex of Spokesperson; SA – Sex of Audience.

Table 2: Mean purchase intentions^a

City	American-Spanish-accent	Mexican-Spanish-accent	Significance
More exposure to US	—	—	—
Culture cities	—	—	—
• Reynosa	3.99	4.04	NS
• Guadalajara	4.19	3.89	0.0016
Less exposure to US	—	—	—
Culture cities	—	—	—
• Monterrey	3.77	4.08	0.0013

^aA seven-point Semantic Differentials scale where 1 indicates 'Would NOT purchase' and 7 indicates 'Would purchase'.

Figure 1: Mean purchase intention levels for treatments.

inland Mexican cities rather than a border or coastal Mexican cities. That is, our findings suggest that a Mexican-Spanish-accented spokesperson will have a more positive influence on consumer purchase intentions in the inland Mexican cities (such as Monterrey) than the coastal cities (such as Guadalajara) and near US border cities (such as Reynosa). On the other hand, as predicted, an ASA spokesperson had a more positive influence on consumer purchase intentions than a spokesperson with an MSA in Guadalajara. We argue that Guadalajara contains a substantial number of people who could identify with an ASA spokesperson. In addition, the coastal border location of the city could have had a positive impact on respondent openness to a foreign accented spokesperson in general. Consequently, the accent should be considered as an additional attribute that the persuasion researchers are to consider when assessing the effectiveness of the spokesperson.^{6,43}

There are numerous studies in the marketing literature, which report that first impressions of spokespersons because of personal factors such as race are significant. Consequently, these factors deserve special consideration for spokesperson training.^{44–45} The present investigation identified the accent as another significant personal factor in first impressions. A well-planned language-training program can address the issue brought forth in this investigation. An immediate measure would be to concentrate on voice volume, hesitation and enunciations. That is, rather than trying to

change the accent in the short run (which potentially could cause more harm), good speech habits need to be practiced.⁴⁶ In addition, through the use of videodisc interactive expert systems, spokespersons with accents can be taught how to effectively respond to negative initial impressions by strengthening their interpersonal skills. In addition, carefully designed role-play training is consistent with the behavior-modeling approach. Finally, learning through observing trainer demonstrations of these skills is another viable approach.⁴⁷ By the use of some of these methods and understanding the role of accent, spokespersons can develop a psychological balance between having a mind set to overcome negative first impressions and the self assurance necessary to properly manage the interaction needed to facilitate the exchange process.⁴⁸ As a result, by anticipating the importance of accent-driven first impressions on ultimate effectiveness, promotional managers can employ the appropriate training tools and personnel (for example, trainers whom themselves have an accent) to overcome communication challenges.

This study used a relatively large sample to test the hypotheses related to the role of the salesperson accent in different locations. The study sample is collected from the Mexican cities of Reynosa, Monterrey and Guadalajara. In addition, the use of different spokespersons for the accents provides a basis to generalize the findings for Mexico. The experimental design that was used for the study tried to provide

internal validity. In addition, a variety of additional procedures tested the internal validity of the instrument give further indications of the validity of the instrument. Cronbach alpha indicated a high degree of reliability for the items in the instrument. In addition, this instrument was developed earlier for a related study by DeShields⁴⁹ in which exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis give additional insights into the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs used in the study.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study show that there is a significant impact on the purchase intentions of Mexican consumers that can be attributed to the relationship between the spokesperson's accent and the city of the respondent. The results of the study partially support Tajfel's theory. Briefly, the theory states that spokespersons who are perceived as a part of the mainstream of society will have a more positive impact on the purchase intentions of consumers in that society than spokespersons who are not perceived as a part of the mainstream. The result of the study indicates that a spokesperson having an MSA has an advantage over a spokespersons speaking with an ASA in inland Mexican cities but not in a border or costal Mexican cities. This finding is consistent with the linguistic and social psychology literature, which noted that presenters speaking in the standard accent of the audience evoke more favorable judgments than presenters speaking a non-standard accent. In addition, this finding is significant because it suggests some influence of the border and coastal regions on the language pronunciation dimension. That is, an acceptable language standard became inclusive of the accented version of the host country language along its border or costal area.

Our study results also indicated that the gender of the spokesperson had an impact on purchase intentions when interacted with spokesperson accent and the location. In general, we found that the impact was most significant when the gender of the spokesperson matched the gender of the audience. This finding is consistent with the literature on source similarity. Therefore,

when the gender similarity is considered along with accent of the spokesperson and location choice, higher purchase intentions were observed.

The findings of this study may look like contracting the findings of Tsalikis *et al*⁶ study, which reported that a sales pitch presented in Guatemalan Spanish to a Guatemalan audience in Guatemala evokes more favorable judgments on all measured dimensions than the same sales pitch in foreign-accented Spanish. We note that some of the effects (that is, closeness to border) we studied in this investigation were not considered in the Guatemalan study hence might have gone unnoticed. Moreover, respondents might have had different levels of identification with the country for the locations where the accents were selected in these studies. In general, the United States has a disproportionate influence on the Mexican culture in comparison to any other foreign Spanish accented country on Guatemala.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Projections of the results should be based on additional research because of the characteristics of the sample. Although the current results may be generalized in Mexico, cautions should be used to generalize these results to other countries. The use of the presenter only in one country may limit the generalizability of the results to other countries. In addition, there are other factors that could account for the variance of the responses to presenters, which were not explicitly taken into account in the survey (for example, race of the presenter). The study did not consider the relationship between the respondents' exposure to an accent and their ratings of the accent. This question will be addressed in a future investigation. In addition, the marketing and social psychology literature has indicated that an individual's ethnic identity has an important impact on such measures as purchase intentions, consumption patterns and perceived spokesperson credibility.^{50–53} Furthermore, ethnicity is clearly not a homogenous property within designated groups. Williams and Qualls⁵⁴ noted a dichotomy with middle-class black consumers in the United States, specifically; they reported that black consumers who measured high on an

intensity-of-ethnic-identity scale and exhibit behavior representative of the black cultural script may in some situations exhibit behavior representative of the Anglo, mainstream culture in other situations. Finally, the use of a student sample and the nature of convenience sampling may be considered an important limitation of the study because of its potential to influence the representativeness of the sample. However, we argue that the use of a student sample in this study is appropriate as this segment of the population is in essence an ideal target market for automobile insurance and car insurance is mandated by for all drivers. In addition, Verlegh and Steenkamp⁵⁵ in a meta-analysis concluded that there were no differences between studies using student and non-student samples. We argue that some of the characteristics of students may even make them more relevant for studies testing hypothesized relationships in business communication. For instance, students considered to have higher than average cognitive skills and may have a higher level of compliance to the instructions given during data collection. These characteristics are important in research where possible influences of factors need to be considered, evaluated and mental activity is reported. Furthermore, the data for the study were collected in different parts of Mexico, and the large sample size used in the study are expected to reduce the potential negative effects of the convenience sample and representativeness of the data. Therefore, we believe that the results are valid and students are potential future clients for this service.

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