Evaluations of Bilingual Product Descriptions on Boxes

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This study investigates the influence of bilingual product packaging descriptions on product evaluation. In an experimental study, the evaluation of a product with English-only package is compared to the evaluation of the same product in a bilingual package. The evaluation of the product in bilingual package was significantly lower. Ethnocentrism and prejudice are investigated as possible explanations for differential evaluations of products with English-only versus bilingual product descriptions. The effect of method of information processing is manipulated. Both ethnocentrism and prejudice affect evaluations of a product in bilingual package in peripheral processing but not in a central processing condition.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The desire to make English the official language of the U.S. seems to have grown from concerns about immigration. On one side of the argument are those who see America as a “melting pot.” They argue that one must speak English to be a “Good American.” Opponents of making America an English-only country feel that America is not a melting pot, but a “stew” where hyphenated Americans of diverse backgrounds can live together in harmony. Perhaps one reason for this debate is that more and more marketers are targeting the Hispanic market and are using Spanish to reach them. This desire to reach Hispanics is not surprising since the Hispanic market represents over $600 billion in buying power.

This paper asks three questions. First, do typical consumers, i.e., consumers who speak only English, respond differently to bilingual versus English-only packaging? Second, do prejudice and ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987) affect the typical consumer’s responses to bilingual packaging? Finally, does the type of information processing task, i.e., central or peripheral information processing, affect the typical consumer’s responses to products in bilingual packaging?

Prejudice: According to Crandall, Eshelman, and O’Brien (2002), prejudice is a negative evaluation of a group or individual on the basis of group membership. We investigate prejudice as one variable that explains the difference in evaluations of products in English-only versus bilingual packages by typical consumers.

Ethnocentrism: Ethnocentrism is anchored in the belief that one’s own group (the in-group) is superior to other groups (out-groups) (Adorno et al., 1950). We argue that typical consumers who are highly ethnocentric will form negative beliefs about a product based on the presence of Spanish on the package. In turn, these negative beliefs will result in lower product evaluations.

Information Processing: The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) distinguishes between two routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. The basic premise of this study is that a product in a package with an English-only product description will be evaluated more favorably than the same product in a package with a bilingual product description.

Summary of Hypotheses
H1: Subjects will evaluate a product with an English-only product description on the box more favorably than one with a bilingual product description on the box.

H2a and H2b are based on the preceding discussion of ethnocentrism and prejudice.

H2a: Subjects who are highly ethnocentric will evaluate a product in a bilingual package less favorably than the same product in an English-only package.

H2b: Subjects who have less ethnocentrism will not differ significantly in their evaluations of a product in an English-only versus a bilingual package.

H3a.: Subjects who are highly prejudiced will evaluate a product in a bilingual package less favorably than the same product in an English-only package.

H3b: Subjects who have less prejudice will not differ significantly in their evaluation of a product in an English-only package versus a bilingual package.

When there is no opportunity to process information, the use of extrinsic cues results in an evaluation that is more heuristic in nature.

H4a: When presented with a bilingual product description, consumers who are under time pressure and in a low-justification condition will resort to peripheral information processing resulting in a lower evaluation of the product in the bilingual package versus the same product in an English-only package.

H4b: When presented with a bilingual product description, consumers who are not under time pressure and who are in a high-justification condition will resort to central information processing.

Under conditions of deeper processing, prejudice or ethnocentrism do not affect evaluations.

H5: When asked to evaluate a product in deeper processing condition, subjects who are highly prejudiced, will evaluate the product in the same way as those who have less prejudice regardless of the language on the package.

H6: When asked to evaluate a product in a deeper processing condition, subjects who are highly ethnocentric, will evaluate the product no differently than those who have less ethnocentrism regardless of the language on the package.

Earlier research leads one to expect prejudice scores for women to be lower than those for men, we also expect women to evaluate products in a bilingual package more favorably than men.

H7: Women will exhibit less prejudice than men.

H8: Women will not significantly differ in their evaluation of a product in an English-only package versus the same product in a bilingual package, while men will have a lower evaluation of a product in a bilingual package versus the same product in an English-only package.

Methodology: In this study, we used a 2 (English-only or bilingual language description) X 2 (central or peripheral information processing) X 2 (high or low prejudice/ethnocentrism score) experimental design. Analysis of data collected from 240 undergraduate students at a major public university shows support for all hypotheses except H8 (Women will have no difference in product evaluations while men will). This finding is adequately explained with support from prior research.

This is the first study to examine the effect of ethnocentrism and prejudice on the evaluation of a product in a bilingual package. The findings suggest that managers should think carefully before deciding to use Spanish on their packages because our study suggests that typical consumers rate a product in a bilingual package less favorably than a product in an English-only package.
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References