Beyond Seeing Mcdonald’S Fiesta Menu: the Role of Accent in Brand Sincerity of Ethnic Products and Brands

Marina Puzakova, Oregon State University, USA
Hyokjin Kwak, Drexel University, USA
Monique Bell, Drexel University, USA

We find that Hispanic accent’s prosodic features (e.g., intonation) are perceived as more sincere and, thus, induce higher brand sincerity. These effects are moderated by brand and product ethnicity. When brand and product ethnicity are incongruent, Hispanic accent induces greater brand sincerity for Hispanic products, yet not for Hispanic brands.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1012660/volumes/v40/NA-40

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Beyond Seeing McDonald’s Fiesta Menu: 
The Role of Accent in Brand Sincerity of Ethnic Products and Brands

Marina Puzakova, Oregon State University, USA 
Hyokjin Kwak, Drexel University, USA 
Monique Bell, Drexel University, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The ascent of Hispanic-Americans as the largest U.S. minority has encouraged firms to start utilizing ethnic brand crossovers (e.g., McDonald’s “Fiesta” menu). One effective way of engaging ethnic groups has been the use of ethnic accent in firms’ branding messages (McDonald’s use of Hispanic-accented spokespersons to tout its “Fiesta” menu). Indeed, accent induces enduring personality impressions (e.g., sincerity; Bresnahan et al. 2002; DeShields, Kara, and Kaynak 1996). Despite the powerful impact of accent in communicating personalities, scholarly research investigating the role of accent in brand communications has been limited. Understanding whether and under what circumstances a spokesperson’s accent is likely to affect brand sincerity can provide marketers of domestic and ethnic brands with another marketing tool to strategically manage their brands’ personalities.

Relying on a prosodic theory of accents, we propose that Hispanic accent’s specific prosodic features (i.e., the acoustic language features such as pitch, rhythm, and intonation; Ramus et al. 2000) are perceived as more sincere (Ray 1986). Given that a spokesperson’s accent is evaluated in part by the prosodic characteristics of the speaker’s native language and that those prosodic features uniquely influence sincerity evaluations, our first hypothesis is that an advertisement using a Hispanic accent will be perceived as more sincere than a brand advertised using an American (standard) accent.

In Study 1, we used a 30-second radio advertisement for a fictitious brand of chocolate that included a verbal message discussing influence sincerity evaluations, our first hypothesis is that an advertisement using a Hispanic accent will be perceived as more sincere than a brand advertised using an American (standard) accent. As predicted, the results of a 2 (gender of the spokesperson) x 2 (spokesperson’s accent: Hispanic vs. American) between-subject ANOVA (n = 60) revealed that Hispanic accent leads to higher brand sincerity perceptions. Consistent with previous literature, brand sincerity also predicted consumers’ attitudes toward the brand.

Furthermore, while it seems sensible to employ a Hispanic-accented speaker to evoke brand sincerity impressions for an ethnic brand (e.g., Chipotle Mexican Grill), might there be greater advantages of using an American-accented speaker to enhance brand sincerity perceptions of a brand with American roots, however, in a traditionally ethnic product category (e.g., McDonalds’ burritos)? We define brand ethnicity as consumers’ perceptions that the brand originated from a specific ethnic culture. In accord with the dynamic constructivist theory of culture (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012), people develop representations of what trait characteristics are associated with certain cultures. For American consumers, the associations of warmth and sincerity of Hispanic cultures are highly accessible and consensually shared (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008). Such group stereotypes are transferred to products, brands, and people originating from the cultures (Chattalas, Kramer, and Takada 2008). As prosodic features of Hispanic accent create greater perceptions of brand sincerity (Study 1), and as Hispanic “brand ethnicity” alone induces sincerity perceptions, our second hypothesis is that a match or mismatch between the spokesperson’s accent and brand ethnicity is likely to play a significant role in either boosting or inhibiting brand sincerity inferences. Hypothesis 2 was tested in Study 2 (n = 60). We recorded 30-second radio commercials featuring a fictitious American brand, Joe’s Burgers, and a fictitious Hispanic brand, Carlos’ Tacos (both identified though a pretest as ethnically salient), using either American- or Hispanic-accented spokespersons. Respondents rated brand sincerity (α = .88), brand attitude (α = .96), strength of their American identity (covariate was insignificant), and the ad’s realism (no differences across conditions). No main effects of accent or brand ethnicity were detected. However, a significant interaction effect between brand ethnicity and accent emerged. That is, a spokesperson’s Hispanic (American) accent created enhanced perceptions of brand sincerity for ethnic (domestic) brands.

Will the moderation effect of brand ethnicity hold when brand ethnicity is incongruent with product ethnicity? Product ethnicity associations are highly accessible, deeply embedded in consumers’ interpretations of brands, are not easily affected by local branding efforts (Eckhardt 2005), and may become an important factor in evaluations of an unfamiliar brand (Nebenzahl and Secunda 1993). In addition, consumers show low levels of brand origin recognition for frequently purchased goods because this information is deemed non-diagnostic for purchasing decisions (Samiee, Shimp, and Sharma 2005). Thus, as product ethnicity is more likely to dominate brand ethnicity perceptions, our third hypothesis is that product ethnicity-accent congruity is likely to induce stronger effect on brand sincerity than brand ethnicity-accent congruity.

In Study 3 (n = 94), 30-second radio commercials for an American (Hispanic) product category and Hispanic (American) brand name, Carlos’ Burgers (Joe’s Tacos) were used. A significant interaction effect between incongruent product-brand ethnicity and accent emerged. Planned contrasts showed that in the commercial about the American (Hispanic) product with a Hispanic (American) brand name, an American (Hispanic)-accented spokesperson induced higher brand sincerity than when a spokesperson had a Hispanic (American) accent. In support of hypothesis 3, these results demonstrate that a congruity of an accent with a product ethnicity, versus brand ethnicity, drives brand sincerity perceptions.

Our research contributes to the literature by demonstrating how the use of Hispanic versus American accent affects the way consumers perceive brand sincerity. In resonance with source congruity theory, we find that a match between an accent and a product ethnicity boosts brand sincerity perceptions. Finally, this research deepens our understanding of the interaction effect of brand and product ethnicities that both determine more effective selection of a spokesperson accent. Overall, our findings have significant implications for brand managers as they consider using accented spokespersons to engender sincerity perceptions for brands that cross ethnic boundaries.

REFERENCES


