The Role of Linguistic Proficiency and Ethnicity in Acceptance of Multilingual Advertisement

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Selecting the suitable languages as a mediator of communication between companies and consumers is always one of the concerns for marketer to develop advertisements in multicultural and specially the multi-ethnical markets. This study by testing a model tried to find the relationship between mother tongue proficiency, English proficiency, ethnicity of consumers and acceptance of advertisements in mother tongue. The result from the Malaysian samples showed that level of proficiency in mother tongue, ethnicity and perception toward advertisements in mother tongue have positive relationships with acceptance of advertisements in mother tongue. These results might help marketers to find the most suitable language to communicate with their customers.

INTRODUCTION

Communication channel plays a substantial role between communicator and audiences. However, if the perceptions of the sender and receiver about the content of the message are not similar, the receiver may not interpret the massage correctly and accurately (Gong, 2011; Hinnenkamp, 2009; Mauranen, 2006; Noghondari & Foong, 2009). Language as a fundamental tool in societies has a significant impact on making a sustainable and meaningful communication occur between communicators and audiences. Regarding Holland & Gentry (1999), similarities between two persons help them to accept the desire of each other and increase their positive feelings. Marketing researches have supported that using mother tongue in mainstream commercial advertisement can promote building relationships between companies and their customers (Backhaus, Muhlfeld, & Van Doorn, 2001; Higgins & May, 2001; Koslow, Shamdasani, & Touchstone, 1994).

In an effort to manage international activities to respond rapidly to the fast changing demands of the different markets, linguistic barriers can affect cross-cultural knowledge sharing, dialogues, relationships and networking (Lauring, 2007). In fact, in many multicultural societies, language is not just a communication mediator; it also can play the role as the key identity and social acceptance by peers and ethnic group members (Burton, 2008; Laroche, Kirpalani, Pons, & Zhou, 2001; Piller, 2007).

The essence of marketing within ethnic groups, and the influence of cultural and ethnic factors on marketing strategy have been investigated in much literature (Backhaus, Büschken, & Voeth, 2001; Cui, 2001; Leo, Bennett, & Härtel, 2005; Melewar & Vemmervik, 2004; Pires & Stanton, 2000; Pires, Stanton, & Ostenfeld, 2006). However, despite lots of efforts in this field, still there are few accurate researchers that can help managers take the best strategy in multiethnic/multicultural market(Koslow et al., 1994; Rosenbaum & Montoya, 2007). This gap is more significant in countries (like Malaysia) where

most of the ethnic identifications among people have been done based on the language of their ethnic group in official and non-official communications (Craig & Douglas, 2006).

According to government's census, the latest Malaysia population is over 28 million (July 2010). This population consists of Malay 53.3%, Chinese 26.0%, Indigenous 11%, Indian 7.7%, others 1.2% (World-Factbook, 2012). Chinese as a minority group in Malaysia have strong relationships among themselves and use their mother tongue as a part of their identity keys (Tan 2001; Hirschman, 1985). They usually introduce themselves in society by using the symbols of their culture. Chinese usually show higher respect when communicators use their cultural symbols in their communication (Ward & Hewstone, 1985).

As in Malaysia**,** language is one of the most important identity key factors for ethnic groups through the country (Hui, Laroche , & Kim 1998; Ward & Hewstone, 1985); therefore, problems related to mutual communication may be more intensified. Thus, the primary objective of the study is to indicate the impact of personal traits and characteristics on acceptance of advertisements by customers in Malaysia as a multicultural/multiethnic society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is a result of Howard Giles's studies (1960's-1970's). According to this theory, people use different types of literature and styles in dialogue regarding their social class, gender, race, and age (Burton & Klemm; Heffernan, 2008; Holland & Gentry, 1999). For instance, when we talk to the elderly we often adapt the way we interact, including our speech patterns and behaviors to show more respect (McCann & Giles, 2006). Marketers can maintain positive self-identity, make approval and become more attached to consumers by improving the effectiveness of communication. Therefore, applying CAT in marketing can help marketers to understand the reasons of negative/positive reactions of customers toward a particular advertisement.

Influence of culture and ethnicity on shopping behavior, selecting media and after purchase behavior have been investigated in many studies (Craig & Douglas, 2006; Gevorgyan & Manucharova, 2009; Jamal, 2003; Palumbo & Teich, 2004). Regarding to Koslow et al., (1994) audiences are more likely to get respectful perception when an advertisement is created in mother tongue. This positive perception can help remove the cultural barriers and increase the level of understanding between two sides.

Holland and Gentry (1999) have figured out that consumers who have strong link with their original culture show more positive reaction to advertisements equipped with high level of their ethnic cultures' content. A good example for implementing accommodation theory in marketing is the use of ethnic music, language, idols, salesperson, national flag, art, and religious symbols (Holland & Gentry, 1999). However, people with high level of acculturation with other cultures (e.g., language) show less positive and sometimes negative reaction toward the advertisement contains such content (Koslow et al., 1994; Leong, 2008; Steenkamp, 2001). The following hypotheses have been developed to test the relationships between language related factors and acceptance of advertisement in mother tongue by Malaysian consumers.

Hypothesis: There is a linear relationship between mother tongue proficiency, perception toward advertisements in mother tongue, ethnicity, perception toward advertisements in English, English proficiency, and acceptance of advertisements in mother tongue.

$$Y=b_0+b_1X_1+b_2X_2+b_3X_3+b_4X_4+ b_5X_5+ \varepsilon$$

Where:
Y: Acceptance of Advertisements in Mother Tongue
X_1: Mother Tongue Proficiency
X_2: Perception toward Advertisements in Mother Tongue
X_3: Ethnicity
X_4: Perception toward Advertisements in English

X_5: English Proficiency
ε; error

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

To fulfill the purpose of this study, data has been collected through the convenience sampling method. The targets of this study were the Malay and Chinese residents in Malaysia. Among different ethnic groups in Malaysia, despite of having dominate economical power in society, Chinese have most the powerful ethnic group after Malay which is the dominate culture based on rules and regulation as well as their population (Cyril de Run, 2007; Jesudason, 1997).

The instrument for data collection of this study was a questionnaire; the first part of the questionnaire covered questions about participants' shopping behavior, their perception toward the language of advertisements and level of acceptance of the multi-lingual advertisement. Respondents have been asked to rate their opinions according to a five points Likert-scale, where number five is an indicator of "very important" or "strongly agree" and number one displays "not important at all" or "strongly disagree". At second part, participants was asked to rate their mother tongue and English proficiency for four language skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening).Third part has covered general information and demographic information about respondents such as; gender, age, race, marital status, education level, and income.

Since not all participants can understand English well, to reduce the language bias (Malhotra, Agarwal, & Peterson, 1996) a questionnaire was designed in three languages (Malay, Chinese, and English). Back translation method was employed to translate the original questionnaire from English to Chinese and Malay. First, one translator of each language was asked to translate the original text to the targeted languages (Mandarin and Malay). At second step another two independent translators were asked translate back to the text to English. Then both versions were sent to some people with a native language of target languages and asked to judge the translated text to check the accuracy of translations (Malhotra et al., 1996).

To measure the acceptance of multilingual advertisements by customers, an advertisement sample has been designed. The advertisement was developed in three languages (Malay/English and Chinese). To make participants more engaged to the advertisement content, honey was selected as product to develop the advertisements. Since Malaysian consumers generally do not have enough and correct information about honey, they are usually eager to know more about the benefit and method of consumption of this product. This method makes participants have higher commitment in research as they also like to read some new information about honey in detail, which need high levels of language understanding (Koslow et al., 1994; Luna & Gupta, 2001). After some modification and improvement, 30 questionnaires of each language distributed among public participants to pre-test and to collect their general idea about the questionnaires.

Developed advertisements were attached to the final draft of the questionnaires (English and Malay/Chinese) and participants were asked to read the advertisements first and after that answer the questions. Data has been collected from different province of Malaysia. Questionnaires distributed and collected based on self-administration method. Participants were free to select the language of questionnaires based on their preference.

Data Analysis and Finding

Thetotal number of 250 questionnaires was distributed. Questionnaires were distributed in shopping malls, sports complex, train stations and airports in three different cities of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabaru, and Kuantan). 32 questionnaires were excluded from data analysis due to incomplete answers for several questions. Overall 218 (almost 87%) questionnaires were suitable to analysis.

Collected data indicate that 63.8% of participants are Malay, and 36.6% are Chinese. 60.1% of participants selected Malay as their mother tongue, 37.2% Chinese and 2.8% English. Moreover,

participants 55.3% selected Malay as major language of communication, 27.1% Chinese and 17.6% English (See table 1).

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Race	Percent	Mother tongue	Percent	Language of communication	Percent	Gender	Percent
Chinese	36.6	**Chinese**	37.2	**Chinese**	27.1	**Male**	48.2
Malay	63.8	**Malay**	60.1	**Malay**	55.3	**Female**	51.8
		English	2.8	**English**	17.6		

Test of Validity and Reliability

To examine the factors that can influence the acceptance of multilingual advertisements the questionnaire has been developed by 17 questions. Theses 17 questions were expected to reflect perception toward advertisements in mother tongue (3 items), perception toward advertisements in English (4 items), individual's ethnicity (6 items) and acceptance of multilingual advertisements (4 items). Factor analyses have been conducted for each variable to examine the developed questionnaire. The results of the tests (See Table 2) showed that the measurements have acceptable level of validity since all of the items have factor meet the minimum requirement of loading equal .6 (Hair, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2011). Then the measures were tested for their reliability. Cronbach's Alpha for the factors isolated as "Perception toward advertisement in mother tongue" was 0.814, 0.829 for "Perception toward advertisement in English" .799, for "ethnicity" and 0.795 for "Acceptance of Advertisements in Mother Tongue". A Cronbach's Alpha of 0.7 and over is considered desirable for the internal consistency of a scale (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Fornell & Larcker's (1981) approach was used to measure average variance extracted (AVE), and construct reliability (CR) and the number of variables that were used for each construct. All factors have an excellent AVE as they are all above 0.5. In addition, composite reliability (CR) of all variables are higher than .7 which is satisfactory (Hair et al., 2006).

To test the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable of this study regression analysis was tested. Table 3 shows that the model is fit (p-value=.001, F=36.626). Moreover, the adjusted R square is .452 which shows that 45% of the variance of dependent variable can be explained by the current independent variables; perception toward advertisements in mother tongue, perception toward advertisements in English, and individual's ethnicity.

The results of regression analysis show that three out of five independent variables have significant impact on acceptance of multi lingual advertisement contains the participants' mother tongue. Analyses support that perception toward advertisements in mother tongue, proficiency in mother tongue and the ethnicity of individual have significant and direct relation with the level of acceptance of advertisements which provide information for audience in English and their mother tongue. However, the result could not support the influence of proficiency in English and perception toward advertisements in English on acceptance of multi lingual advertisements.

TABLE 2
TEST OF VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY; COMPONENT MATRIX[(a)]

Variable	Component		KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity p-value	Reliability Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Perception toward advertisement in mother tongue	Item1	.950	.69	.001	0.814	.944	.848
	Item 2	.901					
	Item 3	.911					
Perception toward advertisement in English	Item1	.897	.724	.001	0.829	.901	.969
	Item 2	.873					
	Item 3	.853					
	Item 4	.700					
Acceptance of Advertisements in Mother Tongue	Item1	.743	.788	.001	.795	.884	.660
	Item 2	.943					
	Item 3	.882					
	Item 4	.649					
Ethnicity • Commitment • Tradition	Item1	.851	.785	.001	0.799	.867	.53
	Item 2	.815					
	Item 3	.669					
	Item 4	.809					
	Item5	.648					
	Item 6	.510					

TABLE 3
MODEL SUMMARY

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	84.548	5	16.910	36.626	.000[a]
Residual	97.414	211	.462		
Total	181.961	216			
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.682[a]	.465	.452	.67947		

TABLE 4
COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	p-value	Result
(Constant)		4.798	.000	
English level proficiency	.057	.992	.323	Rejected
Proficiency of mother tongue	.194	2.156	.032	Accepted
Perception toward advertisement in mother tongue	.290	3.150	.002	Accepted
Perception toward advertisements in English	.050	.433	.665	Rejected
Ethnicity	.200	2.201	.029	Accepted

a. Dependent Variable: Acceptance of Multilingual Advertisements

DISCUSSION

The findings of current study could support the previous findings that level of understanding for a particular language can influence the level of acceptance of the advertisements in that language. Moreover, the current results are consistent with the previous finding that ethnicity can influence the behavior of consumer especially in acceptance or rejection of particular advertisements.

The findings of this study indicated that some individual characteristics influence the behavior of consumers toward the advertisements with English and their mother tongue content. As results showed, level of proficiency in mother tongue, perception toward advertisements in mother tongue and ethnicity of audience have direct and significant influence of a person's acceptance of multilingual advertisements. Therefore, marketers of companies and advertisement agencies should consider these factors in the Malaysia market. For example, when ethnical identity issues are very high, developing the multilingual advertisements can give the better opportunity to communicate with consumers in market.

As with any research work, this study has some limitations which open up avenues for further research. The study has limited the empirical testing of the hypothesized relationship as the samples might not be representative of the entire population of Malaysia. Therefore, further research should consider this weakness and expand the sampling strategy to more cities of Malaysia where the level of general English proficiency is lower than big cities.

Moreover, the adjusted R square of the current result is .45, which indicated that 45% of phenomenon can be explained by purposed Model. Thus, further, studies should consider other variables that can have relationship with acceptance of advertisement in mother tongue, such as the language that audiences communicate in daily routine communications, level of education and other demographic factors.

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