

## The Effects of Code-Switched Advertisements on Hispanic Consumers' Attitudes and Purchase Intentions

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### Abstract

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As the Hispanic population of the United States has dramatically changed over the past decades from a minority population to the minority-majority population, so have the attitudes of these consumers. Because there is little guidance from marketing literature as to how firms can and should address the preferred language medium of this rapidly growing demographic, this study seeks to provide initial guidance for firms seeking to find an appropriate language medium to frame their marketing message. The results of the study find that the degree of Hispanicness is significant in the viewers' interpretation of Spanish and English advertisements, while it is non-significant for Spanglish advertisements. This shows that Hispanicness does play a factor in the overall evaluation of Spanish and English advertisements, being positive for Spanish language ads and negative for English language ads, while formal code-switching language was found not to be significant. Findings and managerial implications are discussed..

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**Keywords:** Advertising; Code-switching; Hispanicness; Purchase intentions, Attitude towards the Ad

### Introduction

As the United States experiences swift and intense changes to the ethnic and racial makeup of its population, the need for firms to effectively manage their advertising messages is more important than ever. In particular, the growth of the Hispanic population has outpaced all others, even surpassing African Americans to become the largest minority group in the U.S. (El Nasser 2003). Projections indicate that this phenomenon is not a passing trend; rather, the growth of the Hispanic population in the U.S. is projected to outpace all other ethnic groups, and, by 2050, is projected to account for one in three residents (Caesar 2011).

Hispanics have demonstrated that they are different from other ethnic groups when it comes to purchasing patterns in the marketplace, exhibiting up to a 43% higher level of name brand buying than the general population (Nielsen 2012). This has implications for the consumer packaged goods market, as well as other areas of consumer purchasing. As the purchasing power of Hispanics has grown from \$978 billion in 2009, to \$1.38 billion in 2015, or more than 10% of overall U.S. consumer purchasing power (Berger 2015), the need to further investigate Hispanic consumer response holds the potential to aid firms in shaping their marketing messages to stay competitive in the marketplace.

The term Hispanic has been broadly to refer to a people or cultures with a historical link to Spain. It is primarily used to designate ethnicity as opposed to race. In the U.S., the growth of this segment has traditionally been attributed to immigration of individuals from countries such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba with additional immigrants coming from Central and South America.

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This trend has slowed as the growth of the U.S. Hispanic population has moved from immigration to births (Caesar 2011), showing that there is a shift in the traditional makeup of the Hispanic population from immigrants to residents.

As Hispanics in the top 10 states with the largest Hispanic populations speak Spanish in their home some or most of the time (<http://factfinder2.census.gov>), or 21 out of 23 million individuals, children often attend schools where the primary language is English, but, at home, the language of preference is Spanish. This leads to the use of both languages within and without the home, resulting in a code-switching between the two languages within a conversation into what is termed "Spanglish" or the use of the Spanish and English languages within the same sentence or conversation.

## **2. Hispanicness and Code-switching**

### *2.1 Hispanicness*

From a methodological standpoint, Villarreal and Peterson (2009) perceived that Hispanic ethnicity has traditionally been treated as a dichotomous variable, similar to demographic variables such as gender or marital status where the respondent can only respond with one of two answers (i.e. yes/no, married/unmarried). Because the treatment of Hispanic ethnicity as a dichotomous variable is '...a theoretical, simplistic, and ignores the fact that being a Hispanic does not reflect the degree to which Hispanic ethnicity or "Hispanicness" is possessed (Villarreal and Peterson 2009)', better understanding of the role of the degree of Hispanicness of individuals as it relates to evaluation of language use is more important than ever.

Individuals may possess Hispanic roots, i.e. parents were born in Mexico, Cuba, Latin, or South America, but they don't fully reflect the traditional dichotomous variable of being a Hispanic, or they may not embrace self-labeling as a Hispanic. For example, there are many celebrities who identify themselves as either being Hispanic, or having a Hispanic heritage, but, doesn't speak Spanish, or have only learned Spanish later in life (i.e. Christina Aguilera, Eva Longoria, and Jessica Alba). Therefore, even though one may possess Hispanic roots, they either don't fully reflect or embrace being a Hispanic. This is also reflected in the fact that as each successive generation of self-identified Hispanics become acculturated at the intersection between their parent's Hispanic cultural identification and their own cultural identification, which is often a mix between their parent's culture and the culture within which they live, the degree with which they identify as being Hispanic could potentially fade.

In previous marketing literature, there has been little research that has treated Hispanic ethnicity as anything other than a dichotomous variable. According to Villarreal and Peterson (2009), the studies which have attempted to move beyond the treatment of this variable as dichotomous have primarily treated ethnic self-identity in terms of weak or strong Hispanic identification (e.g., Deshpande and Stayman 1994; Donthu and Cherian 1994; Webster 1992). Valencia (1985) defined Hispanicness in terms of ethnicity and acculturation, which is attributed to the presence or absence of cultural behaviors. Since some members of the Hispanic community appear to be "more Hispanic" than others, this study adopts Valencia's (1985) definition of Hispanicness as "...the rate or degree of acculturation of Hispanic consumers living in this country (United States)."

Therefore, the current study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ1: Does the degree of Hispanicness affect viewer's purchase intentions to different language message mediums (Spanish, English, or Spanglish)?

### **2.2 Code-switching**

There has been a sharp rise in the use and application of code switching, or the alternating use of two or more languages in conversations (Auer 2013), in the United States. In particular, the use of Spanish and English in communities which possess a high level of Hispanic populations is becoming more common, and has spilled over to advertising and marketing messages as well. In marketing literature, the examination of bicultural and bilingual consumers has examined their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards advertising from looking at the effects from either their primary or secondary language (Kelly et al. 2010).

This neglects the issue of addressing a language that is the result of acculturation, and is a combination of a person's language of origin and current language, which has only been marginally addressed in the marketing literature by Kelly et al. (2010). They studies Mexican-American youths and their response to ads in English, Spanish, and Spanglish, finding that ads in Spanglish or English were both appropriate in reaching the multi-lingual Mexican-American youth.

Because many Hispanic individuals in the U.S. often use both languages, and sometimes use a third language, which is a combination of English and Spanish called Spanglish, it is important to know the effects of the use of this third type of language on viewers. Stavans (2000) defines Spanglish as a form of code switching between English and Spanish that is widely used among U.S. Hispanics. This is considered a hallmark of bicultural communication (Luna and Peracchio 2001). Hispanic youth in the U.S. have reached a level of acculturation whereby which they commonly speak the hybrid language of Spanglish (Maroney 1998). Because Hispanics have become the largest minority in the U.S., and because each successive generation has the potential to become more acculturated to the U.S., this study seeks to add to the literature by answering the research question listed above.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Ad construction**

In an effort to answer the research questions posed in this paper, three distinct advertisements were constructed to represent each different language mode to be tested, including English, Spanish, and Spanglish. As recommended by Hoffman and Hegarty (1983), each ad was translated into the opposite language and back to ensure that the advertisements relayed the same messages. The ads utilized a fictitious specialty item (automobile) for the advertisement.

#### **3.2 Survey**

The survey instrument was administered via a commercial online survey service to a non-student sample of residents in a town bordering the U.S. and Mexico, with residents coming from two border countries, the United States of America and the United Mexican States. The survey produced 237 surveys, and resulted in 173 usable surveys. The survey group had an average age of 26.7, and was 43% male and 57% female. Ninety-three percent (93%) of respondents self-identified as Hispanic or Latino.

In order to capture the concept of Hispanicness, a scale developed by Valencia (1985) was used. Six indicators were used to capture the concept of Hispanicness while reverse scoring was used for English language ability to ensure the directional consistency of the overall index. Lower scores in the Hispanicness scale indicate lower levels of acculturation to a culture other than the Hispanic culture, while higher levels indicate higher levels of acculturation to a culture other than the Hispanic culture.

In order to capture the purchase intentions of the survey respondents, a purchase intentions scale was used. The scale consisted of four questions and utilized five point Likert-like items used to measure the inclination of a consumer to buy the specified product under study. The scale was developed by Okechuku and Wang (1988), and latter modified by Stafford (1998).

A scale to measure attitude towards the ad was included to measure the general evaluative judgment of the advertisements used. It consists of several uni-polar items and is used to capture the respondent's attitude about the advertisements they were exposed to. The scale was developed by Burke and Edell (1986) and has a reported a reliability of 0.92 (n=184), and in testing for validity, Burke and Edell (1986) utilized factor analysis, and found virtually identical factors in each case. The scale used a five point Likert-like items to measure this concept.

### **4. Results**

Overall, the respondents rated all three ads, Spanish, English, and Spanglish as moderately believable. That is, on a scale from one to five, scores ranged from 2.14 to 3.27, showing that the respondents perceived the ads as relatively effective in forming an overall positive attitude toward the ad. Similar scores were achieved for the factors of interesting and convincing.

Respondents did find that ad language in Spanglish, or the code-switched advertisement, to be more informative and interesting than ads in Spanish and English only, while ads in Spanish were found to be more believable and convincing. The results of the multilevel regression analysis for believability, informative, interesting, and convincing are shown in Table 2. The variables listed both under the intercept and the advertising themes are between-subject, whereas the

**Table 1: Advertisement Evaluations by Ad Language**

Measure	Ad Language Spanish	English	Spanglish	All Ads Mean	SD
Believable	2.97	2.14	3.27	2.79	0.41
Informative	1.97	2.41	2.99	2.45	0.53
Interesting	2.21	2.27	2.33	2.27	0.11
Convincing	2.61	1.47	2.55	2.21	0.39

Advertising theme variables are within-subject. The between-subject variables listed under the intercept denote main effects while those listed under each advertising theme denote interaction terms.

**Table 2: Multilevel Model Results for Ad**

Construct	Spanish	English	Spanglish
Intercept	2.87**	1.79	2.37*
Hispanicness	0.17*	-0.11*	0.04
Attitude (Ad)	0.16*	-0.04	0.09*

*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.10*

Based upon the results in Table 2, the degree of Hispanicness is significant in the viewers' interpretation of Spanish and English advertisements, while it is non-significant for Spanglish advertisements. This shows that Hispanicness does play a factor in overall evaluation of Spanish and English advertisements, being positive for Spanish language ads and negative for English language ads, while in the case of this study; Hispanicness wasn't significant in the viewers' overall evaluation of the advertisement.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether the degree of Hispanicness affect the viewers' purchase intentions of English, Spanish, and Spanglish advertisements, the results can be found in Table 3. The results indicate that whichever language was used, whether English, Spanish, or Spanglish, none was significant in the viewers' purchase intentions. In addition to the answer to the primary research question, it was found that attitude towards the ad was significant for Spanish and Spanglish advertisements, while non-significant for English advertisements.

**Table 3: Multilevel Model Results for Ad Purchase Intentions**

Construct	Spanish	English	Spanglish
Intercept	2.92**	1.83	2.36*
Purchase Intentions	-0.03	0.01	-0.04

*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.10*

## 5. Implications

With a rapid shift in the Hispanic population in the United States, the importance of understanding how consumers communicate, and the preferred language medium is more important than ever. With an estimated 1 in 6 U.S. residents currently being Hispanic or of Hispanic origin, while it is estimated that by 2050 1 in 3 will be Hispanic or of Hispanic origin, the ability of marketers to understand the language and verbal cues that appeal to this demographic is vital for success in the U.S. The finding that Hispanicness is significant in the viewer's overall interpretation of Spanish and English advertisement is important because it shows the marketer that these are important demographic factors to consider in the construction of advertising and advertising campaigns, particularly for those products and services that are aimed towards a Hispanic population.

Further, the finding that Hispanicness is non-significant for Spanglish advertisements show that code-switching behavior may be useful in personal conversation, however, the use of this type of code-switching may be ineffective for advertising.

The finding that purchase intentions for viewers' was not significant for any language medium used in the advertisements was surprising. This could have some interesting implications for advertising to those in the Hispanic community. Varying the advertising message language doesn't appear to affect purchase intentions, so, the marketing medium language should be crafted according to the demographic area targeted. For example, in heavily Hispanic areas where there are higher levels of acculturation, perhaps the use of English would have a broader appeal, and could serve to target non-Hispanic individuals as well. For areas that have higher levels of Spanish speakers, the use of the Spanish-language advertising medium may be more beneficial to the advertising firm.

## 6. Limitations and Future Study

### 6.1 Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is the sample study used. Although 93% of the study group self-identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, the sample was taken from residents in a border community from two different countries, which may confound the assumption that those who speak Spanish and English are becoming more acculturated. The fact that the residents of border communities often hold close to the country of origin cultures could've confounded the results of the study. An additional limitation of this study is the use of a fictional specialty product (automobile) as a focal point of the advertisement.

### 6.2 Future Study

The trend of the U.S. population is moving toward a rapidly growing Hispanic population and a shrinking white, non-Hispanic population. As these changes occur, firms must carefully consider the future study of these factors in order to succeed in marketing and positioning of products and services. Also, further study must be done with a wider array of products and services. The product used in this study was fictitious; however, since Hispanics have been shown to possess a higher degree of brand loyalty than other ethnicities, it may be appropriate to study ads with products or services that have a high degree of loyalty among the U.S. Hispanic population. Finally, future studies must include Hispanic individuals located in different regions throughout the U.S. as different areas of the U.S. may show varying levels of acculturation in their Hispanic populations.

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