



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

IJRM

International Journal of Research in Marketing

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/ijresmar](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijresmar)

## Brand linguistics: A theory-driven framework for the study of language in branding☆



Marina Carnevale<sup>a,\*</sup>, David Luna<sup>b</sup>, Dawn Lerman<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Fordham University, United States

<sup>b</sup> Zicklin School of Business, Baruch College, CUNY, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

First received on November 24, 2015 and was under review for 6 months

Available online 30 January 2017

Senior Editor: Michael Haenlein

#### Keywords:

Brand linguistics  
Branding  
Language effects  
Psycholinguistics  
Sociolinguistics  
Semiotics

### ABSTRACT

A conceptual framework examines how language influences the way consumers interact with brands. Building on a review of two decades of research in the field, this framework draws on Schmitt's model of the Consumer Psychology of Brands (2012) and integrates the language-related disciplines of psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and semiotics to convey a novel, interdisciplinary perspective to brand-related managerial concerns. Through this framework, the authors define the domain of *brand linguistics*, the study of language effects on consumers in brand-related settings. Brand linguistics differs from the traditional disciplines associated with linguistics in that it focuses on the consumer as a unit of analysis and utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to theory. The proposed framework recognizes the implicit emergence of brand linguistics as a subdiscipline of consumer behavior, which is in turn a subdiscipline of marketing (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). While integrating extant knowledge on the subject, the authors generate new insights and research propositions, and provide concrete suggestions for both academics and practitioners. Moreover, they discuss how well-established findings within fundamental domains of branding might vary once an integrative approach is adopted.

© 2017 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Branding relies heavily on language, and consumers often come to know a brand through language—the language in advertising or on packaging, the words used in social media or word-of-mouth, and even brand names themselves, serve to communicate the meaning of a brand and influence perception, memory, attitudes, and behavior.

A great deal of consumer research on language recognizes the relevance of language in branding and the impact that language has on consumer response to brands. For example, researchers have studied how language influences the formation of brand associations (e.g., Leclerc, Schmitt, & Dubé, 1994), which brand names are better remembered (e.g., Luna, Carnevale, & Lerman, 2013), and how languages might cue different identities (Kehret-Ward, Johnson, & Louie, 1985) and impact brand evaluations (e.g., Cheema & Patrick, 2008). However, these inquiries have remained relatively ad hoc, lacking a systematic way of organizing what we know about how language affects the consumer psychology of brands. More importantly, language hasn't been explicitly incorporated into theories of branding.

Part of the reason for this non-integration is that the branding literature itself is voluminous and had itself lacked a comprehensive and theoretical organizing framework. Recognizing this limitation of the branding literature, Schmitt (2012) developed a consumer psychology model of brands designed to address “consumer perceptions and judgments and their underlying

☆ This research was partially funded by Fordham University research grant.

\* Corresponding author at: Fordham University, 140 W 62nd street, room 433, New York, NY 10023, United States.

E-mail address: [mcarnevale3@fordham.edu](mailto:mcarnevale3@fordham.edu) (M. Carnevale).

processes as they relate to brands" (p. 8). This model is quite robust in that it organizes and integrates a wide assortment of branding literature from brand personality and brand relationships to brand experiences and more. Yet, despite referencing some literature on the language-brand relationship, it does not explicitly consider the role of language in branding. Given that language is at the heart of how consumers learn about brands, process brand information and experience brands, we argue that there is a need to extend Schmitt's framework to consider the role of language in branding.

We chose the Schmitt (2012) framework because it is the most comprehensive to date and also because its organization provides a natural fit for the incorporation of language. The model identifies five major processes underlying brands: *identifying* brands; *experiencing* brands; *integrating* brand information into an overall concept; *signifying* the brand as a symbol and identity signal, and *connecting* with the brand (Schmitt, 2012). We explore how language informs each of these processes through three dimensions: the way language is processed by individuals (traditionally studied within psycholinguistics), how it is used as a communication tool (typically of interest to sociolinguistics), and how language can be manipulated to communicate certain meanings (mostly investigated in semiotics). In the process, we convey a novel, interdisciplinary framework concerning the role of language in consumer-brand relationships and define a new area of inquiry, which we call Brand Linguistics.

This newly defined area of inquiry recognizes that there are different ways of thinking about language and, relatedly, different types of research questions that can be and have been asked. For instance, in a marketing context we could focus on how breaking the rules of grammar influences consumers' memory of an advertising tagline (e.g., "Got Milk?") or on how alliteration, or the repetition of certain sounds (e.g., "luxurious lather"), influences perceptions of a brand, or what language should be used to target bilingual consumers or consumers living in a foreign country. While the first two questions are psycholinguistic in nature, the third sits more squarely within sociolinguistics. From a semiotic perspective, instead, we could focus on how consumers derive meaning from metaphors and puns in advertising such as the one in a Kenneth Cole billboard that read, "If gas prices continue to rise why not switch pumps?" (a pun on "pump"—the gas pump and the type of shoes). The diversity of the above-mentioned research questions and the linguistic approaches required to study them suggest that work investigating how language affects consumers should be based on multiple disciplines, each bringing its own relevant theories and methodological approaches.

Through our framework, we define Brand Linguistics as the study of language effects on consumers in brand-related settings. This area of inquiry emerges as a subdiscipline of Consumer Behavior. It is different from any of the traditional disciplines associated with linguistics in that it focuses on the consumer as a unit of analysis and is interdisciplinary in nature (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). Brand Linguistics combines theoretical and methodological perspectives from psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and semiotics, and it furthers the understanding of consumer behavior, itself a function of the interaction of cognitive, symbolic, and social forces. Brand Linguistics is different from Consumer Behavior in that it single-mindedly focuses on language-related phenomena and how they affect branding.

Our contribution is threefold: first, building on Schmitt's model, we present a first theoretical framework of language effects on the consumer psychology of brands; second, we discuss how well-established findings within the branding literature might vary once language effects are taken into account, and third, although research in psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and semiotics has informed a variety of branding-relevant topics in a relatively fragmented way, we integrate those bodies of knowledge to generate new insight and provide research propositions as well as concrete suggestions for further study. Therefore, we pursue what MacInnis (2011) defined as a "relating" type of contribution in three ways: a) by synthesizing and connecting previously scattered research across a variety of disciplines; b) by generating a holistic perspective in the study of language on the consumer psychology of brands; and c) by offering overarching ideas that can accommodate previous findings and produce novel insights.

In the next section, we briefly describe the areas of language-related inquiry, including their respective main research questions and methodologies. Following, we illustrate how language can influence the way consumers interact with brands and provide research propositions as well as concrete suggestions for further research. Lastly, we discuss managerial implications and conclusions.

## 1. Areas of linguistic inquiry

### 1.1. Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistics focuses on what happens in the mind when individuals process language. More formally, it is the study of the acquisition, storage, comprehension, and production of language. Psycholinguistics has been a prolific area of research (Carroll, 2008). In fact, psychologists derive a lot of their knowledge of how the mind works from the study of how it processes language. Because of its roots in experimental psychology, psycholinguistic studies tend to use controlled experiments, usually in the lab, as a methodology. This allows experimenters to present carefully selected stimuli to respondents, who can then process them and provide their response to them, according to the manipulations of the researchers. Typical insights from these studies are limited to memory and processing measures, and are perhaps somewhat limited in their external validity because social phenomena are not usually included in the equation.

In a branding context, psycholinguistics is relevant in a variety of instances, from the development of new brand names (Lerman, 2006b) to the composition of longer communications, like ads or web sites (Luna, 2005). For the most part, the effects studied by psycholinguistic-oriented research relate to brand or copy memory. In the brand naming area, for example, the spelling of a brand has an impact on its memorability: ambiguous spellings can lead to greater memory if clues are provided to consumers as to how the brand is really spelled (Luna et al., 2013). Another way in which psycholinguistics studies have helped the understanding of branding-related phenomenon is by building on the effects of sound symbolism—that is, the meanings conveyed by the

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5033751>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5033751>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)