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ARTICLE

Influence of radio spokesperson gender and vocal pitch on advertising effectiveness: The role of listener gender



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Abstract In radio advertising, there is a tendency to employ males in the belief that the male voice is more credible and effective. Because of this, advertising practice is encouraging gender discrimination in disregard of objective criteria. This paper analyzes the effects of spokesperson gender and vocal pitch and their interaction, as well as the effect of listener gender on effectiveness in relation to a radio spot for a non-gendered product (blood donation). We conducted a 2 (male–female voices) \times 2 (low–high vocal pitches) \times 2 (male–female listeners) experimental design via 4 radio programs in which we inserted a radio spot in a commercial block. A sample of 987 Spanish radio listeners was used. Our findings contrast with the existing practice in advertising of preferring male voices, highlighting the need for objective criteria in the selection of voices. In fact, the results shows that vocal pitch has a direct effect which is more significant than gender in terms of unaided recall. Additionally, the results of the interaction effect between spokesperson gender and vocal pitch reinforce the use of female voices, as low-pitched female voices are precisely the ones that generate more favorable attitudes toward the ad and the brand.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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Tono de voz del
portavoz;
Género del portavoz;
Género del oyente

Influencia del género y el tono de voz del portavoz radiofónico en la eficacia publicitaria: papel del género del oyente

Resumen En la publicidad radiofónica, existe una tendencia a emplear varones, en la creencia de que la voz masculina es más creíble y eficaz. Debido a ello, la práctica publicitaria anima a la discriminación de género, haciendo caso omiso de los criterios objetivos. Este documento analiza los efectos del género y el tono de voz del portavoz y su interacción, así como el efecto del género del oyente en la efectividad, con relación a un anuncio radiofónico de un producto carente de género (la donación de sangre). Utilizamos un diseño experimental de 2 (voces varón-mujer) x 2 (tonos de voz bajos-altos) x 2 (oyentes varón-mujer) a través de 4 programas de radio en los que insertamos un anuncio radiofónico en un bloque comercial. Se utilizó una muestra de 987 oyentes radiofónicos españoles. Nuestros hallazgos contrastan con la práctica existente en publicidad, de preferir las voces masculinas, subrayando la necesidad de criterios objetivos en la selección de voces. De hecho, el resultado refleja que el tono de voz tiene un efecto directo, que es más significativo que el género en términos de recordación espontánea. Además, los resultados del efecto de interacción entre el género del portavoz y el tono de voz refuerzan la utilización de voces femeninas de tono bajo, ya que éstas son precisamente las que generan actitudes más favorables hacia el anuncio y la marca.

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Introduction

The advertising industry and the scientific community are interested in analyzing the role of gender in the media, and this is due to the role advertising plays as a socializing agent (Piñeiro Otero, 2010). This interest has given rise to studies on the topic, although the majority focus on television and few of them have analyzed radio despite its high level of penetration. According to Radio Advertising Bureau (2016), radio allows to select any segment of population because reaching over 93% of people age 12 and older every week and 78% daily. Also radio generates a high levels of loyalty and engaging and these can be transferred to its advertising.

This study was conducted in Spain, where almost 60.4 percent of the population listens to the radio on a daily basis (AIMC-EGM, 2016). The audience is comprised mainly of men, but the difference when compared to the percentage that makes up the female audience would not seem sufficient to justify the predominance of male voices. However, in the Spanish context, several studies highlight the fact that radio advertising is clearly dominated by male voices (Perona & Barbeito, 2008).

These results give rise to the following question: is the predominance of male voices in Spanish advertising justified? Some studies argue that this predominance in radio advertising may be due to their lower vocal pitch as low-pitched voices are considered more serious, credible, safe and powerful than high-pitched voices, which are defined as sweet, familiar and cheerful (Perona & Barbeito, 2008). This link between low-pitched voices and the male gender leads to paradoxical situations such as using male voices in radio ads targeted at women – as the aim is to assign the message greater credibility – forgetting that listeners need to identify themselves with the protagonist of the message. The fact that voices are considered in terms of gender has favored the perpetuation of vocal stereotypes that could

justify this situation. That is why there is a need for studies which analyze the potential of different voices when it comes to transmitting a radio message since, as Keith (1992) underlines, the choice of spokesperson is one of the most important decisions in advertising. For this reason, the selection should follow phonogenic criteria. The most phonogenic voices are the ones within the lower ranges. They transmit greater trust, as they are associated with attributes such as safety and credibility. Thus, as Rodero (2001) shows, this leads us to establish the notion that positive connotations linked to low-pitched voices are valid for both genders, and that these qualities being exclusively attributed to male voices, as is currently the case, is not justified. This fallacy has also led to the situation where female voices are being associated with the more negative characteristics linked to higher vocal ranges. Along this line, Madaran and Catterall (2000) state that feminine traits include empathy, helpfulness, caring, and recognition of community interests. In contrast, masculine traits include an ability to be impersonal, self-interested, and efficient.

Therefore, given that vocal pitch is a defining characteristic that conveys personality and distinguishes it from others (Piñeiro Otero, 2010; Tigue, Borak, O'Connor, Schandl, & Feinberg, 2012), the question that arises when considering the common practice in radio is the following: is the underuse of female voices in Spanish advertising justified, regardless of their vocal pitch?

The study of the voice in radio advertising has focused mainly on content analysis, whereas hardly any studies have explored its influence on advertising effectiveness. In this line, Dahl (2010) considers that despite the apparently relevant role of voice in determining the effectiveness of an advertisement, little research has been done in this area. The effectiveness depends on several factors regarding its microstructure – among them phonoaesthetic function – as the effect of a message depends not only on the way it is

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