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Emotional persuasion in localized advertising – analyzing the dialectal language and visual images

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The purpose of this study is to investigate emotional persuasion in localized advertising by exploring how language and images are used to appeal emotionally. The empirical data consists of 32 TV commercials in spoken Swiss-German dialect by the Swiss cooperative Migros. The study is conducted through a mixed-methods approach of content analysis and qualitative analysis (linguistic and semiotic analysis). The outcome of the study is a framework of emotionally persuasive advertising in emotionally appealing dialectal language, emotionally appealing images, and their interplay. The framework opens new perspectives on understanding emotionally appealing advertising.

1 Introduction

This cross-disciplinary study investigates emotionally appealing advertising in a context of localized advertising. Localization—adapting advertising to local habits—has shown to be a more effective strategy than standardization in several studies including performance criteria. (Dow 2005; Kelly-Holmes 2005; Calantone et al. 2006; Okazaki, Taylor, and Zou 2006; Wong and Merrilees 2007; de Mooij and Hofstede 2010.) Another lucrative and increasingly popular advertising strategy for motivating consumers to purchase the company’s products and services is to appeal emotionally to them, that is, stirring emotions when people process advertising messages (Roberts 2004; Rossiter and Bellman 2005; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005; Park et al., 2010; Rossiter and Bellman 2012; Kim and Sullivan 2019). This is achieved by targeting the consumers’ psychological, social, or symbolic needs that is intended to make the audience process the message more thoroughly, create a vivid and enticing memory of the brand, and ultimately persuade to purchase the company’s products or services. Being able to appeal to consumers on an emotional level can cut through the noise inherent in

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advertising, something that is becoming more difficult in today's media environment filled with messages. (Friestad and Thorson 1986, 114–115; Ambler and Burne 1999, 29–30; Leonidou and Leonidou 2009, 523, 527; Young, Gillespie, and Otto 2019, 330.)

Consumers' emotional attachment to a brand has been found to be central in developing strong customer relationships and in bringing several benefits. Emotionally attached consumers are more loyal and more profitable as the price is not decisive in their purchasing behavior. Additionally, their brand purchase volume and purchase rate are bigger. (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005; Thomson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006; Orth, Limon, and Rose 2010; So, Parsons, and Yap 2013.) Even though both localization and emotional appeals have proven to be successful in advertising, there is a dearth of knowledge of how emotional appeals are mediated in localized advertising. In particular, previous studies have not been able to identify how emotional appeals form in the language of advertising or in the joint interplay of the language and the visual moving components. This study addresses the knowledge gap by exploring emotionally appealing advertising through local Swiss-German dialect and moving visual images in television commercials.

Television advertising is an important part of modern economies and paid media. With the combination of sight, sound, and movement, TV commercials can take advantage of many emotionally persuasive techniques to transmit the messages which makes them especially effective in their persuasive power. People's emotions can be evoked by telling stories and demonstrating the benefits or results of the advertised products that impart life and energy to the advertising messages. (Jamhoury and Winiarz 2009, 231; Martín-Santana, Reinares-Lara, and Reinares-Lara 2015, 161.) However, the versatile emotionally appealing techniques of TV commercials have not yet been comprehensively researched.

Some research results regarding television advertising indicate that using local dialects has a positive outcome in enhancing persuasion: The spokesperson using a similar accent to that of the target audience is regarded as more persuasive than a speaker using a less familiar accent (Lwin and Wee 2000; Lalwani, Lwin, and Kuah 2005; Atkinson and Kelly-Holmes 2006, 255; Morales, Scott, and Yorkston 2012, 37–38; Liu et al. 2013, 2386). The purpose of using local languages and dialects in advertising is to resonate with consumers at local level and to deliver personally meaningful and persuasive messages (Kelly-Holmes 2005, 105–107, 143–145).

The Swiss context presents an interesting case within which to investigate emotional persuasion of localized advertising. In the scope of the vast German speaking language area Swiss German represents an important local minority. Swiss German refers to all local German dialects used widely in spoken communication in Switzerland. Among the German speaking Swiss, the Swiss German

dialects are attached to positive emotions and they are generally associated with positive values, ratings and national identity and thereby considered as “the language of the heart”. (Ruoss 2019, 248–249, 372–373; Vorwerk 2019, 132.)

2 Research objectives

The purpose of this cross-disciplinary study is to investigate emotional persuasion in localized advertising, more specifically how emotional appeals are mediated in TV commercials. To address the research purpose, the following sub-questions are posed:

- How is language in dialect used to appeal emotionally?
- How are images used to appeal emotionally?

By analyzing language and images separately, this study provides two interconnected perspectives on emotional persuasion. The empirical study is conducted by analyzing Swiss-German commercials made by a Swiss cooperative, the Federation of Migros Cooperatives (FMC), referred to hereafter as *Migros*.

3 Methods

The research is based on a mixed-methods approach and the empirical study is conducted in two phases by analyzing commercials quantitatively and qualitatively. In the first phase, content analysis is used as a quantitative method to organize the stream of language and images. In the second phase, the emotionally appealing meanings of language and images are investigated qualitatively. The second phase is divided into two stages: 2a) linguistic analysis and 2b) semiotic analysis. The linguistic analysis is conducted to study the emotional appeals of the language in the Swiss-German dialect. The semiotic analysis is conducted to uncover the emotional appeals of the images.

3.1 Phase I: Quantitative analysis

In the quantitative analysis, content analysis is used to organize the stream of language and images of the commercials. The commercials are screened to find out what elements they include and elements which typically comprise advertisements are analyzed. The elements are: pitch, products, people, places and props (Hakala 2008, 203–204). The content analysis is used to provide an answer to a question:

What pitch, products, people, places and props are being depicted in the commercials?

In this study, pitch means a share of text. Places refer to the settings of the commercials and props refer to additional elements of advertising which convey important meanings, for example costumes symbolizing a certain culture (Hakala 2006; Hakala 2008).

3.2 Phase 2: Qualitative analysis

In the qualitative analysis, the emotional appeals of the language and images are investigated at the connotative level in order to reveal what images are used to appeal to the target audience emotionally. Connotation refers to the wide array of associations that signs carry with them. Connotations can be culture-specific meanings, social and personal associations (e.g. ideological, emotional) of the sign. (Langrehr and Caywood 1995; Monaco 2002.)

A. Linguistic analysis

The linguistic analysis examines the emotionally appealing, connotative meanings of the language. The linguistic analysis is conducted to provide answers to the question:

How is language in dialect used to appeal emotionally?

The foundation of studying emotional appeals of language is in rhetoric, the art of persuasion in speech. The connotative meanings will be analyzed in the light of *pathos* which is a communication technique aiming to persuade the audience by arousing emotions and engaging people emotionally (Gross and Walzer 2008, 81–82; Baccarani and Bonfanti 2015).

B. Semiotic analysis

The semiotic analysis explores the emotionally appealing, connotative meanings of the images. The purpose is to provide answers to the question:

How are images used to appeal emotionally?

The methodological foundation of researching meanings is in semiotics, the general science of signs (Fiske 1990, 41, 46). The connotations of the employment of the products, people, places and props of the commercials will be examined to discern what images are used to appeal to the target audience emotionally.

3.3 *Data collection*

The empirical data comprises a collection of 32 advertising commercials made by the Swiss cooperative Migros featuring the Swiss-German dialect either in spoken or sung form. The data has been collected on the cooperative's web page and YouTube channel. The total duration of the extracted material comprises 1326 seconds, around 22 minutes. The commercials are produced and broadcasted between the years of 1967 to 2013 and they have been screened on television.

Migros has a market leading position in Switzerland: The Migros website states it is Switzerland's largest retailer and largest supermarket chain with sales of CHF 29.95 billion in 2020. Migros is also Switzerland's largest employer in the private sector with over 99 000 employees. (Migros.)

3.4 *Data analysis*

The research on emotionally appealing elements starts by providing a full transcription of all spoken language and sung lyrics of the commercials. In the quantitative phase, in the content analysis of the language, the time spent by actors or narrators speaking Swiss German is determined using a stopwatch three times to record the duration of spoken Swiss German in each commercial. The recorded durations are then averaged to derive a figure for the percentage of spoken dialect in comparison to the total duration of the commercials. The calculations reveal to what extent the language and the imagery transmit the advertising messages.

The content analysis of the images, that is, analyzing what products, people, places and props are discernible, is conducted by three Swiss born coders who screen the commercials for these elements based on a predetermined coding sheet. The coding sheet was defined based on the pre-screening of the data (Krippendorff 2004, 100) and it is discernible in the annexes (Appendix 1). Thereafter, the frequency and shares of images of products, people, places and props are determined.

In the qualitative phase, the emotionally appealing meanings of the language are analyzed from the transcriptions provided of the commercials. The qualitative semiotic analysis of the images extends the information derived from the content analysis and investigates what emotionally appealing connotations the products, people, places and props of the commercials have. As the emotional appeals of the images were analyzed, the sound of the commercials was muted to prevent the spoken language influencing the interpretations of the visuals.

4 Findings

4.1 Content analysis of language

The content analysis of the language showed that the commercials of the earliest decades relied predominantly on language to deliver the advertising messages. On average, in the 1960s, the language covered 71.5% of the total time and in the 1970s, 69.8% of the total time of the commercials. On the contrary, Swiss German was spoken notably less in the 2000s (23%) and the least in the 1980s (10.9%). The shares of the language and imagery transmitting the advertising messages were the most balanced in the 2010s (56.2%) and the 1990s (39.3%).

4.2 Content analysis of images

The findings of the content analysis of the images present the distribution of the advertised products, the people, the places, and the props in the commercials.

Products

A little over one-third of the commercials were for food and drink (35.4%). The second most prevalent advertised product was something else than the predetermined product categories on the coding sheet, leading to a designation of *Other* (18.6%). These were for example commercials for energy saving and nature conservation, delivery services or cookery courses.

The third biggest product group encompassed home appliances (14.6%). Clothing and shoes were the fourth biggest category (11.1%) followed by commercials for entertainment (5.6%), public good and charity (4.9%), construction materials (4.2%), furniture (2.8%), household cleaning (2.1%), and photographic equipment (0.7%).

People

The most common types of people were classified as *Other* (20.6%). This was due to the fact that the people appeared in a large variety of different roles in the commercials; for instance as various professionals, extended family members and general public in the background. The second most prevalent group were Migros customer(s) (20.1%).

Surprisingly, animals—the most typically a dog—turned out to be the third most frequent actor (18.1%). Images of family composed of parents and children formed the fourth biggest group (14.6%) followed by Migros representative(s) (12.6%). The rarest occurrence was the appearance of children accompanied by their father only (5%).

Places

In the group of places, home was the most common filming location, featuring in nearly two-fifths of the commercials (37.5%). In more than one-fifth, the setting was a Migros store (23.4%). The share for answer option *Other* turned out to be the third biggest (14.5%) comprising filming locations on a street or in a town, for example. The fourth biggest location was garden (7%), followed by countryside (5.5%), studio (4.7%), and blank (3.9%).

Props

As to the props, the cooperative's logo and the cooperative's name were discernible in over half of the commercials (66.2%). The second most dominant prop was *Other* (18.6%) covering a broad variety of meaningful elements related to the advertised products or visual special effects of the commercials. In the third group were the props for Swiss culture (15.2%). These were all kinds of props representing Switzerland and elements connected to the major annual religious and cultural festivals in Switzerland; Christmas and Easter.

4.3 Linguistic analysis

The linguistic analysis of the language in dialect revealed four categories of emotional appeals. They were the appeal to social contact, appeal to adoration, appeal to surprise and appeal to humor.

Appeal to social contact

The appeal to social contact addressed the fundamental psychological need of human beings for belonging to a group and it was mediated through three kinds of relationships. First, it was mediated through encounters between the actors representing Migros salespeople and their customers. Linguistically, the social contact was established by the expressions used in greetings and farewells which frequently comprised the person's first or last name.

The second type of social contact was mediated by the represented cooperative staff who addressed the target audience directly in order to establish social contact with them. For addressing the viewers, personal pronouns, possessive pronouns and rhetorical questions—sentences posing questions without an expectation they would actually be answered aloud—were used. The third type of social contact was mediated to take place between the represented family members, couples and friends. First names were used to refer both to the represented family members and friends but the family members and spouses were addressed also with lovingly meant terms of endearment.

Appeal to surprise

The appeal to surprise sought to surprise the target audience by mediating either a pleasant or an unpleasant surprise in the commercials. The surprise was mediated either by the actors who acted surprisingly or the advertised products were used in a surprising manner.

Linguistically, characterizing for the appeal to surprise was that it was communicated with a noun or a verb denoting the surprise. In addition, exclamatory sentences, exclamatory questions, and different interjections were discernible to express the immediate surprise. The exclamatory sentences expressed strong emotions with a forceful pronunciation and rise of intonation. The exclamatory questions had a meaning of asking a question but with the force of an exclamatory sentence.

Appeal to adoration

The appeal to adoration aimed to evoke adoration among the target audience. Adoration was mediated in contexts in which the represented family members praised each other positively—often due to the use of the advertised products—or asked for admiration from others. Additionally, the target audience was being appealed to adore the advertised products or the advertising cooperative for acting upon the cooperative's values. Linguistically, the appeals to adoration were characterized by the rich use of descriptive adjectives—in the positive or superlative degree—and diverse expressions denoting perfection.

Appeal to humor

Appealing to humor aimed to amuse the target audience and to evoke joy among the viewers. The language applied hyperbole, oxymoron, puns, and verbal comedy. In hyperbole, the truth was being stretched for communicating funny and exaggerative meanings in the slogans. In oxymoron, the humor was established when the meanings of the linguistic message and the meanings of the imagery were deviant and contradicted each other.

The humor of puns stemmed from the multiple meanings of the language in which one linguistic element was interpretable in two ways: One meaning was evoked in the linguistic context and the second meaning was generated in conjunction with the imagery. In the case of verbal comedy, language appeared humorous since the use of language diverged from the common expectations or language was used by an unconventional and unexpected language user—a dog—which was a fictional narrator of the commercials.

4.4 *Semiotic analysis*

The semiotic analysis of the images revealed which images of products, people, places and props were used to appeal to the target audience emotionally. The most frequently appealed emotions were love and joy and love for Switzerland—the home country of the target audience.

Products

From the group of products, food and drink, Swiss food, home appliances, and construction materials appeared in the emotional appeals. Table 1 presents the product categories in conjunction with appeals to emotion.

Product categories	Appealed emotions
Food and drink, construction materials	Love and joy
Swiss food products	Love for home country
Home appliances	Trust

Tab. 1: Images of products appealing to the emotions.

The images of food and drink as well as construction materials were used to appeal to the emotions of love and joy. The advertised food products caused joy among the represented family members or couple and they were enjoyed in a loving atmosphere. The images mediated perfect sceneries of life in which the successful dinners were paramount. Similarly, the images of construction materials were advertised in the family context with images of families and couples happily renovating their homes together. The successfully renovated new home environment tempted the family members and couples to show affection to each other which appealed to love among the target audience.

Portraying images of Swiss food products, for instance milk, cheese, and meat, appealed to the target audience's emotion of love for Switzerland. The Swiss food products were depicted in a Swiss context to emphasize the appeal; amidst a beautiful alpine landscape or as part of a national festivals. The images of the home appliances appealed to the emotion of trust among the target audience by guaranteeing successful dinners. The dinners had positive consequences by winning the trust of other people and consolidating meaningful relationships or making new friends.

People

From the group of people, images of family, a couple, Migros staff and Swiss cultural figures were discernible in appealing to emotions. Table 2 summarizes the images of people seeking to appeal to the emotions.

People	Emotions
Family (A man and a woman with children)	Love and joy
Couple (A man and a woman in a romantic relationship)	Love and joy
Migros staff (Heroic professionals)	Trust
Swiss cultural figures (related to Swiss traditions, history and culture)	Love for home country

Tab. 2: Images of people appealing to the emotions.

When appealing to the emotions of love and joy people were represented in two kinds of loving relationships: a couple in a romantic relationship and family members living a happy and harmonious life. The representations of Migros staff appealed to the emotion of trust by mediating them as emphatic, unselfish and heroic professionals devoted to helping the customers with personal service. The people belonging to the Swiss culture represented Swiss history, culture and traditions and they appealed to love for the home country among the Swiss.

Places

As to the emotionally appealing places, the images of home setting appealed to the emotions of love and joy. The home environment was represented as a private and intimate place for showing deep affection between family members and couples. In addition, the images of Swiss nature as a national and cultural location aimed to evoke love for the home country of the target audience. Places representing Switzerland were the images of beautiful countryside and the Swiss Alps.

Props

Emotionally appealing cultural props and cooperative props were discernible in the commercials. The props related to the cooperative—Migros logo and name—appeared in the contexts of the imagery appealing to love and joy, trust, and love for Switzerland. Thus, the props of Migros accompanied diverse emotional appeals in order to connect the advertising cooperative to those emotions.

The emotionally appealing cultural props were related to various aspects of Swiss culture. These were, for example, representations of the Swiss national flag, Swiss traditions or traditional clothing. The cultural props addressed the individual's sense of belonging to their nation and appealed to the emotion of love for Switzerland.

Summarizing the main findings on the emotional persuasion in localized advertising, this study introduces a framework depicting the complex interplay between dialectal language and moving images. By providing holistic and new viewpoints on emotional persuasion, the framework contributes to understanding of emotionally appealing advertising. The framework which is called the Pajuranta Prototype is presented in Figure 1.

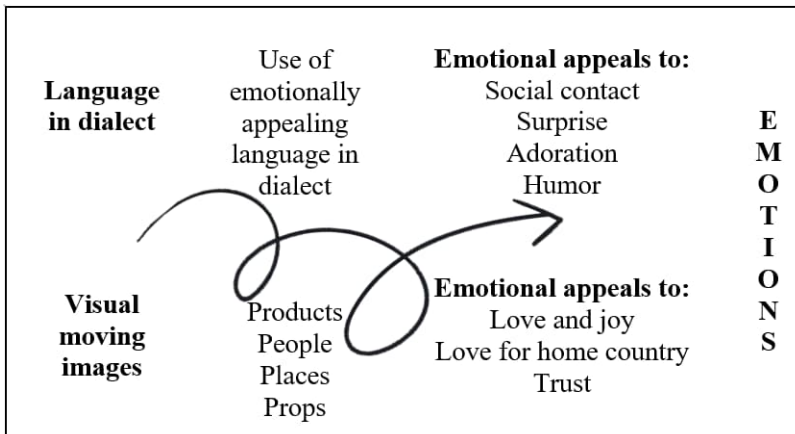


Figure. 1: The Pajuranta Prototype. The framework for emotionally appealing advertising in dialectal language and moving images.

The scientific novelty of the framework is that it specifies how emotional appeals are mediated with two interconnected perspectives of language and visuals. The framework will hopefully encourage advertising planners to think about different options for personalizing advertising for fragmented target audiences. As a practical advertising planning tool, the framework is widely applicable to advertising in several media channels, including online advertising.

5 Discussion

This cross-disciplinary study addressed the lack of understanding how emotional appeals are mediated. The study contributes to the limited body of research on emotionally appealing localized advertising. Herein, it is among the first to investigate emotional appeals through dialectal language and visual moving images in TV commercials targeting a fragmented audience. The study acknowledges the role of local dialects and furthers the understanding on how to appeal to the consumers close to them, by adapting the advertising messages to the local environment and consumers' culture.

6 Theoretical contributions and managerial implications

The research relates to the theoretical fields of marketing and linguistics and offers new insights into emotional persuasion. Studying emotionally appealing techniques of language of advertising in dialect reflected the lack of previous studies on the topic, meaning there was no framework to adopt and very little interdisciplinary literature. The first research gap was addressed in the fields of marketing and linguistics by contributing to the understanding of how emotional appeals form in the language of advertising. In addition, by studying a dynamic stream of advertising images instead of static ones, new emotionally appealing meanings for the products, people, places and props in the commercials were explored. The second research gap in marketing and linguistics was filled by producing the new framework for emotionally appealing advertising which adds to the understanding of the complex interplay between language in dialect and moving images.

This study can have important implications for companies pursuing localization and addressing to a specific target audience. The practical contribution of this study is the Pajuranta Prototype which can assist in designing emotionally appealing advertising. The practitioners can harvest concrete ways in which to apply the emotionally appealing language in dialect, the emotionally appealing images, and their combinations. Being able to appeal to consumers at an emotional level can instill or at least facilitate the consumers' attachment to brands.

7 Limitations and future research

This study focused on emotionally appealing commercials by exploring the language in dialect and moving images. However, analyzing meanings of other sounds; music, for instance, had to be excluded and must be left for consideration

in future research. The empirical study focused on commercials broadcast on television in a particular period from the 1960s onwards. As the Internet and the various streaming services are gaining more and more ground, they would offer another media context for a future study. However, this exploratory study will aid in investigating the interplay between language and moving images in the future.

The findings are limited in the sense that the study was focused on the specific Swiss linguistic and cultural context and the effect of the Swiss-German dialect on the findings cannot be isolated, and thus, the results may be dialect dependent. Further research would be required to discern whether the findings can be generalized to other dialects or even to standard languages. In addition, the empirical study was restricted to commercials of one Swiss cooperative in the retailing segment. The commercials targeting the retail trade and the product categories of the advertised products may have affected the research results. A future research could be conducted in other business sectors than retailing to learn about emotionally appealing advertising more generally.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The coding sheet.

Products	What product category is advertised?	Food and drink Household cleaning Clothing/shoes Home appliances/electronics Furniture Construction materials Photographic equipment Entertainment/entertainment electronics Jewelry/watches Public good/charity Other, what?
People	What people or animals are shown?	Family (father, mother, children) Father with child(ren) A couple Migros representative(s) Migros customer(s) Groups of children Animal(s), what? Other, what?
Places	What places are shown?	Countryside

		Store Home Garden Town Studio Blank Other, what?
Props	What props (other meaningful additional elements) are shown?	Swiss culture, what? Cooperative props (Migros logo, Migros name) Other, what?