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

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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.

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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

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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

smallest units of sounds (i.e., phonemes) and investigating how certain sounds might influence brand preferences and recall (e.g., Klink, 2000; Lowrey & Shrum, 2007; Luna et al., 2013).

Another example of psycholinguistic effects on consumer research is verbal framing. Research in that area suggests that verbal framing might influence actual consumer behavior by affecting whether consumers will redeem promotions (Cheema & Patrick, 2008), be successful at avoiding unhealthy foods (Patrick & Hagtvedt, 2012), and choose to comply with the messages (Kronrod, Grinstein, & Wathieu, 2012). In a similar light, some studies show that merely altering the name of a food item (e.g., “pasta” vs. “salad”) significantly affects dieters’ and non-dieters’ evaluations of the food’s healthfulness and taste, as well as actual consumption (Irmak, Vallen, & Robinson, 2011). Although studies like those are not necessarily positioned as linguistically based, they are consistent with the notion that language affects the categorization of objects (Hunt & Agnoli, 1991; Schmitt & Zhang, 1998; Zhang & Schmitt, 1998; Zhang, Schmitt, & Haley, 2003) and thus influences consumer preferences and behavior.

1.2. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics investigates how language reflects and helps define societal dynamics and interpersonal relationships; it includes the study of the interrelationships of language and social structure, of linguistic variation, and of attitudes toward language. In a sense, while psycholinguistics studies language inside the mind, sociolinguistics studies language “outside” the mind in the act of communications with other individuals. In the broad perspective used in this paper, those who study language from a sociolinguistic angle include researchers within the disciplines of linguistics, but also anthropology, cultural studies, and even cognitive social psychology. Therefore, the range of methodologies used in sociolinguistic studies is much broader than in the field of psycholinguistics. For instance, one could easily employ ethnographies, semi-structured interviews, or experimentation to answer sociolinguistics research questions. Thus, a sociolinguistics approach could be used to answer the question: How does attitude toward a dominant language influence a minority’s purchase of a brand with labeling in that language versus another brand with labeling in the minority language?

A variety of topics in branding and consumer behavior can be studied with a sociolinguistic lens—for instance, the style of language used during service encounters. Thus, customers with a polite interaction style are not only less likely to complain about poor service quality but will also engage in different types of complaining behavior when they do complain, versus customers with impolite interaction styles (Lerman, 2006a). As a result, their relationship with the brand might be impacted accordingly. Further, researchers in psychology and consumer behavior have found that bilingual-bicultural individuals switch social identities when they switch languages (from being individualistic and assertive in one language to being more group-oriented in another language; Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Luna, Ringberg, & Peracchio, 2008).

1.3. Semiotics

To the extent that consumers behave based on the meanings they ascribe to marketplace stimuli, semiotics has informed a variety of consumer research. Broadly speaking, semiotics analyzes the structures of meaning-producing events, both verbal (e.g., words) and non-verbal (e.g., products, images; Mick, 1986). In this paper we mainly focus on the study of how language can be manipulated to communicate certain meanings, how the signs of language (words and their parts, phrases, sentences, as well as images) are interpreted by individuals; for example, how a particular set of brand symbols is developed.

As McQuarrie and Mick (1992, p. 181) well point out, “a semiotic text analysis scrutinizes the various signs in a text in an attempt to characterize their structure and identify potential meaning.” However, compared to other approaches for analyzing texts, semiotics accounts for “the constraints imposed by the structure of signs within a text, on the freedom of the reader to interpret the text in a variety of ways,” and on the broader sociocultural context, which might influence both the text and its possible interpretations.

A great deal of brand linguistics rooted in semiotics builds on Peirce’s model (Peirce, 1931–1958). Peirce’s paradigm incorporates a three-component model, including a “sign” (or “signal,” e.g., a word), an “interpretant,” (e.g., the response or interpretation of the observer), and the “object” (to which the sign refers). Peirce suggests that signs are vehicles that convey meaning to the interpretant via something “outside” the mind (i.e., the “object”). The relationships across the three components of Peirce’s model are instrumental in identifying the three main branches of semiotics—that is, syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics.

Syntactics is the study of sign-sign relations and has traditionally inspired a number of consumer studies based on structural and text interpretative analyses of meaning (e.g., of ads and product packaging; Hoshino, 1987; Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel, & Brannen, 2004). Semantics, instead, is the study of sign-object relations. One way in which semantics-based research (together with psycholinguistics) has helped the understanding of marketing-related phenomenon is by investigating the effects of meanings of particular words or syllables (e.g., descriptive of the product category or of desirable attributes of the product) on brand name recall and product preferences (Keller, Heckler, & Houston, 1998; Lowrey & Shrum, 2007; Lowrey, Shrum, & Dubitsky, 2003; Meyers-Levy, Louie, & Curren, 1994). However, there seems to be ample opportunities for further contribution (Mick et al., 2004).

Pragmatics is Peirce’s main focus and represents the study of sign-interpretant relations; for example, each of us can understand the word “table” in a different way. One consumer might think of a kitchen table and another of a beautifully set upscale restaurant. So if marketers are going to use a deceptively simple word like “table” in their ads, or in a website, they have to know that such a word may evoke different meanings in different people. One has to know how to lead consumers to picture the right table in their minds. The emerging area of corpus linguistics, such as Deignan’s (2006) approach to define certain

words based on the words that co-occur with them, might provide some insights. For instance, if “table” co-occurs with “steel” in a disproportionate number of occasions, it means that consumers think of tables as being made of steel, so a prototype of a table in consumers’ minds is likely to contain the association table-steel (Rosch, 1975, 2002).

1.4. Brand linguistics: multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary?

Researchers in psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and semiotics typically stay within their own area and rarely look outside. This is a result of the process of modern scientific methods. Research topics tend to be very narrow and the literature about them already so dense that it is difficult to combine theories and current thought from multiple disciplines.

However, when considering consumer decisions in real life, staying within one discipline is not an option. For instance, in order to determine which language to use when targeting Moroccan immigrants in Tarragona (a provincial capital on the Spanish Mediterranean coast), one not only needs to know the proficiency of these individuals in Spanish or Catalan (the regional language, co-official with Spanish), but also how they feel about each of the cultures (native, Spanish, and Catalan) and their respective languages, or the meanings that would be conveyed if one of the languages versus the others were to be implemented. Language proficiency would be the domain of psycholinguistics, attitudes toward the languages would be a sociolinguistics topic, and meaning creation would be an area for semiotics.

In sum, strategic branding must consider language from multiple perspectives and disciplines. Only then marketers are able to communicate exactly what is intended. From a researcher’s standpoint this has deep implications: ideally, linguistic constructs and principles from the various disciplines should be jointly taken into account when investigating each process underlying the consumer psychology of brands. In other words, none of the disciplines should be taken into account in isolation as they would not be sufficient to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Hence, brand linguistics should be an interdisciplinary, multi-method area that takes the consumer as a unit of analysis (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010) and studies how language influences the processes underlying the consumer psychology of brands.

Therefore, we integrate numerous findings across the three disciplines that inform brand linguistics. Importantly, we identify specific areas in need of further research and generate a series of research propositions which unify and shape the general framework of brand-linguistic effects (psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and semiotic) along the processes underlying the consumer psychology of brands; namely, consumers identifying brands, experiencing them, integrating brand information into an overall concept, signifying the brand as a symbol and identity signal, and connecting with the brand (Schmitt, 2012). It is worth noting that some of the studies reviewed here could fit in multiple categories, but we have chosen the categories where we believe they make the largest contribution. Fig. 1 illustrates how the most relevant brand linguistic constructs relate to the consumer psychology of branding and to the research propositions. Table 1 in the Appendix presents a summary of the research questions.

We now proceed by addressing the role of language in each of the processes of the consumer psychology of brands.

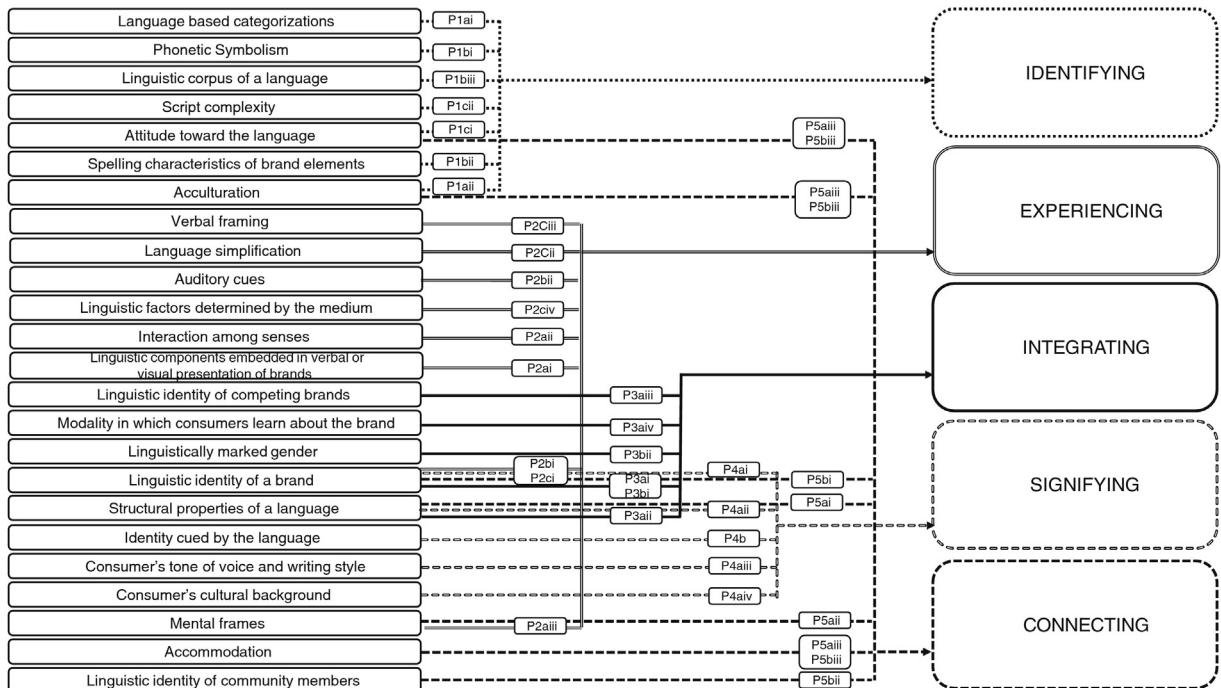


Fig. 1. Brand linguistic constructs in relation to the consumer psychology of branding, as highlighted by the research propositions.

2. Language and the consumer psychology of brands

2.1. Identifying

Identifying a brand involves primarily a) identifying the brand and its category, b) forming brand associations, and c) comparing brands with one another (Schmitt, 2012).

2.1.1. Identifying the brand and its category

A fundamental way in which consumers identify a brand is by linking its brand name and/or logo to one or more categories of products. Language plays a fundamental role primarily because its structural properties affect how people think.

More specifically, psycholinguistic-based research has shown that the structural properties of language affect people's way of categorizing objects. For instance, classifiers are one structural property of languages, such as Mandarin and Japanese, but not of other languages, such as English and German. Classifiers provide people with a reference point for object categorization (Hunt & Agnoli, 1991; Lucy, 1992; Schmitt & Zhang, 1998; Zhang & Schmitt, 1998; Zhang et al., 2003). Thus, Chinese (and not English) speakers are more likely to perceive two distinct objects as similar if they share a classifier than if they do not. From a managerial point of view, this has important consequences for brand positioning and retail layout strategies. For example, Chinese department stores often group together objects that share the same classifier, such as scarfs and undershirts, whereas the same does not happen in US stores. Given the international scope of numerous brands (e.g., online retailers), it might be interesting to explore whether the degree of assimilation into the majority culture (i.e., acculturation) moderates the relationship between language structures and categorization. For example, when targeting bicultural-bilingual Asian-Americans, which language should be chosen as primary? Or, on what shelf should the brand be positioned (and next to which other products)? Acculturation will probably matter, as we would expect more assimilated consumers to appreciate a retail layout and, in general, a positioning, that is consistent with the majority language structure and categorization mindset. Thus, we suggest that acculturation may moderate the effects of language-based categorization on consumer identification of a brand and of its category (RQ_{1aii})¹.

Differences in how language is acquired could also have an effect on how consumers identify a brand and its category. American children, for instance, are often taught a collection of nouns that belong to the same taxonomic category (e.g., a set of animals like dog, cat, horse, pig, and cow) whereas Chinese children are taught collections of nouns according to thematic relationship (Nisbett, 2004). In fact, in a study by Ji, Zhang, and Nisbett (2004), Chinese respondents were likely to group objects based on thematic relations (e.g., monkey-banana because monkeys eat bananas) whereas native English speakers were more likely to group objects based taxonomic category (e.g., monkey-panda because they're both animals). These differences, intrinsic to structural properties of consumer's native languages, may have implications for brands seeking to break out of their category in order to expand their market (e.g., cereal not just a breakfast item but also a snack). Thus, we suggest that structural aspects of consumers' native language, as reflected in noun categorization, may significantly influence the way consumers identify a brand and its category (RQ_{1ai}).

From a sociolinguistics standpoint, research on the effect of language structures on categorization has investigated linguistic universals (or lack thereof) across languages and cultures, such as the naming of colors. Researchers have uncovered that the identification of clear distinction between colors is not universal. For example, Salish, a group of languages spoken among tribes in the northwestern region of the United States and southwestern region of Canada, categorizes yellow and green under the same name (e.g., MacLaury, 1991). In a general context, yellow typically elicits "cheerful" perceptions whereas green conveys perceptions of "peacefulness," "cleanness," and "calmness" (Clarke & Costall, 2008). Therefore, it would be interesting for brand linguists to investigate the influence of language-based categorization on brand perceptions. To what degree, for instance, do speakers of Salish make a distinction, if any, between these colors and the associations made to them? How easily can they learn the associations that brands expect to cue by choosing green or yellow as part of their logos or packaging? Research suggests that it would be particularly challenging for them, as it was for children who grew up speaking languages with relatively few color names (e.g., Namibians). Thus, language-based categorizations, such as naming of colors, may facilitate the way consumers identify the brand and its category (RQ_{1ai}). In fact, in a recent study, Adelson (2005) showed that native English-speaking children, who have been exposed to the rainbow of colors in the "Crayola 64-pack", can actually distinguish "rust" from "brick" and "moss" from "sage," while children who grow up speaking languages with fewer color names tend to group them together (Adelson, 2005).

2.1.2. Forming brand associations

Consumers must identify information that is relevant to them from a unique set of brand associations to ultimately engage with a brand. Thus, researchers need to study how language can lead to developing or activating certain key brand associations. Considerable consumer research has examined how each language can form and later evoke different brand associations. For instance, language or brand names themselves can associate a brand with a particular country of origin—an ad that uses some French language could prompt associations typically attached to France, like "sophistication", "savoir vivre" or "excellent cooking."

One example of how psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic traditions can be combined into an interdisciplinary study is the research on the underlying processes of how some associations are linked to one language versus another. For instance, Luna et

¹ Throughout the text, we have identified specific, testable examples of questions for future research that fit into each research proposition. The questions are tagged according to the proposition they refer to (RQ_{1ai} belongs to P_{1ai} ; RQ_{1bii} belongs to P_{1bii} ...).

al. (2008) make use of psycholinguistic research that has examined the notion of the differential activation of concepts by each language known by a bilingual/bicultural and based on a sociolinguistic explanation; they predict that the different mental frames attached to each language can lead to shifts in consumers' identities. This is because language influences the formation of mental frames (i.e., cognitive structures) through which higher mental functions, such as interpretations of the self and others, are developed. Thus, future research could explore whether we can obtain different effects by including words that are correlated with certain contexts that would cue desired associations, as determined by a linguistic corpus analysis, or by choosing vocabulary with phonemes/sounds that evoke the product category. In other words, we suggest that brand associations might be influenced by the greater context in which these associations are formed, such as the linguistic corpus where the brand resides, and by the phonetic symbolism (RQ_{1bi} and RQ_{1biii}).

Both psycholinguistics and semiotics have informed research on the link between sounds and brand associations and meaning (i.e., phonetic symbolism). Rather than being unique, each of the many sounds in a language are the result of the systematic combination of a limited set of underlying phonetic attributes (Larsen, Luna, & Peracchio, 2004). The important value of semiotics lies in uncovering the relationship between such relatively stable, underlying set and a larger, more changeable set of their manifestations (i.e., possible sounds in a language; Larsen et al., 2004; Mick, 1986; Saint-Martin, 1990).

One way to classify sounds and, consequently, phonetic symbolism effects is based on distinctions within vowel (i.e., front vs. back) and within consonants (fricatives vs. stops). Klink (2000) shows that brand names containing front (back) vowels may elicit perceptions such as smallness (largeness) or lightness (heaviness). Similarly, fricative (vs. stop) consonants help elicit the idea of smaller (rather than bigger) sizes, as well as femininity (rather than masculinity) concepts (Klink, 2000). Yorkston and Menon (2004) extend Klink's findings by showing that the cues provided about the attribute dimensions of the product may influence consumers' attitude towards the brand, as well as their purchase intentions. Most recently, research suggests that the fit between meanings conveyed by the sound of the brand name and product attributes enhances consumer preference (Lowrey & Shrum, 2007) as well as memory for brand names (Luna et al., 2013).

Just like sounds, sentence syntax (i.e., sentences in English) is the result of the combination of only 10 basic sentence patterns (Kolln, 1990). Nevertheless, as studies rooted in semiotics suggest, even slight differences might affect the meaning conveyed (Larsen et al., 2004). For example, consider two sentences strictly equivalent in content yet different in terms of the extent to which they deviate from regular spelling of its words: *See you tomorrow* versus *C u 2morrow*. The sentence which deviates more from a "normal" spelling, or even word order, will be harder to process and thus require more cognitive resources (Chomsky, 1957; Larsen et al., 2004). In this light, a semiotic approach might be useful to understand the effects of unusual spellings for brand names or abbreviations, rhymes, and phonetic symbolism used in slogans or even product reviews. Thus, the formation of brand associations may be influenced by spelling characteristics of brand elements. Returning to the example above, the meaning conveyed by "see you tomorrow" might not be the same as the meaning implied by "C u 2morrow" (RQ_{1bii}).

2.1.3. Comparing brands with one another

Related to how individuals categorize a brand and its product is the way they relate one brand to another, for example, in the case of brand alliances, ingredient branding, co-branding, and sub-branding. Both psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics approaches could provide some insight on consumers' inter-brand perceptions. For instance, from a sociolinguistics point of view, co-branding or brand alliances among brand names that have a different language origin (e.g., the "Italian-German" Armani-Mercedes Benz clothing collection) might be evaluated differently depending on the attitude individuals have toward speakers of the other language and/or associations tied to the language itself (RQ_{1ci}).

From a psycholinguistic perspective, some studies have suggested that script complexity, often referred to as "readability" measures, adversely affects advertising recall and recognition, but only for those consumers who are less involved with the product category (Lowrey, 2006; Metoyer-Duran, 1993). Consequently, in the case of sub-branding or of ingredient branding, we would expect that the complexity of brand names when put next to each other would directly affect consumers' ability to recall them but only if their level of involvement is low and/or cognitive load is high (RQ_{1cii}).

Brand linguistics research in this area of branding is not as rich as in others, so the examination of how language influences the way consumers compare one brand to another emerges as a potential opportunity for future research.

P₁: The process of identifying a brand is influenced by brand linguistic factors. In particular:

P_{1a}: Identifying a brand and its category is influenced (i) by language-based categorizations and, (ii) for bilingual consumers, by their degree of acculturation.

P_{1b}: Forming brand associations is influenced (i) by the presence of phonetic symbolism, (ii) by spelling characteristics of brand elements, and (iii) by the greater context in which these associations are formed (i.e., linguistic corpus of the language).

P_{1c}: Comparing brands with one another is influenced (i) by the attitude individuals have toward the other language if the brands compared have a different language origin and (ii) by script complexity.

2.2. Experiencing

The process of experiencing a brand refers primarily to multi-sensory perceptions (i.e., through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch), emotional connections, and/or a result of consumers' actions and interactions with the brand (Schmitt, 2012).

2.2.1. Multi-sensory perceptions

From a sensorial point of view, consumers rarely experience a brand in one sensory modality (e.g., scent) without being exposed to other sensory cues (e.g., brand names). Although recent studies have been exploring some of these cross-modality effects on consumer perceptions, a promising avenue for future research regards how the auditory qualities of language interact with information received through other senses. For instance, the sound of brand names and the scent of a product could interact to affect brand choice and memory, such that the positive effects of product scent on consumers' memory and choice vary depending on whether the meaning conveyed by the sound of the brand name is congruent with the desired traits of the product category. Thus, when scent is an important selling point in a product (e.g., candles), the brand name should be congruent with the category to enhance the consumer appreciation of the scent, as it improves consumers memory and positively affects choice. However, for products with an inherently pungent odor (e.g. nail polish, blue cheese), marketers may benefit from incongruent brand names, so that the influence of unpleasant olfactory cues on consumer responses is attenuated. Thus, auditory qualities of language, such as spelling characteristics, may moderate the effects of product scents on consumer perceptions (RQ_{2ai}).

Literature on picture-text interaction in logos (Houston, Childers, & Heckler, 1987; McQuarrie & Mick, 1992) offers a natural extension for these effects. Previous research has examined the semantic fit of brand names and visual elements of a logo, but has not examined the fit of visual elements with the sound characteristics of a brand name. One would expect that visual elements of a logo (e.g., a drawing of a TV set) could cue the intended brand spelling ("TiVo" instead of "Teevough"), and with them certain meanings (experts in TV) that would not be present with alternative spellings, lead to perhaps greater memory for the brand (creates a link among visual image, visual spelling and product category), more positive attitudes, or even a more satisfying user experience. Thus, it is possible that auditory qualities of language, such as spelling characteristics of a brand name, may moderate the effects of visual processing on consumer perceptions (RQ_{2aii}). As a result, a fuller experience is achieved when the information received from all senses is congruent semantically (a "harmony of the senses" effect of sorts).

Spelling is itself a cross-modality phenomenon, in that sounds are transcribed into visual signs. Recent psycholinguistic-based research (Luna et al., 2013) illustrates how spelling-related characteristics of brand names and factors related to the context in which brand names are presented (e.g., spelling primes) will make the brands more or less memorable. The authors show that how a brand name is spelled will influence whether consumers remember it at the store or when they are searching for it online. Moreover, they find that when a person hears about a new brand with an ambiguous spelling, like the detergent Gain (which could be spelled Gane or Gain), they will remember it better than if the brand is easily spelled. Yet, it is not clear whether these rules would still apply for bilingual individuals. Would these findings replicate within a multilingual context, such as the web, which recurrently imposes individuals to code-switch from one language to another? In such cases, the activated mental frames and related code-switching may moderate the interaction between visual and auditory processing on consumer perceptions (RQ_{2aiii}).

2.2.2. Emotional connection

In addition to providing multisensorial experiences, brands might also evoke emotional connections. Words, especially those in advertising, reflect dominant emotions of time and place in history and they also evoke emotions to connect consumers to ads and the brands being advertised (Lefkowitz, 2003). Yet, there has been very little research on the relationships between language, emotions, and brands. One exception is represented by the work of Puntoni, de Langhe, and Van Osselaer (2009). In this study, the authors found that texts (such as advertising slogans) in a person's native language are perceived as more emotional than texts in a second language. Similarly, De Langhe, Puntoni, Fernandes, and Van Osselaer (2011) show that bilinguals tend to provide more extreme ratings on scales appearing in their second language versus in their first language, presumably because words in an individual's native language are intrinsically more emotional. These findings evoke a number of research questions about the relationship between language and emotion as they related to brands. For instance, can the tone of voice of a brand- as expressed through the order of words chosen, the words themselves, their rhythm, and pace evoke different emotions? Can colloquial (vs. formal) language favor people to forge an emotional connection with the brand (RQ_{2bi})?

In the context of service encounters, a number of studies have explored the role of auditory cues, such as the accent of a communication source (i.e., salesperson), on the receiver's evaluations (Wang, Arndt, Singh, Biernat, & Liu, 2013), purchase intentions, and overall perceptions (DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 1996). These findings show that a salesperson with a standard accent or dialect is perceived more favorably and inspires more favorable purchase intentions than foreign-accented salespersons. Similarly, could different accents generate unique emotional responses? For example, when speaking English, could omitting certain sounds (e.g., "h" from the beginning of words as per an Italian accent) or emphasizing some other sounds (e.g., "f" in place of "v" as per a German accent) favor an emotional connection with the communication source representing the brand? Thus, we suggest that auditory cues, such as the accent of a communication source, may significantly influence consumer emotional connections with the brand (RQ_{2bii}).

2.2.3. Actions and interactions

Brands can lead consumers to action through language. For instance, research in verbal framing has found that assertive messages (e.g., Greenpeace's "Stop the catastrophe") versus more gentle phrases (e.g., "Please be considerate. Recycle") can be more powerful in motivating consumers toward compliance only if the issue at hand is perceived as important (Kronrod et al., 2012). In a similar light, Patrick and Hagtvedt (2012) show that consumers' use of an empowering expression ("I don't") versus a non-empowering expression ("I can't") affects their product choices and task persistence. A notion related to empowerment is agency. For instance, is it the product, the consumer, or the marketer that solves consumer needs? How a message is worded,

giving agency to one or another, will impact the value that consumers place in the brand. This effect may interact with the perceived self-efficacy of consumers (Bandura, 1997), locus of control (Rotter, 1954, 1990) or any other agency-related construct. Thus, verbal framing may moderate the effects of agency-related constructs on consumer actions and interactions (RQ_{2Ciii}).

Another process through which consumers experience brands is by actively interacting with them (Schmitt, 2012). A consumer linguistics perspective could be particularly helpful in observing two main settings in which such interaction occurs: retail environments and digital media. Service encounters naturally imply a fundamental role of language by their interactive nature between the service provider and the consumer (Holmqvist & Grönroos, 2012). Yet, little theory-based work has examined the use of language in service encounters. There are, however, insightful studies based on comprehensive ethnographic methods of the experience, like Schau, Dellande, and Gilly (2007). In the latter study, the authors examined the practice of code-switching in a service environment, and found differences in the outcomes of switching language (English-Spanish) versus switching dialect (Standard English-Vernacular English), in relation to their deviation from a scripted encounter. From a sociolinguistic point of view, one might wonder whether the linguistic identity of a brand increases/decreases the willingness of consumers to interact with the brand (RQ_{2Ci}).

The area of customer interactions is in need of further research, as interactions with customers now occur even more frequently in an online context. These interactions can take the form of synchronous online chats with customer service representatives or artificial intelligence agents, or asynchronous email correspondence. One relevant area with virtually no research conducted in the consumer behavior literature relates to the fact that nonverbal cues are removed from online communications, so verbal language takes an even more central role. Moreover, the signaling cues of nonverbal communications, that in a person-to-person interaction help make meaning of, can be at least partially substituted through other signaling strategies, such as the time to respond to an inquiry. If a brand responds immediately to a social media criticism by a consumer, for example, it signals customer-friendliness and responsiveness (Walther, 2006). Moreover, response times and the language of the response itself might interact, as attitudes toward a language and cultural values and expectations are cued by the language used. Thus, less efficient response times might be more (or less) tolerated depending on the language used in the interaction (RQ_{2Civ}). Such effects must still be addressed from a theoretical and practical perspective.

Similarly, the implications of interactions with artificial intelligence agents beg for further research, not only in text-based online communications, but also in voice-based systems, like Apple's Siri. Has the form in which customers use language changed to accommodate to interactions with software systems capable of natural-language processing? Given the relationship between language and cognition (Whorf, 1956), if we simplify our language, do we also simplify our product expectations, our customer choice and satisfaction criteria? In the same light, the platforms used by customers to interact with the brand have changed dramatically over the last decade. For instance, desktop computers are no longer the norm as consumers migrate to mobile devices to search for information online. Does the change in platform bring with it a change in language? Should brands use a consistent tone of voice or change it to adapt to different environmental factors or platforms? Some of the emerging literature on online communications documents how consumers use emoticons and abbreviations (Walther, 2006) but perhaps more significant for consumer research may be the creation of a new, stripped down, language to describe consumers' experiences. Thus, the simplification of language by dropping descriptors of experiences and products may have certain implications for marketing theory and practice. As a result, we would expect the simplification of language and/or the choice of digital platform to directly influence consumer expectations and thus interactions (RQ_{2Cii}, RQ_{2Civ}). For instance, less nuanced, more superficial language might lead to putting more weight on social, superficial attributes of the brand.

Relatedly, it is possible that millennials' information processing style is influenced by the type of language used in microblogging (e.g., Twitter, Snapchat or other messaging apps). That is, the language is detached from multisensorial cues, as opposed to face-to-face communications or even phone conversations. For instance, people who mostly use online platforms for communicating may not be able to relate cross-domain information easily, leading to poor comprehension of the analogies typically used in new product introductions (Gregan-Paxton, Hibbard, Brunel, & Azar, 2002). In sum, the area of customer interactions is in dire need of further theoretical language-based research in order to understand the experience of the contemporary consumer.

P₂: The process of experiencing a brand is influenced by brand linguistic factors. In particular:

P_{2a}: Multi-sensory perceptions are influenced (i) by linguistic components embedded in the verbal or visual presentation of brands, (ii) by the interaction among senses, and (iii) by the activated mental frames.

P_{2b}: Emotional connections to brands are influenced (i) by the linguistic identity of a brand and (ii) by auditory cues.

P_{2c}: Consumers' actions and interactions with brands are influenced (i) by the linguistic identity of a brand, (ii) by the degree of language simplification, (iii) by the type of verbal framing used within the interactions, and (iv) by the linguistic factors determined by the medium in which the interactions occur.

2.3. Integrating

Integrating brand information involves combining all information about a brand into one whole concept, as reflected in brand personality and brand relationships (Schmitt, 2012).

2.3.1. Brand personality

This is an important issue from a brand linguistics perspective because the personality of the brand will dictate the kind of language, including the tone of voice that should be used in all its communications (Doig, 2012). If a brand is positioned as solid,

established, trustworthy, it should certainly use a different language than a brand that is positioned as creative, irreverent, and trendy. Differences will include length of sentences and type of vocabulary, use of contractions, a formal versus informal tone, type of punctuation, or even emoticons and (non) use of literary devices, such as alliteration among others. Similarly, if the brand were to be positioned as a global powerhouse, it would likely use some English in its communications (for example, in its tagline, like “Life is Good” or “Connecting People”), and its name would be different from a brand positioned as a local alternative (Seven Up vs. La Casera, a Spanish brand similar in attributes to diet Seven Up). Thus, brand personality is shaped by the linguistic identity of a brand, which includes its choice of language and vocabulary, the tone of voice, the type of literary devices used, as well as the punctuation (RQ_{3ai}).

Unique structures of languages and related psycholinguistic dynamics might shed light on some interesting yet unexplored topics that future research on brand personality might want to investigate. For instance, the use of tone differences belonging to the Chinese languages might interact with dynamics related to brand personality. To illustrate, consider that Mandarin has very few possible syllables (approximately 400 vs. 12,000 in English). As a result, there are many words with the same sound expressing different meanings. Four pitched tones and a “toneless” tone are thus used to identify the intended meaning of these homophones. For instance, the same sound might have completely different meanings depending on whether it is pronounced with a first tone, which can be compared to a high note sang in English, or with a third tone, which is typically low and extended. This distinctive feature of Chinese may moderate the effects of brand personality traits such as excitement and sincerity. For example, advertising claims might be perceived as more accurate if the prevailing tone of such claims matches the personality of the brand, thus making a first tone particularly well fitting for exciting brands and a toneless or a third tone more appropriate for a calm one (RQ_{3aii}).

Another language-specific feature relates to the use of two genders (masculine and feminine) for noun and adjectives, which characterizes Romance languages (e.g., Italian, Spanish, and French; Kess, 1993). Research has already shown that a formal gender system can affect brand recall. In fact, consumers better recall the names of new brands when the gender of the names agrees with the perceived gender of their product class, with the peculiarity that Spanish has a formal gender classification based on the structure of the word itself (e.g., a noun ending in “a” usually is considered feminine while one ending in “o” is masculine), whereas English has a semantic gender system where gender is based on the word’s meaning (e.g., a ship is traditionally thought of as female, referred to as she, and given a feminine name; Yorkston & de Mello, 2005). Despite this and very few other exceptions, there is a dearth of research investigating further effects of formal gender. Masculine versus feminine traits have been found to characterize brand personalities, and research suggests that these traits significantly influence consumers’ perceptions and evaluations (Aaker, 1997; Grohmann, 2009). Therefore, it might be worth investigating whether the effects of masculinity and femininity brand personality traits are moderated by language-specific features, such as the presence (vs. absence) of gender usage within the language (e.g., Spanish, Italian, and French vs. English). Thus, speakers of languages such as Italian might be more receptive (e.g., as evidenced by recall or evaluations) to gender personality traits than might English speakers (RQ_{3aii}).

The idea of having a set of human-like characteristics that identifies a brand fits well with a semiotic perspective. Consider iconic brands, which tend to have a very well established personality. Typically, this is the case of brands that become an expression of “particular values held dear by some members of a society” (Holt, 2004, p. 4). By its very focus of inquiry, the Peircean approach lends itself more naturally to the study of the process of how iconic brands and language-as-a-symbol of these brands influences consumption behavior. In this light, a brand can be conceptualized as a system of signs and symbols that engage consumers in an imaginary or symbolic process.

In addition, the psycholinguistic literature on analogical processing (Gentner, 1983) could be tapped to examine what attributes are indeed transferred to the target domain (personality) from the base domain (brand). Once the analogy is inferred by the consumer—that is, once the consumer “gets” what kind of a person the brand would be based on the language it uses, which attributes are inferred directly and what features of language are most effective in helping consumers map key attributes from one domain to the other? Moreover, to what extent does the tone of messages (e.g., assertive vs. gentle) or of voice of the brand impact perceptions of its personality? Interestingly, a semiotic perspective suggests that the answer to these questions might depend on the greater competitive context (Kehret-Ward, 1982; Mick, 1986), as well as consumers’ culture and mindset (Rose, 1995). For instance, Kehret-Ward (1982) argues that the increasing number of product tags such as “no artificial sweeteners,” “light,” “low-fat content,” “more filling” imply that competitors’ products are “with artificial sweeteners,” “highly caloric,” with “high-fat content,” or “less-filling,” despite the competing products remaining unchanged. Eventually, the communication value of these increasing number of tags vanishes by the contradicting meanings jointly implied (e.g., is “low-fat content” better because of the lower number of calories or worse because “less filling”; Mick, 1986). Thus, the efficacy of brand personality traits, as supported by the brand’s linguistic identity, might vary depending on the linguistic identity of competing brands. In this light, brand elements should be carefully designed with the most direct competitors in mind (RQ_{3aiii}).

In a similar fashion, Saint-Martin (1990) and Larsen et al. (2004) proposed a micro-semiotic approach to the analysis of visual communication elements, which essentially suggests that the properties of an image, like those of a sound, are determined by a set of basic visual attributes that need to be discussed in the context of higher-order meaning-making processes. Thus, for instance, a visual ad might be more effective because “it stands out” from its immediate context (e.g., when a camera cut juxtaposes semantically inconsistent icons), or from the perceiver’s prior expectations (e.g., when an unusual camera angle dramatically alters an object’s appearance; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Larsen et al., 2004, p. 103) because of the increased attention it generates. In this light, it would be interesting to explore whether the personality of a brand is perceived differently as a function of the modality in which words are perceived (e.g., depending on whether consumers hear about the brand through word of mouth or read about it on online consumers reviews; RQ_{3aiv}). In sum, brands and their elements are a complex fusion of signs and these micro-

approaches to coding them, combined with studies rooted in psycholinguistics, offer exciting new research insights for their understanding.

2.3.2. Brand relationships

When forming relationships with brands, consumers may evaluate the brand and its actions in terms of whether the actions violate or conform to the norms of their relationship with that brand (Aggarwal, 2004). Interestingly, such norms often mirror those of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998). Aggarwal (2004) highlights two main types of relationships: exchange relationships, where the motivation for giving a benefit to the counterpart is to get something back in return, and communal relationships, where individuals act toward the other in a way that goes beyond self-interests.

Sociolinguistics could further the understanding of such a framework, as the linguistic identity of the brand may moderate the effects of an adherence to or a violation of relationship norms on the appraisal of the brand. For instance, Chinese brand names may carry significant cultural meanings (Li & Shooshtari, 2003). “Ben Chi,” the Chinese name for “Mercedes Benz,” translates into “dashing speed,” as that of a passing thunder. Therefore, it carries Chinese natives’ conceptions of masculinity. The Chinese brand name for Ford Mustang, instead, is “Bao Ma,” which means “treasure horse,” which typically expresses femininity (Li & Shooshtari, 2003). To the extent that individuals have gender bias in their expectations for forgiveness (Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008), their reaction to brand relationship transactions may vary not only as a function of their type of relationship with the brand but also depending on the brand’s linguistically marked gender (RQ_{3bii}). Furthermore, the language employed to interact with the consumer in particular occasions may offset the negativity of actions. For instance, if a brand has formed a relationship as a “lover” with consumers, they may forgive the brand if the language used after a transgression is reminiscent of courtship and romance (RQ_{3bi}).

Another case in which consumer-brand relationships and interpersonal relationships might interact is when brands are positioned or promoted through metaphors as means to reinforce desirable social relationships (e.g., DeBeers’s “Say it with diamonds” campaign). In such cases, consumers might find that the brand signifies a particular interpersonal relationship because, for example, it was a gift. While the benefits of such positioning are clear from a semiotics perspective, recent research suggests that it might backfire as dynamics within the interpersonal relationships (e.g., a break-up) might consistently impact the consumer-brand relationship (Carnevale, 2012). From a linguistic point of view, this suggests that rather than choosing metaphors and other brand elements that signify the brand as a social relationship enabler, it might be beneficial to also rely on vocabulary and figures of speech that highlight an independent consumer-brand relationship (e.g., self-reward claims; RQ_{3bi}).

P₃: The process of integrating information about a brand is influenced by brand linguistic factors. In particular:

P_{3a}: Brand personality is influenced (i) by the linguistic identity of a brand and its efficacy is influenced (ii) by structural properties of the language, (iii) by the linguistic identity of competing brands, and (iv) by the modality in which consumers learn about the brand.

P_{3b}: Brand relationships and their dynamics are influenced (i) by the linguistic identity of a brand and (ii) by its linguistically marked gender.

2.4. Signifying

Signifying refers to the ability of brands to act as signifiers that transfer meaning (Mick, 1986; Schmitt, 2012). Consumers appropriate such meanings by using brands as an identity signal and symbol (e.g., Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012; Schmitt, 2012).

2.4.1. Brand symbolism

Much work on brand symbolism is based on research in semiotics (Mick, 1986; Schmitt, 2012). The symbolic nature of brand names and of other brand elements has led to numerous efforts on behalf of semiotic researchers to classify them according to meaningful functions. In this perspective, a brand has been defined as a system of signs and symbols that fulfills, even if in a symbolic way, consumers’ emotional, relational and/or sense of belonging needs. Thus, the semiotic dimension of brands is instrumental to building awareness, positive associations, and long-term customer loyalty (Oswald, 1996). Brand linguistics can be particularly useful in this respect, bringing in extra-semiotic dimensions; that is, a more holistic point of view. For instance, a psycholinguistic viewpoint would suggest that the associations activated by the brand’s language (or, in semiotic terms, the signified elements) will be culturally-specific (RQ_{4ai}, RQ_{4aiiv}). For example, yellow, the color of MacDonalds golden arches, signifies royalty in China, courage in Japan, and sadness in Greece. Moreover, research rooted in psycholinguistics could tackle how consumers abstract personality characteristics from the tone of voice of the language used in advertising, social media, or even from user-generated comments posted on blogs. Similarly, it would be interesting to explore whether the act of writing online reviews or sharing experiences by writing on social media might infuse a collectively-derived meaning into brands, which then becomes part of the individual identity. In other words, does the writing style and tone of voice that consumers use online become part of the brand identity and, thus, of the meanings it symbolizes (RQ_{4aiii})?

Brand names and logos are clearly among the most important vehicles of meanings within a brand’s communication strategies (Heilbrunn, 1998a, 1998b; Lipovetsky & Roux, 2003; Mick et al., 2004; Scott, 1993; Semprini, 1996; Zhang, 1997). Yet, semiotics has expanded the study of communications at a variety of other levels of sign analysis, from visual attributes such as angles

and shapes to verbal and visual rhetorical figures used in ads (Mick et al., 2004). A rhetorical figure is a word or a phrase that artfully deviates from the audience expectation (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). Rhetorical figures act as stylistic devices that may attract interest to the message being transmitted (McQuarrie & Mick, 1999). Examples of rhetorical figures include rhymes, antithesis, puns, and metaphors. Their widespread use is easily traceable in our daily language, as well as in advertising. The phrase “a child needs room to grow” or the ad claim “today Slim at very slim price” may provide some examples. Interestingly, advertising music (e.g., jingles) has also been conceptualized as a meaningful, language-like component of advertising that contributes to the rhetorical task in various ways (Scott, 1990). Furthermore, Scott (1992; Scott & Vargas, 2007) was among the first scholars to conceptualize visual rhetorical figures, and in general advertising images, as symbolic artifacts constructed from the conventions of a particular culture. Thus, pictures are actively processed, rather than perceived in a peripheral or automatic way (Scott, 1994a, 1994b). Visual rhetorical figures play an important, if not fundamental role in advertising, considering that they are used in 74% of magazine ads (Leigh, 1994). This tendency is not expected to decrease, as the percentage of visual rhetorical figures used in ads almost doubled in the last fifty years of the twenty-first century (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004).

The extensive use in advertising of both verbal and visual rhetorical figures finds a theoretical “dominant explanation” (Ahluwalia & Burnkrant, 2004, p. 26) in the elaboration consumers engage into as a reaction to an artful deviation, a veer from expectations (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996) whose interest value stimulates deeper levels of processing (Morgan & Reichert, 1999) and curiosity about the brand (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991). In other words, consumers gain pleasure in elaborating upon a picture that artfully deviates from what expected and thus tend to like messages containing them (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). Most recently, McQuarrie and Mick (2003) suggest that rhetorical figures might foster consumers' memory too, as ads containing rhetorical figures are better remembered than those without such figures. There exists one caveat, however; under directed (rather than incidental) exposure, verbal figures tend to outperform visual figures.

The fact that consumers respond positively to “unexpected” linguistic signs such as rhetorical figures suggests that there might be other cases in which similar effects occur. These include, for instance, structural aspect of languages, such as the prevailing direction of the script in which a language is written. More specifically, scripts such as those used for English and for other Latin alphabet-based languages typically follow a left-to-right direction. However, in other cases such as Arabic and Hebrew, the opposite direction is followed (i.e., right to left). We suggest that the directionality of a language script should be taken into consideration when studying the effectiveness of marketing communications such as ads. Perceptually, items placed on the left-hand side will be less expected, and perhaps capture more attention in Arabic than in English. Symbolically, they may be perceived as more important (RQ_{4a11}).

2.4.2. Brands as identity signals

From a sociolinguistics standpoint, languages can be used to cue different identities (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Luna et al., 2008) and enhance self-concept. Therefore, it might be beneficial to match the brand identity with the identity cued by the language. From a semiotic point of view, brands-as-symbols are like linguistic units and, as such, able to communicate information about consumers' identities. For example, Kehret-Ward (1982) and Kehret-Ward et al. (1985) explored how children perceive brands as conveyers of information about themselves and others. They showed that brands are linguistic units in that meaning emerges from differences between them. Such differences, associated with their owners, ultimately signal various identity cues. Thus, the semantic properties of brands arise directly from perceived syntactic relations between brands (Mick, 1986).

Research in psycholinguistics suggests that even relatively small elements of language such as individual letters can cue identity. Specifically, research has uncovered a subconscious tendency to prefer things that resemble oneself (Pelham, Carvallo, & Jones, 2005) including brand names that contain one's own name letters (Brendl, Chattopadhyay, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2005). For example, Denise is more likely to choose Dawn dishwashing liquid and Dove chocolates than she is to select dishwashing liquid and chocolate brands beginning with different letters. At the same time, consumers can distance themselves from negatively valenced name letter targets when mental resources are available thus avoiding this tendency (Kachersky, 2011). In a similar yet semiotic perspective, Damak (1996) showed that adults' preferences for perfume bottles reflected individuals' perceived body shape and their satisfaction with that shape. Specifically, those who were relatively more satisfied (dissatisfied) with their bodies, tended to prefer bottle shapes physically similar to their own (ideal) body shape.

As the increasing use of pronoun brand nomenclature might suggest (e.g., iPhone, MySpace, YouTube), pronouns are yet another set of language elements that have been shown to significantly affect consumers perceptions (Kachersky & Palermo, 2013; Wiebenga & Fennis, 2012). For example, research has shown that “i-” brand names generate favorable consumer response via narrative self-referencing, but only when the root word of the brand is a verb (e.g., iRead). On the contrary, “my” brand names produce favorable consumer response via feelings of subjective ownership, but only when the brand root word is a noun (e.g., myReader; Kachersky & Palermo, 2013). Most recently, Kachersky and Carnevale (2015) build on these findings by incorporating product positioning. Specifically, they show that “I” brand names garner more favorable responses only when the brand is positioned on personal benefits, whereas “you” brands garner more favorable consumer responses when the brand is positioned on social benefits. Would these effects be moderated by whether the brand identity fits with the identity cued by the language (RQ_{4b})?

P₄: The process of signifying is influenced by brand linguistic factors. In particular:

P_{4a}: Brand symbolism is influenced (i) by the linguistic identity of a brand and of its elements, (ii) by the structural properties of the language, (iii) by the consumer's own tone of voice and writing style, and (iv) by the consumer's cultural background.

P_{4b}: Brands as identity signals are influenced by the identity cued by the language, including its smallest units (i.e., letters).

2.5. Connecting

Consumers relate to brands by connecting via brand attitude and attachment, as well as brand community (Schmitt, 2012).

2.5.1. Brand attitude and attachment

In light of the naturally self-centered nature of attitude and attachment processes (Schmitt, 2012), research inspired by psycholinguistic theories can expand our understanding of such dynamics (e.g., via the formation of associations—see “identity” section for a detailed discussion). Processing fluency is a domain that offers fertile ground for future brand linguistics research relating to attitude formation. Typically, processing fluency has been shown to have an overall positive effect on stimuli evaluation and attitude (Jacoby & Dallas, 1981; Reber, Winkielman, & Schwarz, 1998; Seamon et al., 1995). A closer look at the construct, however, reveals that processing fluency may be perceptual or conceptual in nature (Lee & Labroo, 2004; Tulving & Schacter, 1990).

Perceptual fluency reflects the ease with which consumers can identify and process target stimuli (Lee & Labroo, 2004). Conceptual fluency, on the other hand, pertains to the process of meaning and is more indicative of the ease with which the target’s meaning comes to consumers’ mind. The difference between these two constructs is important as it suggests that they might have different antecedents and consequences (Lee, 2002; Tulving & Schacter, 1990). For instance, attention and elaboration have been shown to influence conceptual fluency but not perceptual fluency (Eich, 1984; Hamann, 1990; Lee & Labroo, 2004). Modality shifts and presentation contexts however, have been shown to impact only perceptual fluency (Jacoby & Dallas, 1981; Lee & Labroo, 2004). Thus, for bilingual individuals, the language in which they hear or read a message in, for example, an ad, might influence only their perceptual fluency whereas the knowledge they gain and the related conceptual fluency should be independent of the brand’s language. This could mean a bias in the retrieval of information encoded in a particular language such that only information encoded in the same language used in retrieval is used when constructing attitudes or making judgments. This could potentially lead to errors in judgment (Raghubir & Menon, 1998). In a single-language paradigm, perceptual fluency is also relevant in that consumers exposed to certain types of sounds, words, or even types of words (e.g., nouns vs. verbs) may be more likely to retrieve information associated with that stimuli more easily, thus influencing attitudes toward a brand (RQ_{5ai}).

Brand attitude has also been investigated in the context of how the writing system of a language influences brand name perceptions. The issue is particularly relevant when studying how to most effectively translate brand names and marketing communications, especially if the translation is from a language characterized by a phonographic-based writing system such as English to a logographic-based system such as Chinese. The main challenge is that the translation can be done using three different methods: phonetic (by sound), semantic (by meaning) or phonosemantic (by sound and meaning; e.g., Nida & Tabert, 1969; Zhang et al., 2003). For instance, the Chinese name for Rolls-Royce sounds similar to its English version whereas the brand General Electric was translated in Chinese according to its meaning (“tong-yong-dian-qi”, which is exactly the direct translation of its English name). Alternatively, other brands were translated in a way that would resemble both the original sound and meaning. For instance, the Chinese name for Subway sounds like its original English name (‘sai-bai-wei’) and also conveys positive meanings to consumers (i.e., ‘better than 100 tastes’). Similarly, LinkedIn (“ling-ying”) and Coca-Cola (“Kekoukele”) translate into “the leading elites” and “good to drink and to make you happy,” respectively. Typically, the packaging of Western products introduced in the Chinese market includes both the original brand name and its translation (Zhang et al., 2003). The superiority of one translation method versus the others depends on the emphasis given to the original name (versus its translation) and on the method of translation used previously by brands in the same product category (Zhang & Schmitt, 2001; Zhang et al., 2003).

Research needs to also take into account consumers who are bilingual and biscriptal; that is, individuals who can speak and write in both an alphabetic and a character-based system such as Chinese. For instance, Tavassoli and Han (2002) found that visual cues that support the verbal information in an ad such as color logos are most effective when the marketer uses the character-based Chinese style of writing, whereas auditory cues such as jingles or other sounds supporting the verbal information work better with the English alphabet. The authors theorize that the processing of words written in alphabetic scripts relies more heavily on the phonological loop of working memory. In contrast, the processing of words written in character-based scripts relies more on visual working memory. Therefore, a caveat emerges from Tavassoli and Han (2001): auditory contextual interference (stimuli that are not related to the target verbal information) is higher for alphabetic words than for character-based words, and vice versa for visual distracters. This suggests, for example, that ads containing alphabetic words should be designed to minimize the use of distracting auditory information, which may potentially compete for the cognitive resources required in order to learn printed alphabetic information. In contrast, ads containing character-based words should be designed to minimize the use of distracting graphics or complex visual displays. Hence, different stimuli could interfere with the ability of a biscriptal to process an ad (or any other verbal stimulus) depending on the language/script in which it is written. In a similar light, information from other senses (olfactory, haptic, taste) might be used to mitigate auditory interference for alphabetic scripts and visual interference for logographic scripts (RQ_{5ai}).

Another way in which the structure of language might influence brand perceptions relates to how languages are classified according to basic word order— that is, the dominant sequence of subject, verb, and object (Eifring & Theil, 2005). In subject-verb-object (SVO) languages such as English, Mandarin, and Russian, the most recurring structure is made of a subject, followed by a verb, and then an object (e.g., *I study English*). In subject-object-verb (SOV) languages (e.g., Japanese and Turkish), instead, the object typically precedes the verb (e.g., *Ben İngilizce öğreniyorum*). While there are other possible structures, SVO and SOV ones represent around three-quarters of the world’s languages (Eifring & Theil, 2005). Such distinction is important as it might shed light

on how individuals process information. The ordering of elements in a sentence reflects strong tendencies regarding the ordering of information in the speech flow. Placing the object before the verb (as in SOV languages) mirrors a fundamentally different way of ordering information in the speech flow than placing the verb before the object (as in SVO; Eifring & Theil, 2005). Hence, differences in basic word order might reflect different ways of thinking and therefore result in different reactions to persuasion attempts and thus attitude toward the brand (RQ_{5ai}). For example, individuals who are generally exposed to an SVO language might place more importance or be more influenced by action-oriented phrases than those most recurrently exposed to SOV languages because of the greater emphasis placed on verbs. Moreover, in a language such as Mandarin, which is generally an SOV language but does not require that speakers conform to its structure, individuals may be less influenced by language structure, or perhaps be more easily primed than in an SOV language with a stricter order (e.g., Turkish). For instance, verbs (vs. nouns) might lead to a more (less) implemental mindset (Chandran & Morwitz, 2005) for consumers in an SVO language than in an SOV language, depending on the language flexibility (e.g., Chinese vs. Turkish). This would ultimately impact actual consumer attitude and behaviors (e.g., clicking on an online ad or choosing a product instead of delaying action to consider alternative).

Psycholinguistics may explain some of the underlying processes to attitude formation, but will not fully explain changes in brand attitudes, which necessitate social-psychological concepts like acculturation, accommodation, and attitudes toward particular languages. In fact, sociolinguistic-based research has been informing the domain of language-triggered persuasion. Perhaps one of the most researched topics in the persuasion literature relevant to language is that of which language is most effective to influence the attitudes of a particular target market, particularly if it is a bilingual market (Koslow, Shamdasani, & Touchstone, 1994). In such markets, the degree of acculturation of the minority consumer into the majority culture has emerged as a consistent moderator of language effects on consumer behavior. For instance, in an investigation of advertising targeting U.S. Hispanics, Ueltschy and Krampf (1997) find that language and acculturation interact with respect to attitudes toward an ad. In particular, more assimilated Hispanics tend to like ads in English, and less assimilated Hispanics tend to prefer ads, and likely the brands promoted, in Spanish. We should note, however, that acculturation is not necessarily a linear process and that it not always results in the same outcome. Thus, a minority consumer could end up assimilated into the majority culture, or segregated from it (Berry, 1980; Lerman, Maldonado, & Luna, 2009; Penaloza, 1994).

Koslow et al. (1994) study another factor that interacts with language with respect to affect toward the brand: perceived accommodation, the belief by consumers that the advertiser is making an effort to communicate in their language. The authors conclude that such perceived advertiser sensitivity mediates the positive effects of using Spanish when targeting U.S. Hispanics. If consumers do not feel the advertiser is genuine in their use of language, attitudes will not benefit. Within multilingual communication platforms, such as online consumer hotel reviews, it might be interesting to explore whether consumers discount or put more emphasis on online comments when they are not written in their own language or when the country of origin of the writer is different from their own. We would expect those effects to depend on level of acculturation, accommodation attempts, or attitude toward that particular language (RQ_{5aii}, RQ_{5aiii}).

2.5.2. Brand community

Communities are currently receiving a great deal of attention from marketers, particularly due to consumers' ever-expanding use of social media and crowd-sourced review websites such as Yelp and TrustPilot. Unfortunately, sociolinguistics has to date contributed very little to the understanding of brand communities and, in general, of consumer-brand interactions within the context of social media. This calls for the need to further investigate how language might be used in social media, where communications choices include tone of voice, register, and even the language itself in the case of international brands. For example, should Hilton respond to Italian consumers' postings in Italian or in English when the consumer posted a heavily "accented" review on Yelp or TripAdvisor? This might depend on consumers' expectations about the language the brand would use and/or whether the brand is a multinational or a local company. Thus, brand community formation and reinforcement are influenced by a brand's linguistic identity, as well as consumer's related expectations (RQ_{5bi}). Sociolinguistic factors such as acculturation, accommodation, and attitude toward a language might also affect the weight given by consumers to others' opinions within a brand community (RQ_{5biii}).

In fact, social media has empowered consumers to set the tone for brand communications to take the lead in the dialog. Therefore, brands should become part of the conversation not as a director but as one more participant. How this is achieved linguistically needs to be studied. Is mimicking consumers' linguistic structures (lexical, syntactical, ...) the answer? How can brands assign linguistic leadership and thought leadership without stepping over the boundaries of consumer empowerment? Can the use of certain linguistic forms help walk this fine line? For instance, better attitudes might result from the use of forms like "I can't" instead of "I don't" (Kronrod et al., 2012), or assigning linguistic agency to the consumer rather than to the product (e.g., consumers can clean vs. the product can clean). In sum, linguistic structure and form should be given careful consideration when managing brand communities and verbal framing ought to be managed consistently; (RQ_{5bi}, RQ_{5bii}).

P₅: The process of consumers connecting to brands is influenced by brand linguistic factors. In particular:

P_{5a}: Brand attitude and attachment formation are influenced (i) by structural properties of the language used, and, for bilingual and/or biscriptal consumers, (ii) by the activated mental frames and (iii) by the levels of acculturation, accommodation, and attitude toward the language as well.

P_{5b}: Brand community formation and reinforcement are influenced (i) by the elements that make up the linguistic identity of a brand, (ii) by the linguistic identity of its community members, and (iii) by their levels of acculturation, accommodation, and attitude toward the language used.

We have now described how brand linguistic factors (psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and semiotics taken jointly) drive the processes underlying the consumer psychology of brands (identifying, experiencing, integrating, signifying, and connecting). Along the way, we have distilled several research propositions and identified a variety of specific questions that could be investigated by future research. Next, we provide several managerial implications.

3. Managerial implications

Our paper makes clear that much research remains to be done in order to understand the language-related dynamics that affect the consumer psychology of brands. In addition, the proposed framework also provides a reference for practitioners regarding the language-related aspects to consider when creating and maintaining meaningful brands. As in the previous sections, we organize the present section around the constructs of the psychology of brands (i.e., identify, experience, integrate, signify and connect with the brand).

3.1. Identifying

To help consumers identify a brand, managers should pay special attention to several linguistic constructs. First, as P_{1a} and P_{1b} highlight, the formation of brand associations and the identification of a brand and its category are both influenced by structural properties of the language, which should be therefore taken into careful consideration. For instance, managers should consider whether there are classifiers, and which broader group with which a product is traditionally associated. Even at a less structured level, differences across languages should be carefully considered. For example, English speakers tend to be more parsimonious in the number of words they use, whereas Spanish typically require 30% more words (Demetrakakes, 2003; Lerman, Morais, & Luna, in press). The choice of vocabulary within the product packaging perhaps should reflect such differences, even at the cost of having a number of packaging variations around the globe.

Second, as P_{1b} suggests, when facilitating the formation of brand associations, for instance by naming a new brand, managers should account for two additional brand linguistic factors; that is, spelling characteristics and symbolism carried by the mere sounds (e.g., front vs. back vowel), or, in general, by the meanings overall conveyed (e.g., reference to the product category within the coffee brand *Nescafé*), as they will impact consumer preferences and memory. For the same reason, special consideration should be given to the choice of other brand elements, such as product packaging. In fact, a certain combination of packaging elements might become a powerful “visual vocabulary,” which symbolizes the entire brand (Lerman et al., in press). Snickers brand managers were well aware of such power as in 2006 they replaced the word SNICKERS on the packaging with resemblance of hunger-related words (e.g., hungerectomy) in the attempt to associate in a unique way the consumption of the candy bar with hungry moments. Interestingly, this happened without jeopardizing the connection between the product category, the brand name, and its packaging.

Lastly, as for nearly any process underlying the consumer psychology of brands, managers should be aware of whether there are bilingual and or bicultural individuals among their target market as this is going to affect their mental frames, levels of acculturation, and attitude toward a language. As a result, the way in which consumers may identify a brand and its category and/or compare brands with one another might vary, especially if the brands have different language origins (P_{1a} , P_{1c}). Given the vast data marketers are collecting via their CRM methods, asking consumers a few questions about themselves and then categorizing them according to their cultural background is rather feasible.

3.2. Experiencing

When seeking to impact consumers' experiences with brands, marketers should prioritize a partially different combination of brand linguistic factors. To begin with, the experience with a brand includes its purchase and consumption, which typically involve multi-sensory perceptions. Thus, as P_{2a} suggests, the information received through other senses interacts with the auditory qualities of language. While there is ample space for future research to investigate in what ways these effects occur, marketers should keep in mind such interactions when designing the sensorial elements of the shopping experience and of the product (e.g., the sound of a product and its scent, the easiness with which the brand name can be translated into signs-aka, spelled, the music played in the point of purchase or service environment, the visual cues on the product packaging). Furthermore, given the multi-lingual context in which numerous brands operate (e.g., the web) managers ought to account for (and ideally leverage) the activated mental frames and related code-switching.

The linguistic identity of a brand plays a fundamental role on consumers' interactions with that brand (P_{2b} – P_{2c}). The order of words chosen, the words themselves, their rhythm, and tone of voice will all evoke different emotions and actions. Therefore, they should be selected carefully. Relatedly, in light of the strong influence of in-store interactions and two-way communication with salespeople, special consideration should be given to auditory cues, such as the accent of the salespeople. In fact, a standard accent is generally perceived more favorably because of a tendency to prefer the dominant social group. Even voice characteristics have been associated with the outcome of the service encounter. For instance, Peterson, Cannito, and Brown (1995) found that more successful salespeople articulate words rapidly and use phonetic contractions (e.g., hasn't instead of has not) as well as shorter pauses between words. In the same light, the communication style (e.g., using concrete, everyday language) may also matter such that service providers should adapt to the communication style of consumer (Lerman et al., in press; Williams & Spiro, 1985). Thus, especially within one-to-one service interactions, such as private banking, marketers might want to consider proper

training of “soft” linguistic skills, such as voice characteristics, “accent,” and interaction style. Compared to a person-to-person encounter, an online communication context will imply adopting nonverbal communications cues, such as response times or the use of emoticons (P_{2c}).

3.3. Integrating

To significantly influence consumers' integration of all brand information through language, and thus their perceptions of brand personality and brand relationships, managers should concentrate their efforts primarily around the brand's linguistic identity (P_{3a}–P_{3b}). This implies considering the complex system of signs and symbols that make a brand, from the brand names to other brand elements or the tone of voice used. Even the mere font choices for the logo or the packaging will convey specific brand personality traits (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006). For instance, a serif type of font (e.g., Times New Roman of the *Time* magazine) is perceived as elegant, charming, beautiful and interesting, whereas a sans serif type of font (e.g., Helvetica used in *Skype* software) is perceived as manly, powerful, and smart (Tantillo, Lorenzo-Aiss, & Mathisen, 1995). In this light, managers should choose fonts whose connotative meanings are congruent with both the product offering and the desired traits of brand personality (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006; Lerman et al., in press).

Similarly, the tone of voice used by the brand, as defined by the choices of words as well as other linguistic devices (e.g., rhymes), should reflect the desired brand personality. For example, the energy drink brand *Red Bull* and the “Gives you wings” tagline, as well as the language used in its advertising claims (e.g., “Einstein agrees: Redbull gives you energy”), well convey a tone of voice which is consistent with an exciting, powerful, and young brand personality. Furthermore, as highlighted in P_{3a}, it is important to point out that the impact of brand linguistic identity on brand personality perceptions will vary depending on the greater competitive context and the personality of competing brands. Hence, marketers ought to pretest and monitor whether the tone of voice and vocabulary are not only consistent with the desired traits but also differentiated enough from competing brands. In addition, marketers should consider structural properties of the language, such as a formal gender system or differences in the use of tones, to better understand consumers brand personality perceptions (P_{3a}). For the same reason, they should take into account how consumers learn about a brand (for example, do they hear about it through word of mouth or read about it in magazines) as the modality in which words are perceived might differently shape consumers perceptions (P_{3a}). When cultivating brand relationships, managers should also consider the type of relationship (e.g., communal, exchange, partnership) to select the most appropriate components forming the brand linguistic identity and highlight those personality traits (such as the linguistically marked gender) that may offset eventual violations of the relationship norms (P_{3b}).

3.4. Signifying

Many implications for the integrating phase apply to the signifying processes as well. When considering brands as symbols or as identity signal, as highlighted in the previous discussion, marketers should give careful consideration to brand names and other brand elements as well as the tone of voice. Particularly, as P_{4a} suggests, special consideration should be given to the use of verbal and visual rhetorical figures (e.g., metaphors) as they tend to stimulate deeper level of processing and curiosity about the brand thus further enhancing brand symbolism. Also, it is worth mentioning that the specific communication function served by a brand name should help convey the core strength of a brand and also help satisfy consumers' needs even if only in a symbolic way. For example, the arrow from “a to z” within the *Amazon* e-retailer logo suggests that the company sells everything and at the same time depicts a smile that their customers would experience by shopping on their website. Moreover, while considering signifying brand elements managers should take into account both the structural properties of the language, such as the directionality of the language script, and consumers' cultural background and own tone of voice and language used when referring to the brand as these will both influence and reflect brand symbolism (P_{4a}).

Lastly, when facilitating brands as identity signals, managers should be aware that languages can be used to cue different identities and enhance self-concept, even via relatively small elements of languages, such as individual letters or pronouns (P_{4b}).

3.5. Connecting

When facilitating consumers connecting with the brand managers might want to consider the structural properties of a language (e.g., its writing system or syntactic norms) which directly influence how consumer process information and develop consequent brand attitude and attachment (P_{5a}). Naturally, this implies that managers will also have to consider their target market cultural and linguistic background. The difference with signifying processes, however, is that sociolinguistic factors such as degree of acculturation and accommodation, as well as attitudes toward particular languages, play a significant role in shaping consumers' attitude toward the brand (P_{5a}). In fact, a common but faulty assumption among marketers is to consider that advertising and packaging should be in consumer's first language (e.g., Spanish) if that language is different from the dominant one spoken (e.g., English in the USA; Lerman et al., in press). However, research suggests that Spanish language advertising would not only signal solidarity with the Latino market but would also evoke insecurities about language usage and thus negatively affect toward the ad (Koslow et al., 1994), particularly if consumers are more assimilated to the dominant culture. While little research has looked at the effects of sociolinguistic factors on brand communities, it is likely that such factors will be fundamental to the success of community-building efforts as well (P_{5b}). Lastly, given consumers' active role in brand communities, especially virtual ones,

consumers' own linguistic structure and form should be given careful consideration when cultivating brand communities so that verbal framing and the linguistic identity of the brand in general can be managed consistently (P_{5b}).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we provide an integrative framework of language effects on the key psychological processes underlying the consumer psychology of brands. Despite the relevance of language on consumer responses to brands, no research to date had explicitly incorporated language into theories of branding. Thus, our research represents a first attempt to present a theoretical organizing framework of language effects on the consumer psychology of brands. By laying our framework, we delineate the domain of a new area of inquiry, Brand Linguistics, which is the interdisciplinary study of how language influences the consumer psychology of brands. Brand Linguistics takes models and findings from psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and semiotics and maps them to the consumer-brand relationship, creating new theory and perspectives on the processes underlying the consumer psychology of brands. As such, we can situate brand linguistics as a subdiscipline within consumer behavior (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010).

To unify and shape our general framework, we outlined a number of research propositions designed to guide future studies. Through these propositions we argue that the processes underlying the consumer-psychology of brands should be investigated in their entirety, as they are influenced by brand linguistic factors that reflect psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and semiotic perspectives. Moreover, the extant literature review suggests that each of these disciplines has helped inform only certain processes underlying the consumer-psychology of brands, thus leaving ample space for future studies.

Particularly, by clarifying how individuals process language, psycholinguistics has significantly enhanced our understanding of language effects within identifying, experiencing, and connecting processes. However, only a few, if any studies have explored how psycholinguistic factors, such as verbal framing, impact the way consumers integrate and signify the brand and its meaning. In a similar way, sociolinguistics has informed nearly all the processes, except for the integrating ones. This is unfortunate, as much work is needed to understand how the social identity of a brand might influence its perception (e.g., personality) and relationships. Semiotics, on the contrary, with its focus on how the signs of language can be manipulated to convey certain meanings, has furthered the understanding of how consumers identify a brand, signify it, or integrate all of its information. Yet, much work is needed in exploring how a semiotic interpretation might shed light on the way individuals experience brands (e.g., by clarifying the symbolic value of information perceived via other senses) and share these experiences within communities (e.g., via blog posts or reviews). Across all disciplines one of the most promising areas for future research on brand linguistics relates, in fact, to brand communities and online interactions in general.

Although much work remains to be done in terms of empirically investigating our propositions, we present a concrete example of how the propositions can propel future research. In light of the highlighted urge for further research, we choose to investigate connecting processes and, particularly, brand communities. More specifically, we look at the context of online communities, such as Tripadvisor, where crowd sourced reviews are central to the success of the website, as well as of the businesses subject of reviews. As suggested in P_{5b}, we argue that the success of these communities is influenced by a) the tone of voice and the verbal framing used by community members (e.g., what type of verbal framing prevails when discussing a given brand?), b) language used by community members (e.g., does the weight given by consumers to other reviews vary depending on the language used and the related attitude toward the language?), c) linguistic identity of the brand (e.g., is there any recurring “sign” that reflects a unique connection with the brand?). Given the respective psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and semiotic origin of these questions, a brand linguistic perspective entails a multi-method approach.

Thus, empirically, one might want to content analyze from a psycholinguistic perspective the reviews and track the number of self-referencing terms (e.g., I, my) versus other-referencing ones (e.g., friends, they, etc.) to verify whether the brand receives more positive reviews if consumers reflect in their language perceptions of a personally (vs. socially) relevant brand. In addition, a sociolinguistic approach might suggest to investigate whether votes on the reviews' “helpfulness” tend to be influenced by the language in which the reviews are written, demonstrated language skills, and cues hinting at the background of the reviewer (e.g., foreign vs. domestic name). Lastly, given the importance of “storytelling” to a thorough understanding of consumer psychology of brands (Escalas & Stern, 2003; Holt, 2004; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008), from a semiotic point of view one might want to analyze the texts of the reviews to understand whether a narrative versus argumentative style prevails for a given brand.

Research in brand linguistics is characterized, in the aggregate, by a multi-method approach. The consumer experience is influenced by a myriad of factors, so consumers must be studied from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of ways in order to be fully understood. Each of the disciplines that inform brand linguistics brings with it a rich research tradition that is carried to the consumer domain. Yet, many areas within brand linguistics remain largely unexplored. Our propositional inventory and integrative framework represent efforts to build a foundation for the systematic development of a theory of brand linguistics and the objective of our research is theory construction rather than theory testing.

At a more general level, this paper suggests an intriguing question: What is language in a branding context? Linguists would define language as a system of communication based upon words and the combination of words into sentences; they would also argue that it is characterized by (a) the double articulation of form and meaning, which means that the combination of a small set of sounds can represent an infinite number of meanings in a relatively arbitrary way, and (b) syntax (Mihaliček & Wilson, 2011). Therefore, some of the phenomena we discuss in this paper are not strictly “linguistic”—for instance, tone of voice or the interaction style. However, we can consider tone of voice or interaction style a suprasegmental that could be studied by pragmatics.

Appendix A

Table 1

Summary of research questions by process underlying the consumer psychology of brands.

Identifying	
Identifying the brand and its category	<p>May structural aspects of consumers' native language, as reflected in noun categorization, significantly influence the way consumers identify a brand and its category (RQ_{1ai})?</p> <p>May language-based categorizations, such as the naming of colors, facilitate the way consumers identify the brand and its category (RQ_{1aii})?</p> <p>May acculturation moderate the effects of language-based categorization on the consumer identification of a brand and of its category (RQ_{1aiii})?</p>
Forming brand associations	<p>May brand associations be influenced by the greater context in which these associations are formed, such as the linguistic corpus where the brand resides, and by the phonetic symbolism (RQ_{1bi}, RQ_{1biii})?</p> <p>May spelling characteristics of brand elements, such as unusual spellings for brand names, abbreviations, rhymes, and phonetic symbolism used in slogans, influence the formation of brand associations (RQ_{1bii})?</p>
Comparing brands with one another	<p>May co-branding or brand alliances among brand names that have a different language origin be evaluated differently depending on the attitude individuals have toward speakers of the other language and/or associations tied to the language itself (RQ_{1ci})?</p> <p>May the effect of brand names' complexity on consumers' ability to recall them vary depending on consumers' level of involvement/cognitive load (RQ_{1cii})?</p>
Experiencing	
Multi-sensory perceptions	<p>May the auditory qualities of language, such as spelling characteristics, moderate the effects of product scents on consumer perceptions (RQ_{2ai})?</p> <p>May the spelling characteristics of a brand name moderate the effects of visual processing on consumer perceptions (RQ_{2aii})?</p> <p>May activated mental frames and related code-switching moderate the interaction between visual and auditory processing on consumer perceptions (RQ_{2aiii})?</p>
Emotional connection	<p>Can a brand's tone of voice—as expressed through the order of words chosen, the words themselves, their rhythm, and pace—evoke different emotions? Can colloquial (vs. formal) language favor people to forge an emotional connection with the brand (RQ_{2bi})?</p> <p>May auditory cues, such as the accent of a communication source (e.g., standard or dialect), significantly influence consumers' emotional connections with a brand (RQ_{2bii})?</p>
Actions and interactions	<p>Can the linguistic identity of a brand influence consumers' willingness to interact with the brand (RQ_{2ci})?</p> <p>Within online communications may response times and language of the response interact, such that less efficient response times might be more (or less) tolerated depending on the language used in the interaction (RQ_{2cii})?</p> <p>May the simplification of language (e.g., fewer descriptors of experiences and products) and the choice of digital platform directly influence consumer expectations and, thus, interactions (RQ_{2ciii}, RQ_{2civ})?</p> <p>May verbal framing moderate the effects of agency-related constructs on consumer actions and interactions (RQ_{2ciii})?</p>
Integrating	
Brand personality	<p>Can the linguistic identity of a brand, including its choice of language and vocabulary, the tone of voice, the type of literary devices used, as well as the punctuation, significantly influence the brand personality (RQ_{3ai})?</p> <p>May distinctive features of languages (e.g., use of tone differences, presence of formal gender for nouns and adjectives) moderate the effects of brand personality traits (RQ_{3aii})?</p> <p>May the efficacy of brand personality traits, as supported by the brand's linguistic identity, vary depending on the linguistic identity of competing brands (RQ_{3aiii})?</p> <p>Is the personality of a brand perceived differently as a function of the modality in which words are perceived (RQ_{3aiv})?</p>
Brand relationships	<p>May the language employed to interact with the consumer on particular occasions (of relationship transgression) offset the negativity of actions when consistent with the type of consumer-brand relationship (RQ_{3bi})?</p> <p>When choosing metaphors and brand elements that signify the brand as a social relationship enabler may it be beneficial to also rely on vocabulary and figures of speech that highlight an independent consumer-brand relationship (e.g., self-reward claims; RQ_{3bii})?</p> <p>May the reaction to brand relationship transactions vary not only as a function of their type of relationship with the brand but also depending on the brand's linguistically marked gender (RQ_{3bii})?</p>
Signifying	
Brand symbolism	<p>Will the associations activated by the brand's language be culturally specific (RQ_{4ai}, RQ_{4aiv})?</p> <p>May the directionality of a language script influence the effectiveness of marketing communications like ads (RQ_{4aii})?</p> <p>May the writing style and tone of voice that consumers use online become part of the brand identity and, thus, part of the meanings it symbolizes (RQ_{4aiii})?</p>
Brands as identity signals	<p>May the congruence between the brand identity and the identity cued by the language moderate the effects of pronoun brand names and product positioning on consumer responses (RQ_{4b})?</p>
Connecting	
Brand attitude and attachment	<p>In a single-language paradigm may consumers exposed to certain types of sounds, words, or types of words (e.g., nouns vs. verbs) be more likely to retrieve information associated with that stimuli more easily, thus influencing attitudes toward a brand (RQ_{5ai})?</p> <p>May information from other senses (olfactory, haptic, taste) be used to mitigate auditory interference for alphabetic scripts and visual interference for logographic scripts (RQ_{5aii})?</p> <p>Can the dominant sequence of the subject, verb, and object in a language reflect different ways of thinking and therefore result in different reactions to persuasion attempts and, thus, attitude toward the brand (RQ_{5aii})?</p> <p>Within multilingual communication platforms, does the importance consumers give to online comments depend on the</p>

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Table 1 (continued)

Identifying	
Brand community	<p>language they are written in and related mental frames, as well as on the level of acculturation, accommodation attempts, or attitude toward that particular language (RQ_{5aiii}, RQ_{5aiii})?</p> <p>May a brand's linguistic identity, as well as consumers' related expectations, influence brand community formation and reinforcement (RQ_{5bi})?</p> <p>How can linguistic structure and form, as well as verbal framing, positively influence brand communities' management (RQ_{5bi}, RQ_{5bii})?</p> <p>May the weight consumers give to other members' opinions within a brand community depend on the level of acculturation, accommodation, and attitude toward the language used by those members (RQ_{5biii})?</p>

Hence, any form of human communication that uses conventionally agreed-upon signs can be considered linguistic for our purposes. A particular intonation could be itself a sign that is recognized by speakers of a particular community.

The aim of brand linguistics is not merely to apply knowledge from language-based disciplines to consumer behavior. Rather, good theoretical research in brand linguistics must start with the consumption phenomenon (e.g., consumers' interactions with artificial intelligence agents) and attempt to understand it with any of the theoretical and methodological tools that language-related disciplines can provide (Deighton, 2007). As a result of this process, new theories are developed, tested, and applied in a practical setting. Up to this point, linguistic phenomena have generally been relegated to an after-thought or merely something to be controlled for in consumer research. Our aim in this paper is to underscore (1) the centrality of linguistic processes in branding, and (2) the need for a systematic study of language in a branding setting.

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