

PhD defense Ivana Busljeta Banks - Faculty of Applied Economics

“A cross-cultural investigation of probability markers in advertising claims”

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Abstract: Verbal claims in advertisements (Smith 1991) often influence consumers' attitude towards the brands advertised (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Mitchell 1986). Probability markers (hedges and pledges) are frequently used to signal the degree to which it is likely that the given claim is true. This dissertation identifies several moderators to the effectiveness of probability marker usage in advertising claims, both among product/service characteristics (involvement, buying motivation, usage) and consumer characteristics (gender, tolerance for ambiguity, individualism/collectivism). Moreover, we test to what extent the practice of using probability markers in Belgium and Croatia reflects the findings of academic research. While in conditions of high involvement, probability markers do not influence advertising effectiveness, in low involvement conditions, they do have an impact on claim persuasiveness, brand attitude, and purchase intention. The direction of this influence depends on buying motivation – hedges fit better with hedonic products/services, and pledges with the utilitarian ones. The private vs. shared use condition does not have a clear impact on probability marker effectiveness. One of the most relevant consumer characteristics moderating probability marker effectiveness is tolerance for ambiguity. Our results show that consumers who are highly tolerant towards ambiguity are better persuaded by the use of hedges in advertising claims, with those who are intolerant for ambiguity preferring pledges. The consumers' gender has been proven as another relevant moderator, with men displaying greater sensitivity to probability markers in advertising claims than women. Men react better to hedges than to pledges in low-involvement situations. The consumer characteristic of individualism vs. collectivism seems to play only a minor role in the context of probability marker effectiveness. The advertising practice has yet to start fully profiting from the practical insights this research provides. Especially in countries where the low Uncertainty Avoidance Index presupposes a population more tolerant to ambiguity (such as Croatia), and where hedges have been found to have a positive impact on advertisements of low-involvement, hedonic services, advertisers should make more use of this finding. Advertisers should also make more use of our findings relating to gender as a moderator of probability marker effectiveness.