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Crossing the cultural divide through bilingual advertising: The moderating role of brand cultural symbolism

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the roles of brand cultural symbolism and advertising type (i.e., bilingual vs. host country language) in influencing brand liking among biculturals (people who equally identify with two distinct cultures). Across four experiments, we show that a brand's cultural symbolism (or the degree to which a brand symbolizes a cultural group) moderates the impact of bilingual advertising (vs. English-language advertising) on brand liking among biculturals. Brands low in cultural symbolism can appeal to some types of biculturals by engaging in bilingual advertising, whereas there is no significant improvement in brand liking when bilingual advertising is paired with host-culture symbolic brands. This research also highlights the role of bicultural identity integration (BII), or the degree to which biculturals perceive their mainstream (host) and ethnic (home) identities as compatible (versus incompatible), as a key process mechanism that mediates these effects. We demonstrate that at high levels of BII, biculturals react more favorably to a bilingual ad than an English ad, but only for a less symbolic brand. At low levels of BII, advertising type has no significant effect on biculturals' brand evaluations.

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1. Introduction

There is a worldwide trend toward an increasingly multicultural consumer landscape, with nearly 232 million people living outside their home countries (United Nations, 2014) and the United States comprises many different multicultural groups. For example, the 2010 Census estimated that 16% of the U.S. population consists of Hispanics, 13% African Americans, and another 5% Asians. Ethnic groups such as Hispanics and Asians were also among the fastest-growing groups in the past decade, growing at a rate of 43% in a single decade from 2000 to 2010. The growth in ethnically diverse populations has significant implications for marketing, as companies are increasingly targeting this multi-ethnic population. Advertising in 2010 to Hispanics was estimated at around $5.5 billion in gross advertising revenue (Edelhauser, 2000). Wal-Mart alone spends approximately $60 million annually to reach Hispanics with ads deemed highly successful (Hernandez, 2013). One challenge in appealing to ethnically diverse populations is that members of these groups may be at different stages of acculturation, with varying receptiveness to ethnic marketing efforts.

One such group is bicultural individuals who identify with both their home and host cultures (Berry, 2005).

The focus of the current research is on understanding the impact of bilingual advertising on bicultural consumers' brand attitudes, and specifically how the brand's cultural symbolism moderates this impact. Prior research has examined various factors moderating the impact of bilingual advertising, including congruity between the ad picture and the text (Luna & Peracchio, 2001) and the extent of code switching on advertising persuasion (Luna & Peracchio, 2005) or type of product (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). We build on this stream of research by investigating the role of a brand's cultural symbolism in moderating the impact of bilingual advertising among bicultural consumers.

A brand's cultural symbolism captures the perceived consensus of the degree to which the brand symbolizes the abstract image of a certain cultural group (Torelli, Keh, & Chiu, 2010). Brands acquire cultural meanings through a collective effort influenced by advertising, the fashion system, and reference groups (McCracken, 1986; Monga & Lau-Gesk, 2007), and their cultural significance is a product of social consensus building (Torelli et al., 2010). For example, brands such as Levi's and Budweiser are highly symbolic of the United States, and brands such as Corona are symbolic of Mexico. Exposure to culturally symbolic or "iconic" brands and products should be more likely to activate the cultural schema than less culturally symbolic brands (Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012). Does bilingual advertising work equally well for highly symbolic and less symbolic brands? In this research, we examine

whether there are systematic differences in the appeal of bilingual and English-only ads in the context of highly symbolic brands and less culturally symbolic brands.

Biculturals differ in their subjective perceptions of host and home cultures. The degree to which biculturals perceive their mainstream (host) and ethnic (home) identities as compatible and integrated versus oppositional and difficult to integrate is known as "bicultural identity integration" (BII) (Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002). At high levels of bicultural identity integration, biculturals perceive their dual cultural identities as compatible and easy to integrate. At high levels of bicultural identity integration, biculturals will react more positively to bilingual ads that appeal to their distinct ethnic identities. In contrast, at low levels of bicultural identity integration, biculturals are more likely to activate one cultural identity at a time and will perceive their cultural identities as distinct and oppositional. Research has also shown that biculturals who have lower levels of bicultural identity integration demonstrate behaviors that may contrast with cultural norms (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). Recent research has argued that "integrative complexity" (Tadmor, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2012), or the ability to combine multiple perspectives, is the key process explaining how biculturals can perform various tasks. In this research, we examine whether bilingual ads that appeal to multiple cultural identities can be more effective for low culturally symbolic brands than for high culturally symbolic brands. In summary, this research has two primary objectives. First, we examine the role of bilingual advertising in strengthening brand liking among biculturals and the role of brand cultural symbolism as a moderator of this effect. Additionally, we examine the role of BII as a mediator of this relationship. We test our hypotheses across a series of four experiments. We focus on one specific bicultural type in three studies (i.e., Hispanic Americans) and, to ensure generalizability, run a fourth study with another group of biculturals (i.e., Asian Americans). We designed Study 1 to assess brand preferences for a culturally symbolic and less culturally symbolic clothing brand among Hispanic Americans. The ads featured either English only or a combination of Spanish and English. Study 2 replicates Study 1 in a different context (i.e., beer brands) with Asian Americans (Indian and Chinese origin). The ads in Study 2 featured either English only or a combination of Hindi (or Chinese, for those of Chinese origin) and English. Study 3 replicates Study 2 with Hispanic American biculturals. In addition, Study 3 presents the role of BII in reactions to advertising language. Study 4 provides further insights into the role of BII mechanisms by directly manipulating this construct.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Bilingual advertising and biculturals

Previous research has used a few perspectives to explain the effect of language choice on advertising effectiveness for bilingual consumers. One of these perspectives is "affective response." For example, Luna and Peracchio (2005) consider language effects from affective response perspective and find that some words arouse a more emotional attachment when presented in a native language rather than in the second language. In line with this finding, Noriega and Blair (2008) find that a person's native language may activate thoughts about family and friends. In turn, these thoughts contribute to more positive attitude measures and behavioral intentions, and the consumption context presented in the advertisement moderates these effects. Puntoni, De Langhe, and Van Osselaer (2009) show that marketing slogans expressed in consumers' native language tend to be perceived as more emotional than message expressed in their second language. In the "affective response" scenario, people use their positive feelings about a language as a cue to ascertain how they feel about the product, without regard to the message. With this theorizing, we would expect that all bicultural consumers would be positively inclined toward brands that use home-language words in their advertising. However, we argue

that for brands that have higher levels of host cultural symbolism, bilingual ads are not as effective.

2.2. Cultural symbolism

Building on the work of Torelli et al. (2010), we previously defined a brand's cultural symbolism as the perceived consensus of the degree to which the brand symbolizes the abstract image of a certain cultural group. According to the dynamic constructivist theory of culture (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000), cognitive representations of a culture or cultural schema evolve when people have some direct or indirect experiences with a certain culture. This cultural schema comprises a loose network of shared knowledge about a human group and includes both a central concept (e.g., American culture) and its associated beliefs, values, and objects (including brands and products). Cultural schemas can operate below consciousness and guide cognition only when it becomes accessible (Hong et al., 2000; Oyserman, 2009; Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012).

Referred to as "consumption symbols" or cultural icons (McCracken, 1986), commercial brands can evoke distinct cultural schemas. For example, in a cued recall study, Torelli, Chiu, Keh, and Amaral (2009) show that European Americans who read a list of important and unimportant values (for American culture) recalled a greater number of culturally important values in a subsequent surprise recall task when cued with images of brands high (vs. low) in cultural symbolism. The effect occurred presumably because culturally symbolic brands automatically spread activation in the cultural knowledge network and thereby facilitated recall of culturally important values encountered earlier. The extent to which the brands used as retrieval cues symbolized American culture did not influence recall of culturally unimportant values. In the same study (Torelli et al., 2009), European Americans reminded of the positive qualities of the American identity had more favorable evaluations of brands that were symbolic of the American culture (e.g., Nike) but were indifferent to brands that were low in cultural symbolism (e.g., Dasani bottled water). Torelli et al. (2010) show that American participants rated American brands higher on individualist values, such as power and achievement, which are common in the United States.

We expect that the positive impact of bilingual ads on biculturals' brand attitudes is stronger for brands that are not culturally symbolic than for brands that are culturally symbolic. Among culturally symbolic brands, bilingual ads may be less effective because they may contradict or be perceived as inconsistent with the cultural associations of a brand that is strongly linked to one culture (i.e., host-culture symbolic brand). Therefore, there is less likelihood of enhancing consumers' perceptions of the culturally symbolic brand through bilingual advertising. In other words, because these culturally symbolic brands are strongly linked to one primary cultural identity, consumers may not perceive bilingual advertising involving a second, distinct cultural identity as compatible with their existing set of brand associations. Stated differently, consumers may evaluate bilingual ads as having lower perceived fit when paired with culturally symbolic brands. As a result, bilingual ads may not be very effective.

In contrast, in the case of less culturally symbolic brands, bilingual ads have the potential to enhance brand liking significantly, over and above advertising in the host language. Because the less symbolic brand is not tied to a specific culture, there is a potential for it to appeal to the dual identities of biculturals, via bilingual advertising.

Thus, in accordance with the compatibility-with-brand-symbolism argument, bilingual ads will elicit higher levels of brand liking compared to host language ads, but this will be evident only for less culturally symbolic brands. We design a series of studies to test these hypotheses, which are summarized below:

H1a. For brands low in cultural symbolism, ads featuring both the host and the home language and ads featuring the host language will have

significant differences in brand liking, and the bilingual ad will have higher levels of brand liking among biculturals than ads featuring only the host language.

H1b. For brands high in cultural symbolism, ads featuring both the host and the home language and ad featuring the host language will not be significantly different in brand liking, among biculturals.

2.3. BII

As mentioned previously, BII is the degree to which biculturals perceive their cultural identities as integrated and compatible versus dissociated and difficult to integrate. BII encompasses two components: cultural blendedness and cultural harmony. Cultural blendedness is the behavioral, performance-related component of BII, whereas cultural harmony is the affective psychological component of BII. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) find that for Chinese American biculturals, lower blendedness is associated with lower openness to experience, greater language barriers, and living in more culturally isolated surroundings, whereas lower cultural harmony is related to higher neuroticism, greater perceived discrimination, and greater language barriers. BII is viewed as both a situational state variable, as well as a trait. Consistent with Cheng and Lee (2013), we demonstrate that BII can be manipulated and can vary based on priming.

Previous research indicates that the differences in BII moderate the cultural frame-switching process (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006). Research has shown that when exposed to positive cultural cues, biculturals who are able to integrate and combine their bicultural identities exhibit a cultural assimilation effect, whereas biculturals who are unable to integrate their bicultural identities exhibit a cultural contrast effect (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2006; Mok & Morris, 2009).

We argue that high levels of bicultural identity integration should mediate the impact of bilingual ads on brand liking. Based on research demonstrating that BII can vary based on priming (Cheng & Lee, 2013), we argue that when individuals are exposed to bilingual ads, there is an increase in bicultural identity integration, among some individuals. The importance of code-switching involving inserting words or expressions from one language into another has also been highlighted by Luna and Peracchio (2005). Bilingual ads can highlight a unique way of combining the home and host identities. It could also legitimize the co-existence of the home and host identities and thus facilitate bicultural individuals' integration of their two ethnic identities. Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) find support that the mixing of home and host languages is preferred among biculturals, and also highlight the role of code-switching in enhancing the likelihood that the associations or schemas for both cultures are activated. In contrast, when individuals are shown monolingual English-only ads, there is no explicit mention of the home culture. Therefore, in this case, there is no consequent increase in bicultural identity integration.

Further, the elevated levels of bicultural identity integration can contribute to greater brand liking. There is a long history of research in consumer behavior showing that brand consumption can act as a method of self-expression (Belk, 1988), and consumers choose products and brands that are consistent with their self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). Because biculturals with high levels of identity integration see their two identities as compatible, their brand liking following exposure to bilingual ads also increases. Bilingual ads are seen as having a stronger fit with brands with low cultural symbolism, the mediation of bicultural identity integration should only be observed among those brands with low cultural symbolism. Our proposed effect does not hold among brands with high levels of cultural symbolism. Thus, we posit the following:

H2. BII mediates the interaction effect of brand cultural symbolism and advertising type on brand liking among biculturals.

It should be noted that bicultural identity integration can be both measured and manipulated (using a priming manipulation) and in the current set of studies, we both measure as well as manipulate BII. In examining the impact of cultural symbolism and bilingual advertising, it is important to control for brand familiarity and biculturalism. Brand familiarity is important because it is related to the extent of consumer knowledge, and the extent of familiarity could directly impact brand liking (Baker, Hutchinson, Moore, & Nedungadi, 1986). The extent of biculturalism could have a direct impact on brand liking (Vijaygopal & Dibb, 2012), and it is important to covary out its impact, therefore, we include the continuous biculturalism score in the model.

3. Study 1

The primary purpose of Study 1 was to examine how bicultural people react to two advertising languages (English and bilingual). In addition, we examine the moderating role of cultural symbolism in this relationship.

3.1. Pretests

We carried out a first pretest (N = 160) to ensure the reliability and validity of the acculturation items. Participants were "multicultural" people residing in the United States. We drew all participants from an online panel and prequalified them on the basis of their responses to two questions: "Are you living in a country other than your country of origin?" "Were one or both of your parents born in a country other than United States?" We assessed acculturation using the Cultural Life Style Inventory (CLSI) (Lerman, Maldonado, & Luna, 2009; Mendoza, 1989; see Appendix A). We removed all items with factor loadings less than .60 from the scales. The psychometric characteristics of the final acculturation scale (19 items) were satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha of .87.

We conducted a second pretest (N = 64) to select brands that symbolize the United States (less symbolic, highly symbolic). People of Hispanic origin residing in the United States participated in the study. We drew the original cultural symbolism item list from Torelli and Ahluwalia (2012). We identified two American clothing brands as significantly different in American cultural symbolism: Gap and Levi's (5.11 vs. 5.91; $F(1, 62) = 40.24, p < .0001$).

3.2. Methodology

The study comprised a 2 (type of advertisement: English or bilingual) × 2 (brand cultural symbolism: high vs. low) design, with type of advertisement and the brand's cultural symbolism as between-subjects factors. We drew Hispanic-origin participants living in the United States from an online panel and prequalified them on the basis of their responses to three questions: "Were you born in a Spanish-speaking country?" "Were one or both of your parents born in a Spanish-speaking country?" and "Do you speak Spanish?". Participants who had a positive response to either of the first two questions and also to the third question were able to continue the survey. In addition, we asked them to translate a definite sentence into Spanish. We dropped participants who were not successful in translation from the study (N = 18). We also administered a qualifying question about brand familiarity (five-point scale; 1 = very unfamiliar and 5 = very familiar); participants who indicated that they were very unfamiliar with the brands were disqualified (N = 5). One hundred and eighty-five participants qualified for the study. Following the qualifying questions, participants rated their overall feelings about the use of Spanish and English on a seven-point scale, anchored by extremely negative and extremely positive (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008).

To identify bicultural people, we asked participants to respond to the acculturation scale, used in the pretest (Lerman et al., 2009; Mendoza, 1989). Participants received a score based on their responses to a series

of questions intended to assess their affiliation to the home culture, host culture, or both. For example, the response options for the item asking about the types of newspapers and magazines participants read were (a) Spanish only, (b) mostly in Spanish, (c) English only, (d) mostly in English, and (e) both English and Spanish about equally. Another question asked about the types of foods they ate: (a) native foods (only), (b) mostly native foods, (c) host country foods (only), (d) mostly host country foods, and (e) both kind of foods about equally. Participants who indicated either "a" or "b" to the questions received a score of 1 for home country affiliation; similarly, participants who indicated either "c" or "d" received a score of 1 for host-culture affiliation. Finally, those who indicated option "e" received a score of 1 for biculturals. We summed participants' response scores across a series of 19 questions ($\alpha = .87$). If a participant had a total bicultural score that was greater than the home and host country affiliation scores, we deemed that person as a bicultural, and we retained these biculturals (N = 76) for further analysis. The average age of the bicultural participants was 30 years, 48.7% were men, 47.37% had a bachelor's or higher degree, and 67.1% had an annual income of less than $50, 000.

Participants then saw a print ad that depicted either a high culturally symbolic brand (Levi's) or a less culturally symbolic brand (Gap). The ads featured either English only or a mixture of English and Spanish; the ads were identical except for the advertising language (see Appendix B1, B2). Two native Spanish speakers who were fluent in both languages translated the slogans from English into Spanish. Immediately after this, participants completed the brand-liking scale. We measured brand liking with three items on a seven-point scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree): "This brand is a favorable brand," "This brand is a good quality brand," and "I have positive opinions about this brand." We averaged the items to form a brand-liking score ($\alpha = .86$).

3.3. Results

3.3.1. Bilingualism and language favorability

Participants reported that their feelings about both languages were favorable (above the midpoint of 4 on a seven-point scale). In addition, their feelings were not significantly different from each other (English = 6.50, Spanish = 6.32; $p > .10$).

3.3.2. Brand liking

We tested the predictions using a general linear model (GLM), including the main effects of brand cultural symbolism, advertising type, and the two-way interaction between the variables. As noted previously, we controlled for the main effects of biculturalism (as a continuous variable) and familiarity, because they would potentially directly impact the extent of brand liking. Accordingly, total biculturalism and familiarity scores were added as covariates, although they were not significant. The results yielded a significant main effect of advertising language ($F(1, 70) = 3.67$, $p < .05$) and a two-way interaction of brand cultural symbolism and advertising type ($F(1, 70) = 3.95$, $p = .059$). For the less symbolic brand, a simple-effects test revealed significant differences in brand liking between the bilingual and the English ad ($M_{Bilingual} = 5.79$, $M_{English} = 5.00$; $t(70) = 2.74$, $p < .01$). The bilingual ad did not yield any significant differences in brand liking compared with the English ad for the highly symbolic brand ($M_{Bilingual} = 5.72$, $M_{English} = 5.71$; $t(70) = .04$, NS). This pattern of results provides support for H1a and H1b. Fig. 1 illustrates the differences between the two ad conditions.

3.4. Discussion

The results of Study 1 show that the effect of bilingual advertising depends on the cultural symbolism of the brand. Among biculturals, the bilingual ad had a more positive effect on brand liking than the English ad for the less culturally symbolic brand. We do not observe any significant effect of bilingual advertising for the high culturally
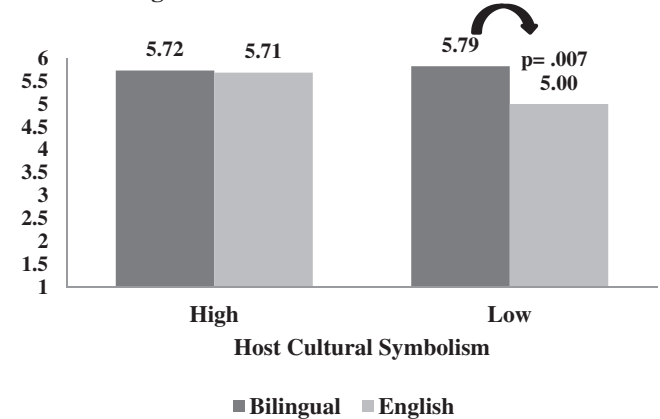
Brand Liking

Fig. 1. Study 1: Effect of advertising type on brand liking among biculturals.

symbolic brand. To examine whether these results are specific to the particular brand category (i.e., clothing) used in this study, we repeat the procedures with a second category of brands (i.e., alcoholic beverage) in Study 2. We also examine a different bicultural group (i.e., Asian Americans), to ensure robustness of the results across different types of biculturals.

4. Study 2

In Study 1, we demonstrate how Hispanic American biculturals react to bilingual advertising and examine the moderating role of cultural symbolism on this relationship. Study 2 replicates this effect using a different set of brands, Budweiser and Coors. To ensure that the results are generalizable, and not specific to one bicultural type, we ran Study 2 with Asian American biculturals.

4.1. Methodology

Study 2 was a 2 (type of advertisement: English vs. bilingual) × 2 (brand cultural symbolism: high vs. low) design, with type of advertisement and the brand's cultural symbolism as between-subjects factors. We selected two American beer brands that differed in cultural symbolism (Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012). We drew Indian- and Chinese-origin people residing in the United States from an online panel they responded to the same type of questions as in Study 1 "Were you born in a Hindi/Chinese-speaking country?", "Were one or both of your parents born in a Hindi/Chinese-speaking country?" and "Do you speak Hindi/Chinese?". Similar to Study 1, participants were also pre-qualified on the basis of their ability to translate a sentence from the home language (Hindi or Chinese) to English. Participants (N = 26) who were unsuccessful in translations were discarded from the study. Four participants who indicated that they were very unfamiliar with the brands were also disqualified. Then, participants rated their overall feelings about the use of Spanish and English on a seven-point scale, anchored by extremely negative and extremely positive (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008).

To identify biculturals, we asked participants to respond to the acculturation scale, and used the same scale and qualifying criteria described in the previous study. We retained biculturals (N = 105; $N_{Chinese} = 26$, $N_{Indian} = 79$) for further analysis. The average age of bicultural participants was 31 years, 48.9% were men, and 47.6% had a bachelor's or higher degree. Participants then saw a print ad that depicted either a high culturally symbolic brand (Budweiser) or a low culturally symbolic brand (Coors). All ads included the taglines and pictures relevant to the brand. The two ads were written in English only. In the other two ads, a mixed language (English–home language) was used. The ads were identical except for the advertising language. Two native speakers of the home language who were fluent in both

languages translated the slogans from English into the home language (Hindi or Chinese). We measured brand liking with two items on a seven-point scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree): "This is a good quality brand" and "I have positive opinions about this brand." We averaged items to obtain a brand-liking score (α = .89). We then measured cultural symbolism with items from Torelli and Ahluwalia (2012). A brief demographic section concluded the survey.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Manipulation check and language favorability

To examine whether the two brands were significantly different in brand cultural symbolism, we analyzed the responses to the questions about cultural symbolism. Analysis of variance revealed that both American beer brands (Budweiser and Coors) significantly differed in cultural symbolism ($M_{Budweiser}$ = 5.51, M_{Coors} = 5.00; $F(1, 103)$ = 3.36, $p < .005$).

We also checked to determine whether participants varied in their liking for the two languages, English and Hindi (or Chinese). Participants reported that their feelings about both languages were favorable (the neutral midpoint = 4; English = 6.22, home language = 6.12; $t(80)$ = 1.1, $p > .10$). The mean responses related to language were also around the midpoint: reading ($M_{English}$ = 4.60, $M_{Home\ language}$ = 4.38), writing ($M_{English}$ = 4.54, $M_{Home\ language}$ = 4.15), and speaking ($M_{English}$ = 4.54, $M_{Home\ language}$ = 4.37).

4.2.2. Brand liking

We tested the predictions using analysis of variance, including the main effects of brand cultural symbolism and advertising type and the two-way interaction between these two variables. It is possible that there is a main effect of ethnic group on brand liking; therefore, we felt the need to control for it, as we do so subsequently. As noted previously, brand familiarity and extent of biculturalism were deemed to be important, because of their potential for influencing brand liking. Thus, biculturalism score, familiarity and ethnic origin (Indian or Chinese) were added as covariates. The results yielded a main effect of familiarity ($F(1, 98)$ = 8.96, $p < .005$) and a significant interaction effect of brand cultural symbolism and advertising language ($F(1, 98)$ = 4.25, $p < .05$). Neither biculturalism nor ethnic origin was significant.

A simple-effects test revealed significant differences in brand liking for the less symbolic brand between the bilingual and the English ad conditions ($M_{Bilingual}$ = 6.05, $M_{English}$ = 5.48; $t(98)$ = 3.89, $p < .05$). These results provide additional support for H1a. In support of H1b, no significant differences appeared in brand liking between the bilingual and English ad conditions for the highly symbolic brand ($M_{Bilingual}$ = 5.48, $M_{English}$ = 5.74; $t(98)$ = .80, $p > .1$). Fig. 2 illustrates the differences between the groups.

In order to ensure that there were no significant differences based on ethnic groups, we also ran a model including the three-way interaction of brand cultural symbolism, advertising type, ethnic group, and found that this three-way interaction was not significant ($F(1, 95)$ = 2.11, $p > .1$). Therefore, we retain our focus on the previous analysis which combines across the two ethnic groups. Although the results of Study 2 are broadly consistent with the findings from Study 1, it is important to note a key difference. In the current study, we find a pattern of means which is consistent with the higher evaluations of bilingual ads relative to English ads for less culturally symbolic brands.

4.2.3. Post hoc test of perceived fit

Both Studies 1 and 2 revealed that bilingual ads were preferred when coupled with less-host-culture-symbolic brands. Furthermore, bilingual ads provided no additional benefit when paired with highly symbolic brands, such as Levi's and Budweiser, which had strong associations with the host culture. To understand the reasons for this pattern of results, we examined the perceived fit of the ads with the brands.
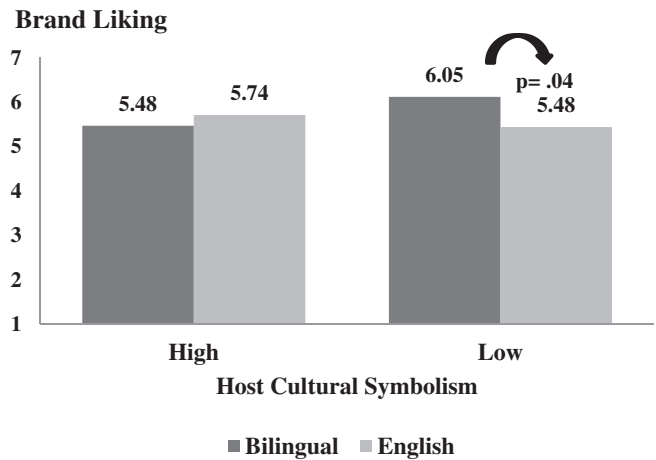

Fig. 2. Study 2: Effect of advertising type on brand liking among biculturals.

Because culturally symbolic brands are strongly linked to one primary cultural identity, people may not perceive bilingual advertising involving a second, distinct cultural identity as compatible with their existing set of brand associations. As a result, bilingual ads may not be very effective.

We ran a study to investigate the effect of ad language on perceived fit with the brand. The study sample included 138 bicultural (Asian, Hispanic origin) participants. The study was a 2 (type of advertisement: English vs. bilingual) × 2 (brand cultural symbolism: high vs. low) design, with type of advertisement and the brand's cultural symbolism as between-subjects factors. We selected participants using the same procedure as in Studies 1 and 2. After seeing the ads, participants responded to the ad–brand fit questions ("This ad fits the advertised brand well" and "This ad is relevant to the advertised brand"). We found that for a brand high in host cultural symbolism (Budweiser), participants perceived the English ad as more congruent with the brand than the bilingual ad ($M_{Bilingual}$ = 3.53, $M_{English}$ = 4.12; $t(60)$ = 8.74, $p < .01$). For a brand low in host cultural symbolism, there was no difference in perceived fit between the English ad and the bilingual ad ($M_{Bilingual}$ = 3.67, $M_{English}$ = 3.89; $t(74)$ = 1.35, $p > .1$). This finding suggests that the lack of perceived fit with the host-culture symbolic brand might be the reason for the absence of differences in brand attitudes toward bilingual versus English ads for a high cultural symbolic brand. For brands with low cultural symbolism, perceived fit is not a significant issue, which results in bilingual ads being more effective.

4.3. Discussion

The results from this study provide support for the hypothesized effects. Similar to the results from Study 1, the bilingual ad had a more positive effect on brand liking than the English ad, but only for the less culturally symbolic brand. For the high culturally symbolic brand, advertising language did not cause a change in brand evaluations.

Finally, the processes underlying the findings in these studies require further investigation. Recall that we posit that BII is a key mechanism that explains the responses to advertising language. Study 3 elucidates the role of BII on the impact of bilingual advertising. We conduct mediational analyses in Study 3 to test the role of BII in predicting brand liking.

Recall that we posited that the higher evaluations associated with bilingual ads among biculturals would result from their greater ability to integrate and find commonalities across their home and host cultural identities (i.e., BII). Study 3 is designed with a view to examining the role of BII in mediating the impact of bilingual ads, particularly for

brands with low cultural symbolism. Furthermore, Study 3 focuses on Hispanic Americans and examines beer brands that vary in cultural symbolism.

5. Study 3

Study 3 was a 2 (type of advertisement: English vs. bilingual) × 2 (brand cultural symbolism: high vs. low) design, with type of advertisement and the brand's cultural symbolism as between-subjects factors. We selected two American beer brands that differed in cultural symbolism (i.e., Budweiser and Coors). We drew Hispanic-origin people residing in the United States from an online panel and prequalified them on the basis of their responses to the same questions as in Study 1. Similar to Study 1, participants were pre-qualified on the basis of their ability to translate a sentence from Spanish to English. Participants (N = 9) who were unsuccessful in translations were excluded from the study. Three participants who indicated that they were very unfamiliar with the brands were also disqualified. Following the qualifying questions, participants rated their own proficiency in Spanish and English in general (i.e., reading, writing, and speaking) (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008; Luna & Peracchio, 2001) on a five-point scale. In addition, they rated their overall feelings about the use of Spanish and English on a seven-point scale, anchored by extremely negative and extremely positive (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). After the qualifying questions, participants responded to the acculturation scale used in the previous studies. We retained biculturals (N = 81) for further analysis. The average age of bicultural participants was 28 years, 41.9% were men, and 39.4% had a bachelor's or higher degree.

Participants then saw a print ad that depicted either a high culturally symbolic brand (Budweiser) or a low culturally symbolic brand (Coors). All ads included the taglines and pictures relevant to the brand. The two ads were written in English only. In the other two ads, a mixed language (English–Spanish) was used. The ads were identical except for the advertising language. Two native Spanish speakers who were fluent in both languages translated the slogans from English into Spanish. Following this, participants responded to a six-item BII questionnaire (α = .76; 1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree), including two components of the BII scale (i.e., cultural blendedness and harmony). We adapted all items from Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005), Huynh (2009), and Huynh, Nguyen, and Benet-Martínez (2011): "I find it easy to harmonize my Hispanic and American identities," "I feel that my Hispanic and American identities are incompatible" (reverse scored), "I feel caught between the Hispanic and American identities" (reverse scored),"I do not feel trapped between the Hispanic and American identities," "I do not blend my Hispanic and American identities" (reverse scored), and "I feel Hispanic and American at the same time." Immediately after this, participants completed the brand-liking scale. We measured brand liking with two items on a seven-point scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree): "This is a good quality brand" and "I have positive opinions about this brand." We averaged items to obtain a brand-liking score (α = .94). We then measured cultural symbolism with items from Torelli and Ahluwalia (2012), and we averaged these items (α = .85). A brief demographic section concluded the survey.

5.1. Results

5.1.1. Manipulation check and language favorability

To examine whether the two brands were significantly different in brand cultural symbolism, we analyzed the responses to the questions about cultural symbolism. Analysis of variance revealed that both American beer brands (Budweiser and Coors) significantly differed in cultural symbolism ($M_{Budweiser} = 5.14$, $M_{Coors} = 4.22$; $F(1, 79) = 8.19$, $p < .005$).

We also checked to determine whether participants varied in their liking for the two languages, English and Spanish. Participants reported

that their feelings about both languages were favorable (the neutral midpoint = 4; English = 6.37, Spanish = 6.38; $t(79) = .14$, $p > .10$). The mean responses related to language were also around the midpoint: reading ($M_{English} = 4.82$, $M_{Spanish} = 4.22$), writing ($M_{English} = 4.74$, $M_{Spanish} = 3.96$), and speaking ($M_{English} = 4.81$, $M_{Spanish} = 4.25$).

5.1.2. Brand liking

We tested the predictions using analysis of variance, including the main effects of brand cultural symbolism and advertising type and the two way interaction between these two variables. The total biculturalism score and familiarity were added as covariates. The results yielded a marginally significant main effect of familiarity ($F(1, 75) = 3.81$, $p < .06$) and a significant interaction effect of brand cultural symbolism and advertising language ($F(1, 75) = 5.27$, $p < .05$).

A simple-effects test revealed significant differences in brand liking for the less symbolic brand between the bilingual and the English ad conditions ($M_{Bilingual} = 5.11$, $M_{English} = 4.00$; $t(75) = 5.21$, $p < .05$). These results also provide support for H1a. In support of H1b, no significant differences appeared in brand liking between the bilingual and English ad conditions for the highly symbolic brand ($M_{Bilingual} = 4.88$, $M_{English} = 5.36$; $t(75) = .98$, $p > .1$). The results from Study 3 also confirm the findings in the previous studies. Fig. 3 illustrates the differences between the groups.

5.1.3. Mediation analyses

We tested whether identity integration would mediate the effects of advertising language and brand type on brand liking among biculturals. For this purpose we conducted moderated mediation analyses. In testing moderated mediation, we wanted to determine whether the indirect effect of ad language on brand liking through identity integration depended on brand cultural symbolism. We tested for the conditional direct, conditional indirect, and conditional total effects of ad language on brand liking through BII as brand cultural symbolism changes using a conditional process model (Hayes, 2012). We included familiarity and biculturalism score as covariates.

The bootstrap analysis with 5000 samples indicated that the full model was significant ($R^2 = .20$, $p < .005$), and there were two indirect effects that were conditional on the brand's cultural symbolism. The indirect effect of ad language on brand liking through BII was significant for the less symbolic brand condition, with a 95% CI (bootstrap confidence interval) wholly above zero [indirect effect = .39; SE = .20; CI = .08 to .88]. For the highly symbolic brand condition, the indirect effect was not different from zero, as evidenced by a CI that straddles
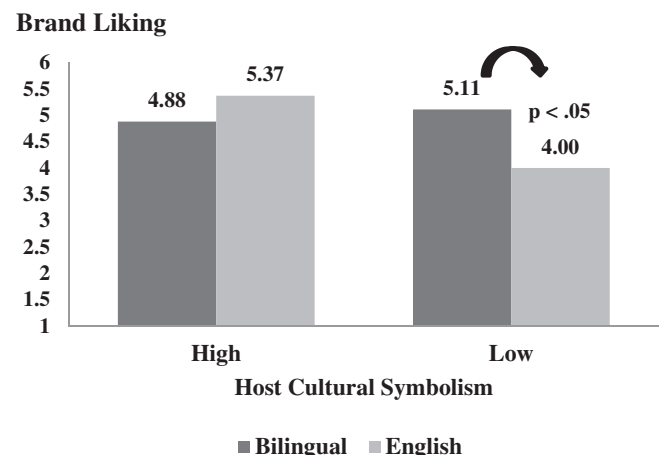
Brand Liking

Fig. 3. Study 3: Effect of advertising type on brand liking among biculturals.

zero [indirect effect = −.04; SE = .15; CI = −.38 to .25]. For the less symbolic brand, the direct effect of ad language on brand liking was not statistically significant [direct effect = .90; SE = .50; CI = −.09 to 1.89], which suggests a full mediation. These results are summarized in Fig. 4 and offer support to H2.

5.2. Discussion

In support of the previous findings, the bilingual ad had a more positive effect on brand liking than the English ad, but only for the less culturally symbolic brand. For the high culturally symbolic brand, advertising language did not cause a change in brand evaluations.

Study 3 provides support for the argument that the effect of ad language on brand liking is moderated by brand type through BII. The results indicate that the indirect effect of the bilingual ad on brand liking through BII is consistently positive for a less symbolic brand. In support of previous studies (Noriega & Blair, 2008), we show that language choice in advertising to biculturals influences attitudes toward the brand and that liking for the brand increases with identity integration (*b* = .49). The results also confirm the argument that response to cultural cues differs depending on the level of BII (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002).

Cheng and Lee (2013) show that BII can be malleable. Specifically, they find that recalling positive bicultural experiences increases BII whereas recalling negative experiences decreases BII. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) indicate that high-BII biculturals find their cultural identities easy to integrate and compatible; thus, they respond to the activation of the corresponding cultural meaning system by providing responses that are culturally congruent (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2006). High-BII biculturals also have more positive feelings about their bicultural identities and the two related cultures (Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004). Therefore, they respond more positively to bilingual ads than to English ads. Study 3 also shows that liking for a less symbolic brand increases with identity integration. To provide more unambiguous evidence for the role of BII on brand evaluation and to eliminate the effects driven by the constructs correlated with BII, we manipulate BII in Study 4. From the results of Study 3, when BII is primed (high vs. low), we expect the following:

H3a. For brands low in cultural symbolism, ads featuring both the host and the home language increase high-BII biculturals' brand liking more than ads featuring only the host language.

H3b. For brands high in cultural symbolism, ads featuring both the host and the home language have the same impact on high-BII biculturals' brand liking as ads featuring only the host language.

H3c. For brands high in cultural symbolism and for those low in cultural symbolism, ads featuring both the host and the home language have the same impact on low-BII biculturals' brand liking as ads featuring only the host language.
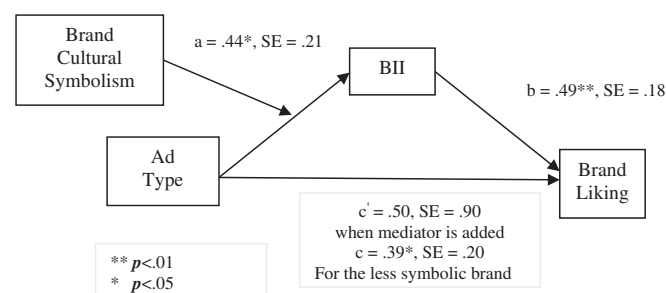

Brand Cultural Symbolism → a = .44*, SE = .21 → BII

BII → b = .49**, SE = .18 → Brand Liking

Ad Type → Brand Liking

c' = .50, SE = .90
when mediator is added
c = .39*, SE = .20
For the less symbolic brand

** *p* < .01
* *p* < .05

Fig. 4. Study 3: BII mediates the effect of advertising type on brand liking.

6. Study 4

We designed Study 4 to examine the role of BII on brand liking more directly. Although BII is an individual difference, it is not necessarily unmalleable (Cheng et al., 2006). Study 4 attempts to manipulate BII to provide further evidence of its role on the impact of bilingual advertising and brand cultural symbolism.

6.1. Methodology

Study 4 was a 2 (type of advertisement: English vs. bilingual) × 2 (brand's cultural symbolism: low vs. high) × 2 (identity integration: low vs. high) between-subjects design. We used the same brands and ads as in Study 3. We drew Hispanic-origin participants residing in the United States from an online panel and prequalified them on the basis of their responses to five questions: "Were you born in a Spanish-speaking country?" "Were one or both of your parents born in a Spanish-speaking country?" and "Do you speak Spanish?". If a "no" response was given to the third question or to both the first and the second questions, the survey was concluded. Remaining two questions were about familiarity with the brands. Participants who were unfamiliar with the brands were not able to proceed. Following the qualifying questions, participants responded to the translation questions as in previous studies. Participants (N = 16) who were unsuccessful in translations were discarded from the study. In total, we had 235 participants. The average age of participants was 30 years, 51.5% were men, and 45% had a bachelor's or higher degree.

To establish that the BII priming was equally effective across different acculturation types, participants completed the five-item short-ened acculturation scale adapted from Lerman et al. (2009) (α = .79). We selected five items with the highest factor scores: language spoken with friends, language used in prayer, language of jokes familiar with, language of newspapers and magazines read, and language of television programs watched. Following this, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (identity integration: high vs. low).

In the high identity integration condition, the instructions specified, "Suppose you are asked about the similarities of Hispanic and North American cultures by someone who knows nothing about it. How would you describe it? Please write 5 main common/similar aspects that define Hispanic and North American cultures." In the low identity integration condition, the instructions specified, "Suppose you are asked about the differences in Hispanic and North American cultures by someone who knows nothing about it. How would you describe it? Please write 5 main different/separate aspects that define Hispanic and North American cultures."

After the identity integration manipulation, they completed the same BII questionnaire as in Study 3 (α = .78). Participants then saw a print ad that depicted either a high culturally symbolic brand (Budweiser) or a low culturally symbolic brand (Coors). All ads included the taglines and pictures relevant to the brand. The ads were identical except for the advertising language. The two ads were written in English only. In the other two ads, a mixed language (English–Spanish) was used. We measured brand liking with three items on a seven-point scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree, α = .88): "This is a good quality brand," "This is a favorable brand," and "I have positive opinions about this brand." A brief demographic section concluded the survey.

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Manipulation checks

A GLM revealed a main effect of manipulation type on identity integration, such that participants in the high identity integration prime condition had significantly higher scores on BII than those in the low identity integration condition (M = 5.28 vs. M = 4.94; F(1, 233) = 6.46, p < .01); this indicates that identity integration was successfully primed. By way of comparison, we evaluated the BII in a no-prime control group

of 51 respondents and found that the average BII was 5.20 (with a standard deviation of 1.18), on a seven-point scale (with higher values indicating higher BII). To ensure that BII did not vary across acculturation types, we ran an additional analysis to examine the interaction between BII priming and acculturation. The interaction of BII and acculturation was not significant ($F(2, 230) = 1.14$, $p > .1$). This suggests that BII priming was equally effective across different types of acculturation.

6.2.2. Brand liking

We examined whether BII interacts with the effects of cultural priming on brand liking. We conducted GLM analyses to determine the effect of advertising type on brand liking in different manipulation conditions. We added familiarity with the brands as a covariate, although it was not significant.

The results show that the three-way interaction between brand cultural symbolism, advertising type and cultural priming was not significant ($F(1, 224) = 0.98$, $p > .1$). Despite the overall non-significant three-way interaction, we further examine the pattern of means, with a view to affirming the hypothesized difference in results under high bicultural identity integration. The simple effects test revealed that in the high BII condition, participants in the high BII condition reacted more favorably to the less symbolic brand when exposed to a bilingual ad ($M_{Bilingual} = 4.88$, $M_{English} = 4.13$; $t(224) = 1.92$, $p < .05$) than to the English ad. This provides support for H3a. In support of H3b, in the high BII condition, for the highly symbolic brand, there was no significant effect of advertising type ($M_{Bilingual} = 4.83$, $M_{English} = 4.65$; $t(224) = .43$, $p > .1$). In the low BII condition, advertising type had no effect on brand liking for either the less symbolic brand ($M_{Bilingual} = 4.08$, $M_{English} = 4.33$; $t(224) = .64$, $p > .1$) or the highly symbolic brand ($M_{Bilingual} = 4.64$, $M_{English} = 4.69$; $t(224) = .13$, $p > .1$). These results provide support for H3c. Fig. 5 illustrates the differences between the groups.

6.3. Discussion

Recall that Study 3 highlights the role of BII as a key process that explains the results for bilingual advertising. Study 4 builds on the findings from Study 3, by directly manipulating BII. The results reveal that for less culturally symbolic brands, participants (including those who identify with only mainstream or ethnic culture) who are asked to think about commonalities between the host and home cultures are significantly more likely to evaluate bilingual ads more favorably than English ads. Advertising type has no effect on brand evaluations when people are asked to think about the differences between the host and home cultures.
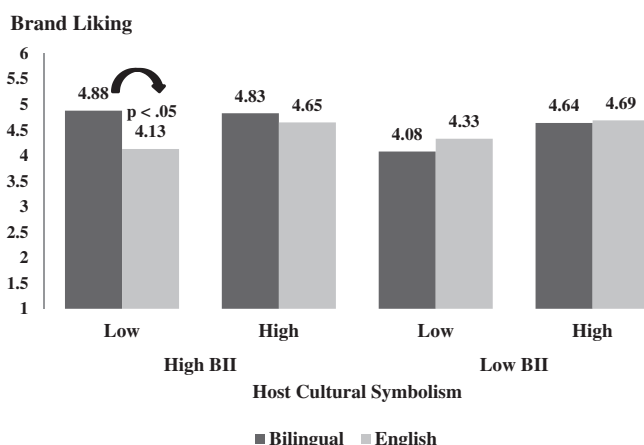

Fig. 5. Study 4: Effect of bilingual advertising on brand liking: the impact of BII.

7. General discussion

This research examines the role of bilingual advertising in strengthening brand liking among biculturals. We argue that this impact varies based on the cultural symbolism of brands. Further, we shed light on the role of BII on the effect of bilingual advertising.

We demonstrate that bilingual advertising does not significantly increase brand liking for brands that are highly symbolic of the host culture and therefore can result in wasted advertising dollars for brands such as Budweiser and Levi's. In contrast, for brands low in cultural symbolism, a bilingual message leads to an increase in BII and its concomitant positive effect on brand attitudes. In summary, the findings provide insights into cultural symbolism as a key brand attribute that has an impact on consumers' evaluations of advertising strategies, particularly with regard to bilingual advertising.

For high culturally symbolic brands, bilingual ads may be less effective because culturally symbolic brands are strongly linked to one particular identity, and bilingual ads involve a second cultural identity, consumers may not perceive them as compatible with their existing set of brand associations. Therefore, a bilingual ad is perceived as having lower perceived fit and is therefore less congruent with the highly symbolic brand compared to an English ad. This is also consistent with the exclusionary response to bicultural stimuli as indicated in past research, which describes how threats to the integrity of one culture could result in emotional, reflexive reactions (Torelli, Chiu, Tam, Au, & Keh, 2011). As a result, bilingual messages may not increase the effectiveness of ads for these high-CS brands. In contrast, for brands low in CS, a bilingual message leads to an increase in BII and its concomitant positive effect on brand attitudes. Marketing managers could focus on English advertising for brands that are highly symbolic of the host culture, whereas managers could utilize bilingual advertising for brands which do not have strong symbolic associations with the host-culture.

The findings from this research contribute to extant theory on bicultural identities. Research on bicultural identity demonstrates that people react favorably to both individual and interpersonal appeals if they have equally developed cultural dispositions (Lau-Gesk, 2003). The current research argues that people with bicultural identities move between two separate cultural meaning systems and that bilingual advertising can help cue these cultural identities. Thus, this research argues for the accessibility of the two cultural systems. Our findings provide deeper insights into the process by which biculturals integrate or combine two identities that are sometimes in conflict. We argue that biculturals have a greater ability to identify common themes or elements in the two cultures (i.e., home and host cultures), which enables them to develop stronger brand liking when they are exposed to bilingual advertising, but only in the presence of brands low in CS that are not strongly connected to the host culture.

This finding regarding the ability of biculturals to combine and integrate disparate cultures has been shown to be true elsewhere in the literature on biculturalism and its relationship to creative and professional success in the workplace. For example, Tadmor et al. (2012) argue that people who identify with both home and host cultures demonstrate enhanced creativity and professional success because of their higher cognitive complexity and their ability to consider and combine multiple perspectives. However, this notion of BII has not been examined in a branding and consumer behavior context as a key process explaining the differential response to bilingual advertising. To date, process explanations regarding bilingual advertising have focused mainly on fluency or accessibility of the two identities; our focus herein is on people's ability to integrate two identities and how this ability provides a process explanation for the reactions to bilingual advertising.

We provide additional evidence of process by manipulating BII. The results reveal that participants who are asked to think about commonalities between the host and home cultures are significantly more likely to evaluate bilingual ads favorably than participants who are focused on differences between the two cultures. As previously, this result

primarily holds for less culturally symbolic brands. This study sheds light on how biculturals are likely to be different from host-culture-oriented people and provides a path forward for people to begin integrating two conflicting identities. Perhaps marketers could use this result to appeal to ethnic minorities. Rather than engaging in bilingual advertising, marketers could focus on how their brands help people cross the chasm that separates their two cultural identities. In doing so, marketers could help different ethnic groups resolve the identity conflict they may face, while improving the appeal of their brands to those with varying levels of acculturation.

An interesting finding in the present research is that bilingual advertising is less effective for high host-culture symbolic brands. For these brands, their advertising could focus on using English-language ads to appeal to biculturals. Further, to appeal to bicultural groups, these ads could emphasize universal values and themes that do not target either of their ethnic identities. Further research is needed in identifying the broader themes that would work well when paired with highly symbolic brands.

Another important issue that has not been addressed is how biculturals would react to bilingual ads when the brand is symbolic of their home culture, rather than their host culture.

Understanding the differences in how biculturals process bilingual advertising for home-culture symbolic brands versus host-culture symbolic brands is a worthwhile area for future investigation.

This research is not without limitations. First, our studies focus on two specific bicultural populations, Spanish-speaking and Asian American people residing in the United States. Therefore, the findings need to be replicated across other ethnic groups to ensure generalizability. Second, the studies focus on two particular product categories (i.e., clothing and beer). It is not entirely clear whether similar results would be obtained across other product categories (e.g., low involvement product categories). Further research should address this issue by replicating the findings across a larger set of product categories and brands. Finally, we focus on measuring levels of biculturalism using self-reports. Biases exist with self-reported measures, and thus alternative methods of obtaining levels of biculturalism would provide more accurate information on the role of biculturalism.

Various aspects of this research are worth investigating in the future. First, research should focus on various boundary conditions that facilitate bilingual advertising, even for culturally symbolic brands. For example, research could examine whether the particular advertising medium plays a role in increasing the acceptability of bilingual advertising for culturally symbolic brands. Second, replication of these findings in other cultures, for other product categories, and using other languages would provide a rich picture of the role of biculturalism, bilingual advertising, and brand characteristics. Third, examining asymmetries in reactions to bilingual ads featuring home-culture symbolic brands versus host-culture symbolic brands would be a worthwhile avenue for further research. Finally, research could examine various other characteristics that might influence the interplay of biculturalism and brand type on brand preferences. These could include brand characteristics, such as brand personality and consumer characteristics (e.g., need for affiliation, need for uniqueness). The results provided here offer a first step toward developing a deeper understanding of how biculturalism and brand type together influence reactions to bilingual advertising.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2015.04.003.

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