



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

ARCHIVIO ISTITUZIONALE  
DELLA RICERCA

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna  
Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

Dub or sub: effects of dubbing versus subtitling on TV advertising efficacy

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

*Published Version:*

*Availability:*

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/770389> since: 2020-09-07

*Published:*

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1007/s43039-020-00008-3>

*Terms of use:*

Some rights reserved. The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (<https://cris.unibo.it/>).  
When citing, please refer to the published version.

(Article begins on next page)

This is the final peer-reviewed accepted manuscript of:

**Scarpi, D., Pizzi, G. & Prestini, S. Dub or sub: effects of dubbing versus subtitling on TV advertising efficacy. *Italian Journal of Marketing* 2020, 189–206 (2020).**

The final published version is available online at:

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s43039-020-00008-3>

#### Terms of use:

Some rights reserved. The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

*This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (<https://cris.unibo.it/>)*

***When citing, please refer to the published version.***

# **DUB OR SUB: EFFECTS OF DUBBING VERSUS SUBTITLING ON TV ADVERTISING EFFICACY**

**DANIELE SCARPI<sup>1</sup>**

Associate Professor of Marketing  
Department of Management – University of Bologna  
Via Capo di Lucca, 34  
40126 BOLOGNA  
ITALY  
Phone: +39 051-2098087  
Email: [daniele.scarpi@unibo.it](mailto:daniele.scarpi@unibo.it)

**GABRIELE PIZZI**

Associate Professor of Marketing  
Department of Management – University of Bologna  
Via Capo di Lucca, 34  
40126 BOLOGNA  
ITALY  
Phone: +39 051-2098087  
Email: [gabriele.pizzi@unibo.it](mailto:gabriele.pizzi@unibo.it)

**STEFANO PRESTINI**

Academic Fellow of Marketing  
Department of Marketing, Bocconi University  
Via Guglielmo Röntgen, 1 - 20136 Milano  
Phone: +39 02 58365739  
Email: [stefano.prestini@unibocconi.it](mailto:stefano.prestini@unibocconi.it)

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author

# **DUB OR SUB: EFFECTS OF DUBBING VERSUS SUBTITLING ON TV ADVERTISING EFFICACY**

## **Abstract**

TV advertising can be standardized or adapted for local markets. In that case, the available options are dubbing and subtitling. This research focuses on the comparison of TV advertising efficacy when the same (foreign) ad is dubbed rather than subtitled in the viewer's native language. It uses a 2 (dubbed vs. subtitled) x 2 (German vs. Italian) experimental design on 260 respondents for an English ad, dubbed or subtitled in German and Italian, respectively. It advances a moderated sequential mediation model with ad adaptation as independent variable, ad attitude and brand attitude as mediators, language similarity as moderator, with ad sharing and brand purchase intention as dependent variables. Results show that dubbing works better than subtitling in driving positive attitudes toward the ad, which in turn affects how viewers perceive the brand. In turn, attitude toward the brand positively affects the intention to share the message and purchase the advertised brand. Instead, language similarity does not moderate the relationship between ad adaptation and attitude toward the ad.

**Keywords:** TV advertising, dubbing, subtitling, attitude, sharing intention, purchase intention

## **1. Introduction**

TV advertising can be standardized or adapted for local markets. Language transfer is a key factor to consider whenever advertisements are deployed internationally (Hornikx, Van Meurs, & De Boer, 2010), and is usually achieved with one of two methods. In that case, the available options are dubbing and subtitling. This research focuses on the comparison of TV advertising efficacy when the same (foreign) ad is dubbed rather than subtitled in the viewer's native language.

Dubbing refers to the practice of replacing the original voices with a lip-synched translation, while in subtitling (also called "closed-captioning" or "subbing") the original audio is preserved, and a translation is provided via on-screen subtitles (Luyken, Herbst, Langham-Brown, Reid, & Spinhof, 1991).

A variety of factors influences the choice between dubbing and subtitling. Both adaptation methods have distinct advantages and disadvantages concerning language processing, aesthetic considerations, and learning effects (Koolstra, Peeters, & Spinhof, 2002). The choice also has to be

made under economic considerations. Dubbing, due to the constraints and requirements of its format, is a far more elaborate process than subtitling: It involves not only translators but also specialized dubbing studios where voice actors record the synchronized translations under supervision of a dubbing director (Martínez, 2004). All this results in a significantly higher cost when compared to the simpler subtitling method (Luyken et al. 1991).

Overall, however, there is a paucity in the literature on dubbed advertising compared to subtitled advertising so that new theoretical contributions might be particularly meaningful. Moreover, those studies tend to highlight partially contradictory evidences (Nederstigt & Hilberink-Schulpen, 2018). For instance, some suggest that adaptation is better than no adaptation at all, but find no differences between dubbing and subtitling (Pagani et al., 2015), other studies find that dubbing plays no effect in bilingual communities (Caruana and Abdilla, 2005), while others find instead more positive effects of dubbing over subtitling (Koolstra et al., 2002) because dubbing could have a superior capability to subtitling in clarifying the linguistic content of the message (House, Quigley, & de Luque, 2010).

As a consequence, which type of linguistic aid is provided to consumers who are not native speakers (dubbing vs. subtitling) might potentially affect how they react to the ad. Accordingly, the present research aims to compare TV advertising efficacy when the same (foreign) ad is dubbed rather than subtitled in the viewer's native language, thereby challenging the opposite findings reported in the literature. In this vein, it is worth noticing that studies on dubbing and subtitling often used different dependent variables, making it difficult to compare findings across studies. On the other hand, they often treat each effect and variable in isolation rather than addressing their inter-relationships. In doing so, they also usually neglect the presence of moderators which might however affect the relative impact of dubbing versus subtitling on consumer perceptions.

Accordingly, addressing the sequence of effects generated by dubbing and subtitling, as well as the identification of relevant moderators, constitutes the object of the present research. Addressing the sequence of effects allows us to compare ad dubbing and subtitling from a broader theoretical perspective and address managerially relevant outcomes, related to consumer behavioral intentions toward the message and the brand.

Finally, considerations could be made for both the source and the target language (i.e., the language the advert is adapted to) involved in the adaptation process. First, languages have specific associations that come with them: Even if the recipient of a message cannot understand its semantic meaning, the message itself is still endowed with symbolic meaning (Piller, 2001). Said meaning differs significantly from language to language, and, in particular, English has been found to evoke associations that are detached from any specific country or culture (Piller, 2003; Hornikx & Starren,

2006). Second, languages are also processed semantically: the degree of similarity of the ad's language with the viewers' native language (Brauer, 1998) could have an impact on attitudinal variables (Caruana and Abdilla, 2005; Puntoni et al., 2008). That is to say, language similarity could qualify as a potential moderator of the dubbing-consumer attitudes relationship.

In the following paragraphs, we review the literature and advance specific hypotheses that lead to a conceptual model of sequential moderated mediation. After that, the model is tested quantitatively on a panel of 260 respondents, addressing the intention to purchase the advertised product and to share the message as dependent variables. Finally, the results are presented, and their theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

## **2. Theoretical background and hypotheses**

### *2.1. Message Standardization and adaptation*

The standardization-localization dilemma is still an open question in advertising research (Liu et al., 2016; Rajabi et al., 2017). From the perspective of a multinational company, a real global ad would be untouched, save for the adaptation of its language (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1990). However, concretely, even highly standardized advertising must be adapted to some degree, and language is probably the main element (Harvey, 1993). In this sense, Domzal and Kernan (1993) state that "global" does not necessarily imply "completely standardized", and instead define a global advertisement as one which is directed in several countries at the same time. According to Melewar and Vemmervik (2004), decisions about standardization can be distinguished in strategic decisions, which are more easily standardized, and in tactical decisions, which are more likely to be adapted. Coherently, three broad advertising strategies emerge: standardization, adaptation, and compromise. In the domain of advertising research, cultural aspects have been found to impact no less than other marketing elements, highlighting the need and the positive effects of advertising adaptation in the local context (Hite & Fraser, 1990; Weijters, Puntoni, & Baumgartner, 2017). Standardization advantages over adaptation are mainly the cost reduction (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1990; Van Mesdag, 2000), which mostly originates from economies of scale and scope (Melewar & Vemmervik, 2004), and a more consistent brand image (Melewar, Turnbull, & Balabanis, 2000; Tai, 1997).

Given the centrality of language in the strategic choice between standardization or adaptation in advertising, Hornikx and Van Meurs (2015) reviewed the existing literature on the use of foreign languages in advertising and identified two broad research streams: psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic. In the first stream, a person's first language succeeds any language learned later in life in terms of processing efficiency (Caruana & Abdilla, 2005; Alcantara-Pilar, Del Barrio-García,

& Rodriguez-Lopez, 2018) by affecting the emotional intensity of the message (Puntoni, De Langhe, & Van Osselaer, 2008). However, foreign languages can better attract the recipients' attention (e.g., Alm, 2003; Piller, 2001).

Furthermore, Thoma (2013) conducted an experiment tracking eye movement to discover how long participants lingered on advertising copy in various languages and found a significant advantage for English-language copy. This foreign language preference is also supported by Ahn and La Ferle (2008), who found that messages in a foreign language led to higher recall than native-language ones. In the sociolinguistic research stream, scholars found that foreign languages in advertising are firstly processed for symbolic meaning, not just for their semantic content (Hornikx & Van Meurs, 2017; Kelly-Holmes, 2005). In this vein, foreign languages in advertising represent a signal of the country-of-origin effect (Aichner, 2014; Melnyk, Klein, & Völckner, 2012). However, such effects are also influenced by the congruence between the advertised product and the perceptions of the language and its country: for example, the French are associated with cosmetics closer than Mexicans (Usunier & Cestre, 2007). Indeed, studies confirmed the positive effects of congruence and found that it led to significantly higher quality perception and purchase intention (Hornikx, Van Meurs & Hof, 2013). However, other studies provided contradictory evidence: for instance, Hornikx et al. (2010) found that easier-to-understand English slogans were more appreciated by respondents, in line with similar results by Gerritsen et al. (2000). These findings suggest that the role of foreign versus native language in advertising needs to be further investigated.

## 2.2. *Dubbing, subtitling, and attitude toward the ad*

The two main forms of language adaptation – both in videos and movies in general and in advertisements specifically - are dubbing and subtitling. Subtitling allows preserving the original soundtrack and the integrity of the performance. Luyken and colleagues (1991, p. 73) define dubbing as “the replacement of the original speech by a voice-track which is a faithful translation of the original speech and which attempts to reproduce the timing, phrasing and lip movements of the original”. The process of recording a translation by dubbing actors is referred to as *synchronization* (Varela, 2004). Synchronicity represents one of the pivotal features of dubbing, which differentiates it from mere voice-over, in which the original audio track is usually still audible in the background (Koolstra et al., 2002). In the dubbing process, credibility is the main goal that is the creation of the illusion of unity between character, on-screen actor, and dubbing actor (Varela, 1998).

With regards to the relative advantages and disadvantages of dubbing and subtitling, studies on subtitling show that it can diminish the linguistic understanding and therefore undermine the effectiveness of the original message delivery (Pagani et al., 2015; House, Quigley, & de Luque, 2010). This problem is not relevant for dubbed messages that are easier to follow because viewers do not have to read while viewing (Koolstra, Peeters, & Spinhof, 2002). For this reason, dubbing is the most used adapted system in many countries, such as Austria, Italy, Spain, France, and Germany (Koolstra, Peeters, & Spinhof, 2002). This preference can be extended to advertising spots in these countries, making dubbing of particular relevance at least at a European level.

When dealing with the consequences of dubbing and subtitling, previous studies suggest that which type of linguistic aid is provided to consumers who are not native speakers (dubbing vs. subtitling) might potentially affect how consumers react to the same ad. However, despite the importance of dubbing as the main form of spot adaptation, there is a paucity in the literature on dubbed advertising compared to subtitled advertising. To the best of the authors' knowledge, only two studies have measured the impact of dubbing on advertising, brand, and product attitudes. First, Caruana and Abdilla (2005) compared the affective reactions following original English advertisements against versions dubbed in the bilingual community of Malta. The findings displayed no effect of the dubbing on affective reactions, regardless of the degree of bilingualism. The study shows that sociolinguistic factors (like the social standing of a language) give English importance on par with the local Maltese, which is the reason why participants reacted similarly to both languages. The second study by Pagani, Goldsmith, and Perracchio (2015) found that any linguistically adapted version (dubbed or subtitled) outperformed the ad left in the original version without adaptation. However, they found no differences in consumer reactions between subtitling and dubbing on attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand. On the other hand, a separate stream of literature might lead to opposite suggestions. For instance, dubbing or subtitling could differently affect viewers' attitudes toward the advertisement based on the fact that dubbing has a superior capability to subtitling in clarifying the linguistic content of the message (House, Quigley, & de Luque, 2010) by providing a more realistic illusion of being exposed to the original message (Koolstra et. Al., 2002).

Building on the aforementioned studies, one might argue that consumers could evaluate the ad more positively when dubbed rather than when subtitled, at least for non-bilingual speakers, because dubbing could provide a format that is easier to follow (requiring to listen, not to read), and more realistic, because the actors are heard speaking and seen moving the lips. With a similar logic, studies in translations have even suggested that dubbing could be an ideal solution for overcoming linguistic barriers in the viewers of a video (Cintas & Orero, 2010). Accordingly, we advance that:



**H1:** Dubbing in advertising affects consumers' attitude toward the ad more positively than subtitling

### *2.3. Attitude toward the brand, product purchase intention, and message sharing intention*

Attitude toward the ad has been found to affect individuals' attitudinal and behavioral intentions: more favorable attitudes toward the ad have been found to determine stronger behavioral intentions than ads associated with less favorable attitudes (Ohanian, 1991; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Furthermore, the literature suggests that consumers' developed attitude toward an advertisement is crucial in clarifying its subsequent effects (Hwang, Yoon, & Park, 2011): namely, evaluating the brand or specific product – or both – presented in the ad (Sallam & Wahid, 2012). In this regard, some studies specifically focused on the set of causal relationships leading from attitude toward the ad to attitude toward the product or brand, finding an image transfer from the ad to the brand (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Finally, previous studies have suggested that a positive attitude toward the brand influences also consumer's brand-related behaviors such as purchase and referral intention (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013, Jones & Kim, 2010).

Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

**H2:** Attitude toward the ad positively affects attitude toward the brand

**H3a:** Attitude toward the brand positively affects purchase intention

**H3b:** Attitude toward the brand positively affects ad sharing intention

### *2.4. Ad dubbing and native language*

Finally, literature in psychology has identified a mechanism where familiarity reduces the psychological distance between the evaluating self and the object to be evaluated (Edwards, Lee, & La Ferle, 2009), and increases positive attitudes toward that object (Verhellen, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2016). Similarly, literature in branding has highlighted that brand knowledge increases brand liking (Zajonc, 1968; Montoya et al., 2017). However, previous studies have largely neglected to consider consumers' familiarity with the *language* used to advertise the brand. Previous studies have shown that the native language is more familiar to an individual than a foreign language, thereby it is more vivid and emotionally close (Caruana & Abdilla, 2005). However, studies in psycholinguistic have explained this phenomenon in broader terms relating it to psychological closeness. Familiarity is a possible facet, but many studies focus instead on language similarity as a way to create psychological closeness. The literature has related the psychological

closeness of a language to a consumer, to higher perceived emotionality of the message (Puntoni et al., 2008), as well as to a higher level of attention (Alm, 2003; Piller, 2001), message recognition (Ahn & La Ferle, 2008) and message processing efficiency (Caruan & Abdilla, 2005; Alcantara-Pilar et al., 2018). In this vein, several studies have shown that some languages share a closer etymological root than others (e.g. Dijkstra et al., 2010), documenting -for instance- that Chinese and English are perceived more dissimilar than English and German (Brauer, 1998) or, in a European context (Gerritsen et al., 2007) with Dutch and English versus Spanish and English. Specifically, Dutch and English were found to be perceptually closer than Spanish and English (Johnson & Babel, 2010; Runnqvist et al., 2013). Therefore, the languages which display higher similarity (e.g. due to a more similar etymology) induce higher psychological closeness than less similar languages and therefore should lead individuals to display different reactions to a message depending on their familiarity with the language used to deliver it. In particular, considered that dubbing has been addressed as an ideal solution for overcoming linguistic barriers (Cintas & Orero, 2010), it can be argued that the higher the difference between languages, the higher the positive effect of dubbing on attitude toward the ad. Conversely, when languages display higher similarity, subtitling might still lead to positive attitudes toward the ad because it allows preserving the original soundtrack and the integrity of the performance. In other words, we posit a moderation effect of language similarity on the relationship between language adaptation and attitude toward the ad. Specifically:

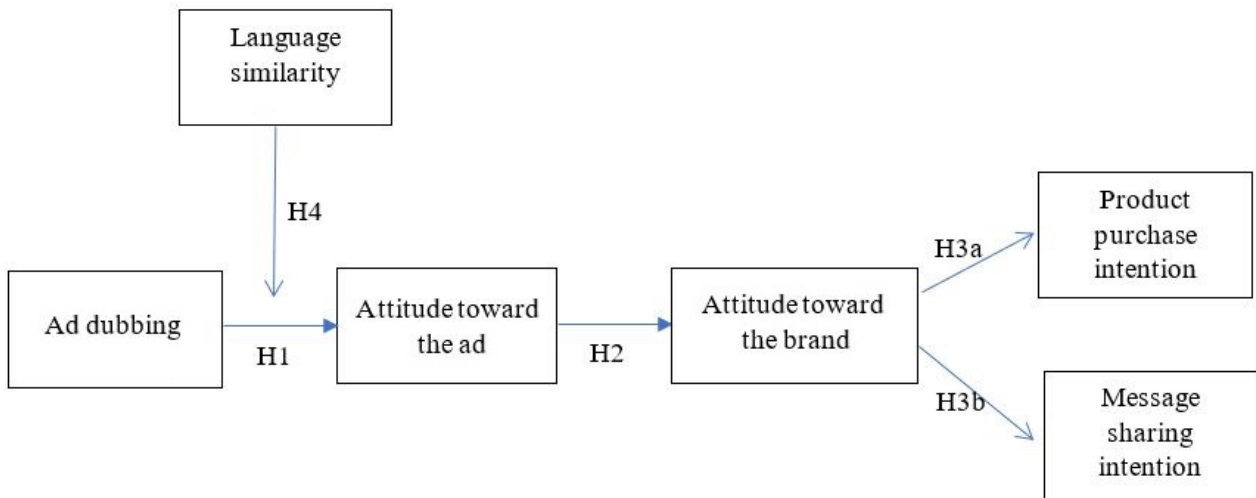
**H4:** the relationship between ad dubbing and attitude toward the ad is moderated by language similarity so that when the viewers' native language is perceptually distant to the ad's original language, the effect will be stronger.

### *2.5. The conceptual model*

Overall, the hypotheses build on the literature on advertising and advance that a dubbed ad will lead to a higher attitude toward the ad, especially for consumers whose native language is more similar to the ad's original language (i.e., English, in the present research). Furthermore, the hypotheses advance that attitude toward the ad will lead to attitude toward the brand, ultimately driving higher intention to purchase the advertised product and to share the message.

In summary, we develop a moderated sequential mediation model, where the attitude toward the ad and the attitude toward the brand mediate the ad dubbing – purchase intention and the ad dubbing – message sharing relationships, while language similarity moderates the relationship between ad dubbing and attitude toward the ad (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. The conceptual model**



### 3. Method

#### 3.1. *Experimental stimuli*

Participants were randomly exposed to either a dubbed or subtitled version of the same video featuring the ad of the same brand (Twix chocolate bars) which was downloaded from Youtube. The ad was launched in 2014 as part of the “Pick a Side” campaign, which was built around the tongue-in-cheek narrative that rivaling factories make the two bars of every Twix package. In the video, a tour guide shows a group of visitors the Left Twix factory, touting its “unique approach” to candy-making. He is constantly interrupted by a sassy boy, who points out that Right Twix is using identical procedures. The clip ends with one of the factory machines taping the petulant child’s mouth shut, before the title card with the slogan “Try both, pick a side” appears. The original ad was in the English language and was created by the advertising agency BBDO. Then, it was dubbed by the company for various local markets. What stands out is that it was also adapted in its visuals, beyond just the on-screen slogan: There are signs in the background of the factory reading “Left Twix” and “Right Twix”, which were translated into the language of the dub (“Linkes Twix” / “Rechtes Twix” and “Twix Sinistro” / “Twix Destro” respectively for German and Italian). Screenshots from the video can be found in the appendix (figures A.1 and A.2). Since participants were recruited both from Germany and Italy as in Pagani and colleagues (2015), the video was displayed dubbed or subtitled in German for the Germans and in Italian for the Italians. The dubbed versions were real ads that the company was broadcasting in the two countries. The authors created the subtitled versions by using the freeware video editor Adobe Lightworks to add the subtitles to the original English version. The wording of the subtitles was the transcription

of the text spoken in the real dubbed ads to ensure perfect matching in the wording of the messages. All videos used a 720p resolution.

### *3.2. Sample and procedure*

The survey was implemented on Qualtrics and distributed to an online panel, ensuring that they were either German or Italian native speakers. A total of 260 respondents was gathered (mean age 26.41, median age 25, 63.7% female). Respondents agreeing to participate in the survey were first randomly exposed to either the dubbed or the subtitled version of the video matching their native language. After watching the video, participants were asked to rate on 7-point bipolar scales their attitude towards the ad (three items from Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002) and toward the brand (three items from Spears & Singh, 2004). Brand knowledge was measured with a single item question (as in Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011). Then, respondents reported on their intention to buy the advertised product (three items adapted from Holzwarth, Janiszewski, & Neumann, 2006), and intention to share the ad (three items from Huang et al., 2013).

Respondents were asked one question about their perceived similarity of the languages, adapted from van Oudenhoven, Selenko and Otten (2010) (“To what extent do you think that the English language resembles the language of the people of your own country?”). Finally, respondents reported their age and gender, were tested for suspicion, thanked and debriefed. Details are provided in the Appendix.

### *3.3. Model Estimation*

Two moderated sequential mediation analyses were run to test the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1 using the PROCESS macro 3.4 for SPSS 25 with the mean composite scores on the items for attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand as sequential mediator. Product purchase intention and ad sharing intention were entered as dependent variables, respectively. Ad subtitling versus dubbing was entered as a dichotomous independent variable (0 = subtitled; 1 = dubbed). Brand knowledge was entered as a covariate and respondents’ native language as a moderator of all the sets of mediating paths involved in the model (Model 92; Hayes, 2018).

The analysis combined mediation and moderation to estimate the conditional indirect effect of ad dubbing versus subtitling on product purchase intention and ad sharing intention through attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand as mediators. The statistical significance of the direct and indirect effects was evaluated by means of 5,000 bootstrap samples to create bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs; 95%).

## 4. Results

First, a confirmatory factor analysis was run, whose results support the convergent validity of the measures, given that all factor loadings exceed the .6 threshold (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), while the composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) exceed the .7 and .5 thresholds, respectively (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Next, a test of discriminant validity was run, comparing the AVE for each construct with the squared correlation between any two constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity is confirmed, as the lowest AVE (.60, attitude toward the ad) exceeds the highest squared correlation between any two variables (.34, attitude toward the ad with attitude toward the brand). The measures, therefore, meet all relevant psychometric properties. Details are provided in Table A.1 and A.2 in the Appendix.

Finally, as a manipulation check a subsample of 80 respondents was asked one question about their perceived similarity on a subsample of 80 respondents, English and German were perceived to be more similar than English and Italian ( $M_{Ger} = 52.10$  vs.  $M_{Ita} = 28.45$ ,  $F(1;79) = 44.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .36$ ). They also correctly reported which language was used in the ad, and whether the ad they saw was dubbed or subtitled (no participants failed this check).

### 4.1. Moderated sequential mediation model

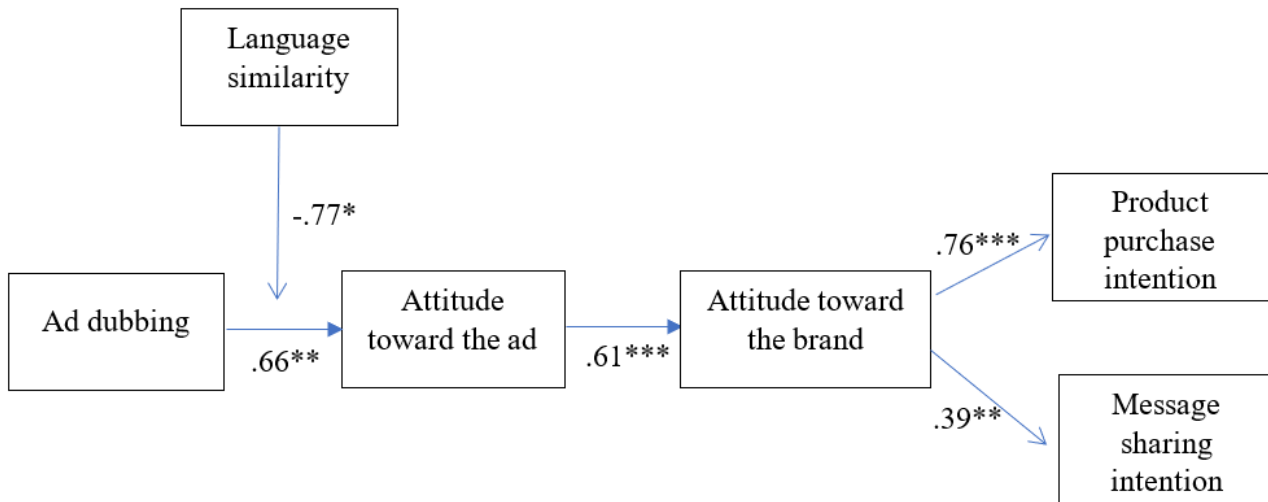
Ad dubbing increased attitude toward the ad (Effect = .66;  $p = .01$ ), providing support for H1. In turn, as advanced in H2, attitude toward the ad positively affected attitude toward the brand (Effect = .61;  $p < .001$ ) that, ultimately, affected both the intention to purchase the advertised product (Effect = .76;  $p < .001$ ) and the intention to share the ad (Effect = .39;  $p = .01$ ) as hypothesized in H3a and H3b respectively.

Furthermore, testing for the moderation of language similarity on the dubbing – ad attitude relationship, yields a significant moderation effect (Effect = -.77;  $p = .02$ ). This is to say, dubbing efficacy is affected by the distance of respondents' native language from the ad's original language. Specifically, the results show that the effect of language adaptation on attitude toward the ad is positive when language similarity is low (Effect = .66;  $p = .01$ ), whilst it becomes negative and not significant when language similarity is high (Effect = -.11;  $p = .64$ ). In other words, high language similarity switches off the effect, while low language similarity switches it on, in line with H4. Evidence from the estimation of the model shows a significant index of moderated mediation on purchase intention (Effect = -.36, 95% CI [-.70, -.06]) as well as on sharing intention (Effect = -.18, 95% CI [-.42, -.02]), as the 95% CI interval does not include zero. This evidence supports the robustness of the conceptual model (Hayes, 2018).

No direct effect emerges for language adaptation neither on purchase intention (Effect =  $-.07$ ;  $p = .73$ ) nor on ad sharing intention (Effect =  $.15$ ;  $p = .54$ ), thereby suggesting a full moderated mediation.

Figure 2 below graphically summarizes the results:

**Figure 2. The model with estimates**



## 5. Discussion

The frequent use of language adaptations in international advertising advances the question of whether different techniques for adapting a message yield different consumers' reactions. In particular, the two most common techniques are dubbing and subtitling. Accordingly, the aim of this research has been to compare their effectiveness. However, the literature on dubbing in advertising is relatively scarce and frequently focuses on bilingual audiences or the audience's language proficiency (Caruana and Abdilla, 2015; Puntoni et al., 2008). Furthermore, among those previous studies, there emerge contradictory findings: for instance, Pagani and colleagues (2015) compare the original message with dubbed and subtitled adapted versions of the same message, and find no difference between dubbed and subtitled adapted on consumers' attitudes. Instead, Koolstra and colleagues (2002) show that dubbing outperforms subtitling in affecting consumers' processing of the message, and explain it in light of the greater realism of dubbing.

On the one hand, these contradictions could be explained in light of the fact that studies on dubbing and subtitling often use different dependent variables, that range from information processing to message aesthetics and affective reactions as well as attitudes, which makes comparisons across studies difficult. On the other hand, most studies either run separate comparisons of means or adopt a qualitative approach. Furthermore, it is worthwhile noticing that

the present research considered also moderators in assessing the relative impact of dubbing versus subtitling on consumer perceptions. The presence of moderators could explain these contradictions.

Overall, the present research contributes in two directions. First, it addresses the comparison of ad dubbing and subtitling by incorporating a heterogeneous literature in suggesting they might yield different results. Second, in doing so, it advances a conceptual model that simultaneously accounts for the entire chain of effects from ad dubbing and subtitling to behavioral intentions toward the message and the advertised brand, through attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand. This allows incorporating in the same analysis several variables often considered in isolation in previous literature, or scattered among different studies. Therefore, it allows us to address and quantify their causal relationships specifically. Furthermore, the focus of the present analysis is sharper on managerially relevant outcomes, going beyond attitudes, to address also the behavioral intentions. As a result of these contributions to previous studies, there emerges that dubbing works better than subtitling in driving positive attitudes toward the ad, which in turn affects how viewers perceive the brand. In turn, attitude toward the brand positively affects the intention to share the message and purchase the advertised brand.

Finally, the present research also addresses language similarity, advancing it as a moderator in the sequential chain of effects triggered by dubbing and considering both similar (German-English) and dissimilar (Italian-English) languages (Brauer, 1998). The consideration of language similarity is relatively novel in studies about dubbing and subtitling within the domain of advertising rather than cinematic studies, as language similarity has more frequently been addressed with regards to language learning. No moderating effect emerges for language similarity, which is particularly meaningful in that it highlights the robustness of the model across different linguistic domains. This is to say, the attitude building ability of dubbing does not depend upon the specific destination language.

Overall, the findings from this research could contribute to improving both scholarly knowledge on the effects exerted by ad dubbing and subtitling, and practitioners' advertising strategies in the adaptation of TV ads. The managerial implications are detailed in the next paragraph.

## **6. Managerial implications/ conclusion**

Practitioners might benefit from the results showing that ad dubbing increases the attitude toward the ad more than subtitling and therefore exerts higher effects on brand attitude and positive behavioral intentions. Accordingly, although dubbing is relatively more expensive and time-consuming than subtitling (Tveit, 2009), the results from this analysis provide support for the added

value. As a result, communication managers should consider the possibility of reconverting international subtitled campaigns in a dubbed advertisement. With this regard, recent trends brought by streaming platforms fully align with the findings from this research in showing a trend of preference for dubbed over subtitled messages. For instance, with regards to movies, Netflix recently declared that about 80% of its American viewers preferred the dubbed version of foreign movies over the subtitled (The New York Times, 2019)

On the other hand, international brands that know well in advance that their ad will have to be adapted to different linguistic contexts and markets should plan ways to minimize the higher adaptation cost of dubbing by leveraging the proportion of verbal and non-verbal elements in the original ad.

Furthermore, the effect of dubbing or subtitling is not affected by the specific language in which it is adapted. Thus, advertisers should be confident that the same effect of dubbing on attitude toward the ad would hold regardless of the target language of the translation. This final consideration echoes the recent trend by Netflix of “improve the quality of its English dubbing to make foreign shows more appealing to English-speaking audiences” (The New York Times, 2019).

## **7. Limitations and future research**

This study was not meant to be conclusive and -like any other study- is not exempt from limitations. However, they provide avenues for future research. First, care is needed before generalizing the results from this research, as it considered only an online panel with 200 respondents and three languages (Italian, German, and English language). With this regard, future research could broaden the scope of the analysis by considering more countries and languages, and comparing languages with an even higher degree of dissimilarity, such as European and Asiatic languages.

Furthermore, future studies could address viewers’ attitude not only to the advertising and the brand but also to the language in which the ad has been dubbed or subtitled. With some noticeable exceptions (e.g., Alonso-Garcia, Chelminsky, & Gonzales-Hernandez, 2013), literature in advertising has largely neglected that consumers could react differently to an ad because they have a negative attitude toward its language. Yet, this issue has been largely neglected in advertising and could be a fruitful avenue for future studies on dubbing and subtitling.

Finally, future research could address the different efficacy of dubbing and subtitling in media different from Television, such as Youtube advertising. In this vein, the present research did not manipulate the original language of the ad, which remained English across the experimental conditions. However, online movie streaming platforms such as Netflix, more and more commonly face the issue of movies in original languages different than English. In these cases, the language



adaptation is not from -but rather to- English. Accordingly, future studies could compare dubbing and subtitling for different original languages.

### **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

This study received no funding. The Authors declare they do not have any conflict of interest. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

### **References**

- Ahn, J., & La Ferle, C. (2008). Enhancing Recall and Recognition for Brand Names and Body Copy. A Mixed-Language Approach. *Journal of Advertising*, 37(3), 107–117.
- Aichner, T. (2014). Country-of-origin marketing: A list of typical strategies with examples. *Journal of Brand Management*, 21(1), 81-93.
- Alcántara-Pilar, J. M., Del Barrio-García, S., & Rodríguez-López, M. E. (2018). Does language matter? A cross-national comparison of the moderating effect of language on website information-processing. *Journal of Business Research*, 88, 66-78.
- Alm, C. O. (2003). English in the Ecuadorian commercial context. *World Englishes*, 22(2), 143-158.
- Alonso García, N., Chelminski, P., & González Hernández, E. (2013). The effects of language on attitudes toward advertisements and brands trust in Mexico. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 34(1), 77-92.
- Bambauer-Sachse, S., & Mangold, S. (2011). Brand equity dilution through negative online word-of-mouth communication. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 18(1), 38-45.
- Becerra, E. P., & Badrinarayanan, V. (2013). The influence of brand trust and brand identification on brand evangelism. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 22(5/6), 371-383.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the evaluation of structural equation models. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*, 16(1), 74-94.
- Brauer, M. (1998). Stroop interference in bilinguals: The role of similarity between the two languages. In A. F. Healy & L. E. Bourne, Jr. (Eds.), *Foreign language learning: Psycholinguistic studies on training and retention* (p. 317–337). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

- Caruana, A., & Abdilla, M. (2005). To dub or not to dub: Language adaptation of global television advertisements for a bilingual community. *Journal of Brand Management*, 12(4), 236-249.
- Cintas, J. D., & Orero, P. (2010). Voiceover and dubbing. In Y. Gambier & L. van Doorslaer (Eds.) *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Vol. 1 (pp. 441-445). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Domzal, T. J., & Kernan, J. B. (1993). Mirror, mirror: Some postmodern reflections on global advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 22(4), 1-20.
- Gerritsen, M., Korzilius, H., Van Meurs, F., & Gijsbers, I. (2000). English in Dutch commercials: Not understood and not appreciated. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 40(4), 17-31.
- Gerritsen, M., Nickerson, C., Van den Brandt, C., Crijns, R., Domínguez, N., & Van Meurs, F. (2007). English in print advertising in Germany, Spain and the Netherlands: Frequency of occurrence, comprehensibility and the effect on corporate image. In G. Garzone & C. Ilie (Eds.), *Linguistic insights: Studies in language and communication: Vol. 34. The use of English in institutional and business settings: An intercultural perspective* (pp. 79-98). Bern, Switzerland: Lang.
- Gwinner, K. P., & Eaton, J. (1999). Building brand image through event sponsorship: The role of image transfer. *Journal of advertising*, 28(4), 47-57.
- Dijkstra, T., Miwa, K., Brummelhuis, B., Sappelli, M., & Baayen, H. (2010). How cross-language similarity and task demands affect cognate recognition. *Journal of Memory and language*, 62(3), 284-301.
- Edwards, S. M., Lee, J. K., & Ferle, C. L. (2009). Does place matter when shopping online? Perceptions of similarity and familiarity as indicators of psychological distance. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 10(1), 35-50.
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error: Algebra and statistics. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(3), 382-8.
- Harvey, M. G. (1993). A model to determine standardization of the advertising process in international markets. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 33(4), 57-65.
- Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Guilford Publications.
- Hite, R. E., & Fraser, C. (1990). Configuration and coordination of global advertising. *Journal of Business Research*, 21(4), 335-344.
- Holzwarth, M., Janiszewski, C., & Neumann, M. M. (2006). The influence of avatars on online consumer shopping behavior. *Journal of marketing*, 70(4), 19-36.
- Hornikx, J., & Starren, M. (2006). The relationship between the appreciation and the comprehension of French in Dutch advertisements. In R. Crijns, & C. Burgers (Eds.), *Werbestrategien in*

*Theorie und Praxis: Sprachliche Aspekte von deutschen und niederländischen Unternehmensdarstellungen und Werbekampagnen* [Advertising strategies in theory and practice: Linguistic aspects of German and Dutch organizational representations and advertising campaigns] (pp. 129-145). Tostedt, Germany: Attikon.

- Hornikx, J., & Van Meurs, F., & De Boer, A. (2010). English or a local language in advertising? The appreciation of easy and difficult English slogans in the Netherlands. *The Journal of Business Communication* (1973), 47(2), 169-188.
- Hornikx, J., Van Meurs, F., & Hof, R. J. (2013). The effectiveness of foreign-language display in advertising for congruent versus incongruent products. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 25(3), 152-165.
- Hornikx, J., & Van Meurs, F. (2015). Foreign language display in advertising from a psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspective: A review and research agenda. In *Analyzing the cultural diversity of consumers in the global marketplace* (pp. 299-319). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Hornikx, J., Van Meurs, F. (2017). Foreign languages in advertising as implicit Country-of-Origin cues: Mechanism, associations, and effectiveness. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 29(2), 60-73.
- House, R. J., Quigley, N. R., & de Luque, M. S. (2010). Insights from Project GLOBE: Extending global advertising research through a contemporary framework. *International Journal of Advertising*, 29(1), 111-139.
- Huang, J., Su, S., Zhou, L., & Liu, X. (2013). Attitude toward the viral ad: Expanding traditional advertising models to interactive advertising. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(1), 36-46.
- Hwang, J., Yoon, Y. S., & Park, N. H. (2011). Structural effects of cognitive and affective responses to web advertisements, website and brand attitudes, and purchase intentions: The case of casual-dining restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(4), 897-907.
- Johnson, K., & Babel, M. (2010). On the perceptual basis of distinctive features: Evidence from the perception of fricatives by Dutch and English speakers. *Journal of phonetics*, 38(1), 127-136.
- Jones, C., & Kim, S. (2010). Influences of retail brand trust, off-line patronage, clothing involvement and website quality on online apparel shopping intention. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 34(6), 627-637.
- Kelly-Holmes, H. (2005). *Advertising as multilingual communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Koolstra, C. M., Peeters, A. L., & Spinhof, H. (2002). The pros and cons of dubbing and subtitling. *European Journal of Communication*, 17(3), 325-354.

- Lafferty, B. A., Goldsmith, R. E., & Newell, S. J. (2002). The dual credibility model: The influence of corporate and endorser credibility on attitudes and purchase intentions. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 10*(3), 1-11.
- Liu, S., Perry, P., Moore, C., & Warnaby, G. (2016). The standardization-localization dilemma of brand communications for luxury fashion retailers' internationalization into China. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(1), 357-364.
- Luyken, G. M., Herbst, T., Langham-Brown, J., Reid, H., Spinhof, H. (1991). *Overcoming language barriers in television: Dubbing and subtitling for the European audience*. Manchester: European Institute for the Media.
- Machleit, K. A., & Wilson, R. D. (1988). Emotional feelings and attitude toward the advertisement: The roles of brand familiarity and repetition. *Journal of Advertising, 17*(3), 27-35.
- Martínez, X. (2004). Film dubbing. In Orero, P. (ed.), *Topics in Audiovisual Translation* (pp. 3-7). Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Melewar, T. C., Turnbull, S., & Balabanis, G. (2000). International advertising strategies of multinational enterprises in the Middle East. *International Journal of Advertising, 19*(4), 529-547.
- Melewar, T. C., & Vemmervik, C. (2004). International advertising strategy: A review, reassessment and recommendation. *Management Decision, 42*(7), 863-881.
- Melnyk, V., Klein, K., & Völckner, F. (2012). The double-edged sword of foreign brand names for companies from emerging countries. *Journal of Marketing, 76*(6), 21-37.
- Montoya, R. M., Horton, R. S., Vevea, J. L., Citkowicz, M., & Lauber, E. A. (2017). A re-examination of the mere exposure effect: The influence of repeated exposure on recognition, familiarity, and liking. *Psychological bulletin, 143*(5), 459-498.
- Nederstigt, U., & Hilberink-Schulpen, B. (2018). Advertising in a Foreign Language or the Consumers' Native Language?. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 30*(1), 2-13.
- Ohanian, R. (1991). The impact of celebrity spokespersons' perceived image on consumers' intention to purchase. *Journal of advertising Research, 31*(1), 46-54.
- Onkvisit, S., & Shaw, J. J. (1990). Global advertising: revolution or myopia? *Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 2*(3), 97-112.
- Pagani, M., Goldsmith, R., & Perracchio, A. (2015). Standardization vs. adaptation: consumer reaction to TV ads containing subtitled or English dubbed ads. *International Journal of Advertising, 34*(4), 702-714.

- Petty, R. E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Schumann, D. (1983). Central and peripheral routes to advertising effectiveness: The moderating role of involvement. *Journal of consumer research*, 10(2), 135-146.
- Piller, I. (2001). Identity constructions in multilingual advertising. *Language in society*, 30(2), 153-186.
- Piller, I. (2003). Advertising as a site of language contact. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 23, 170-183.
- Puntoni, S., De Langhe, B., & Van Osselaer, S. M. (2008). Bilingualism and the emotional intensity of advertising language. *Journal of consumer research*, 35(6), 1012-1025.
- Rajabi, M., Dens, N., De Pelsmacker, P., & Goos, P. (2017). Consumer responses to different degrees of advertising adaptation: the moderating role of national openness to foreign markets. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(2), 293-313.
- Runnqvist, E., Gollan, T. H., Costa, A., & Ferreira, V. S. (2013). A disadvantage in bilingual sentence production modulated by syntactic frequency and similarity across languages. *Cognition*, 129(2), 256-263.
- Sallam, M. A. A., & Wahid, N. A. (2012). Endorser credibility effects on Yemeni male consumer's attitudes towards advertising, brand attitude and purchase intention: The mediating role of attitude toward brand. *International business research*, 5(4), 55.
- Spears, N., & Singh, S. N. (2004). Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions. *Journal of current issues & research in advertising*, 26(2), 53-66.
- Tai, S. H. (1997). Advertising in Asia: localize or regionalize? *International Journal of Advertising*, 16(1), 48-61.
- The New York Times (2019). Netflix Wants to Make Its Dubbed Foreign Shows Less Dubby, 19 July 2019, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/19/arts/television/netflix-money-heist.html>
- Thoma, D. (2013). Effects of the use of English in non-English advertising contexts: An eyetracking approach. *Proceedings from the Conference on Corporate Communication June 2013* (pp. 159-168).
- Tveit, J. E. (2009). *Dubbing versus subtitling: Old battleground revisited*. In *Audiovisual Translation* (pp. 85-96). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Usunier, J. C., & Cestre, G. (2007). Product ethnicity: Revisiting the match between products and countries. *Journal of International Marketing*, 15(3), 32-72.

- Van Oudenhoven, J. P., Selenko, E., & Otten, S. (2010). Effects of country size and language similarity on international attitudes: A six-nation study. *International Journal of Psychology*, 45(1), 48-55.
- Van Mesdag, M. (2000). Culture-sensitive adaptation or global standardization: The duration-of-usage hypothesis. *International Marketing Review*, 17(1), 74-84.
- Varela, F. C. (1998). Textual constraints and the translator's creativity in dubbing. In Beylard-Ozeroff, A., Králová, J., & Moser-Mercer, B. (Eds.). *Translators' Strategies and Creativity* (pp. 15-22). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishings.
- Varela, F. C. (2004) Synchronization in dubbing – A translational approach. In: Orero, P. (Ed.): *Topics in Audiovisual Translation* (pp. 35-52). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishings.
- Verhellen, Y., Dens, N., & De Pelsmacker, P. (2016). Do I know you? How brand familiarity and perceived fit affect consumers' attitudes towards brands placed in movies. *Marketing Letters*, 27(3), 461-471.
- Weijters, B., Puntoni, S., & Baumgartner, H. (2017). Methodological issues in cross-linguistic and multilingual advertising research. *Journal of Advertising*, 46(1), 115-128.
- Zajonc, R. B. (1968). Attitudinal effects of mere exposure. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 9, (2, Pt. 2), 1-27.

## Appendix

**Table A.1. Questionnaire items**

	Cronbach alpha	AVE	CR
Attitude toward the ad	.89	.60	.87
1. Good- Bad			
2. Favourable - Unfavourable			
3. favourable-unfavourable.			
Attitude toward the brand	.93	.76	.91
1. Good- Bad			
2. Favourable - Unfavourable			
3. satisfactory-unsatisfactory			
Purchase Intention	.89	.68	.87
1. I can imagine buying [snack] from this brand			

2. The next time I buy [snack] I will take this brand into consideration
3. I am very interested in buying [snack] from this brand

Sharing intention .92 .79 .92

1. I am likely to share with friends and colleagues the [video] I watched
2. I am likely to tell other about [video]
3. I am likely to talk about [video] in my conversations with friends and colleagues

Brand knowledge - - -

1. Please indicate your knowledge with regard to the brand

**Table A.2. Means, standard deviations, correlations, and squared correlations.**

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4
1 Attitude toward the ad	4.77	1.08	1.00	<i>0.34</i>	<i>0.08</i>	<i>0.04</i>
2 Attitude toward the brand	4.79	1.13	0.58	1.00	<i>0.31</i>	<i>0.09</i>
3 Purchase intention	3.92	1.48	0.29	0.56	1.00	<i>0.20</i>
4 Share intention	3.22	1.59	0.20	0.30	0.45	1.00

Notes: *Squared correlations* are listed in italics and above the diagonal, with correlations below the diagonal

**Table A.3. Full model: sequential moderated mediation analysis**

Hypothesis		coeff	se	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
H1	Ad dubbing on Attitude toward the ad	0.66	0.24	2.73	0.01	0.18	1.15
H2	Attitude toward the Ad on attitude toward the brand	0.61	0.07	8.83	0.00	0.47	0.74
H3a	Attitude toward the brand on Purchase intention	0.76	0.11	7.22	0.00	0.56	0.98
H3b	Attitude toward the brand on Sharing intention	0.39	0.23	3.00	0.01	0.13	0.65
H4	Moderation of Language similarity	-0.77	0.34	-2.29	0.02	-1.44	-0.11
-	Ad dubbing on Purchase intention	-0.07	0.20	-0.34	0.73	-0.46	0.32
-	Ad dubbing on Sharing intention	0.15	0.24	0.61	0.54	-0.33	0.63

Note. LLCI = lower limit 95% confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit 95% confidence interval.

Figure A.1. Stimuli example: ad subtitled in Italian



Figure A.2. Stimuli example: ad subtitled in German

