

IMPACT OF MALE AND FEMALE VOICE CUES ON CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES IN TELEMARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Voice is well known to have a crucial impact on consumer attitudes. In telemarketing, voice qualities are fundamental in the decision making of the consumer. Contradictory studies are sure indicators of the need for more research.

In a factorial design putting forward three voice variables (intensity, intonation and speech rate), a male and a female professional actors, modifying their own voices read an advertising message. Manipulation checks corroborate each of the experimental conditions. Subjects (399) filled a questionnaire after hearing the message recreating telemarketing conditions. The questionnaire included a series of questions in a 7 points Likert scales form revealing subjects attitudes toward the message and their behavioral intent about message content .

Results show differences according to specific voice variables : intensity, then speech rate, induce more effects on message perception and on behavioral intent than intonation. There is no significative impact in regards of the gender's source and respondents gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

In telemarketing, the very first seconds of listening to an advertising message have a direct impact on the decision listener will take to end the conversation as quick as possible or, in the contrary, to listen to the speaker. It's well known that voice has a crucial role in the success or failure of the sale. The impact of voice on receptors is studied in phonetics, in social psychology , in marketing but there is almost no formal research in telemarketing to understand more clearly this phenomenon. The purposes of this study are to highlight the impact of male and female voice cues on consumers' attitudes in telemarketing.

1.1 Voice and phonetic

Phonemic information revealed by the source have been well documented : rate of speech [14, 21, 22], voice pitch [1, 6] and intensity of voice [4, 5, 7]. Speakers who talk loudly are perceived as more able to articulate their arguments, more attractive, more credible and trustworthy. Competence can be also inferred from a powerful speaking style [4, 8, 15] or from a marked intonation accompanied with high pitch of voice [1].

Very few phonological studies have investigated the effects of voice on listeners behavioral intent. Persuasion seems to be enhanced by expressive voice tone [12], rising intonation [2], high intensity [16, 20] and speech rate [12, 15]. In the advertising context, voice is consider as a neglected research topic even if it is perceived as unavoidable in established models.

1.2 Voice and marketing

Petty and Cacioppo [18, 19] have proposed a model to explain attitudes and behavior in a persuasion context : The Elaborated Likelihood Model (ELM). The road map of persuasive communication is explain in such a way : if a message is clear or important, the audience will be willing and able to take an effortful route to process the message (central route), giving attention to arguments. The message is then said to be of *high involvement*. If, on the contrary, the message is difficult to understand or thought unimportant, it is said to be of *low involvement* . In this case, where the audience is distracted or uninterested, a less strenuous route will be taken (peripheral route), giving attention only to the setup.

On the central route, attitude arguments are learned and processed carefully before they are accepted . On the peripheral route, less cognitive effort is exerted and persuasion is based on heuristics, attributions, and moods. Voice is a fundamental heuristic element in a context based on audio settings, where all visual cues are absent. Impact of two voice characteristics on listeners attitudes were clearly enhanced in a low involvement audio context [9, 10].

Following ELM, voice should have a crucial role in telemarketing . Having no visual supports, voice constitute the only possible peripheral route. Moreover, during the first few seconds, the receiver concentrates is attention only on the speaker's voice because the arguments of the message are still to come. Therefore, all telemarketing messages should first be considered as being low involvement ones, at least for the time needed to attract the customer.

1.3 Voice and telemarketing

It has been shown that low speech rate, low pitch and low intensity are specific qualities of the successful telemarketer [3, 11, 13]. Other research contradict these findings [17]. These contradictory results are sure indicators of the need for more research. To our knowledge, at this point, no comparative research has been done on man and woman voices in telemarketing. By initiating this research we hope to fill this gap.

2. METHODOLOGY

A professional actress and a professional actor were asked to record a mock low involvement telemarketing message. The message was about a ATM card (Automatic Teller Machine card) offered by a known Canadian bank. It was a real publicity message that had been modified for our purposes. The message had previously been validated as being of low involvement [10].

The first condition recorded was the *moderate* condition, which was asked to be as "neutral" as possible (normal speech rate, normal intensity, slight intonation). The other targeted conditions were the following : loud and soft

intensity, marked and unmarked intonation and fast and slow speech rate (conditions labelled *high and low*). During the recording, the actress/actor was asked to vary only the target of the condition, keeping all other as close as possible to the *moderate* condition. Adding the *moderate* to these conditions, we ended out with 14 experimental conditions (6 conditions plus the moderate for both male and female source's voices). All the recording were done in an acoustic room, on a Marantz PDM-222, using high bias audio cassettes.

The two best recordings of each conditions were first selected. Two experimenters separately choose the recording that best represented the targeted conditions. The level of agreement reached 100%.

2.1 Pre-experimentation.

The collected conditions were all acoustically confirmed and excerpts from each condition were presented to a group of linguistic students who confirmed the adequacy of the selected recordings.

2.2 Experimentation.

408 undergraduate university students were selected in 14 grammar classes that are opened to all university students, therefore giving us a good diversity of students both in background and in age. The 14 groups were randomly assigned to one of the condition.

Each of the 14 experimental groups was asked to listen to one of the conditions from a good quality radio-cassette player. The students were all told that what they were about to hear was a mock telemarketing message. High and low frequencies were cut off to reproduce telephone conditions as accurately as possible. After listening to the recording, each student was asked to answer a questionnaire concerning his or her attitudes toward the message and his or her behavioral intent. Subjects filled series of questions in a 7 points Likert scales form (-3 to +3). 399 questionnaires were fully completed, 205 by women (51,4%) and 194 by men (48,6%). Age range was 19 to 61 years old (mean : 26,51).

3. RESULTS

An analysis of variance and a maximum likelihood factor analysis were performed on the effects of source voices, intensity, intonation, speech rate, and respondents' gender on the receiver's attitude toward the message (message quality perception) and his/her intent to act (behavioral intents). After iterations, extraction of the first three factors permit to put forward message execution, intelligibility and credibility variables. Message execution represents the perception by respondents of the set up of the message, the understanding and the possibility to give selfconfidence to the message.

3.1 Message quality perception and attitudes

The three voice variables (intensity, intonation and speech rate) have main effects on message perception and subjects attitudes (respectively, $F_{1,395}=3,730$, $p=0.000$, $F_{1,395}=2,49$, $p=0.011$, $F_{1,395}=2,313$, $p=0.019$). More precisely, intensity affects positively the message execution, negatively the message intelligibility and positively the behavioral intents ($F_{1,395}=3,81$, $p=0.023$, $F_{1,395}=4,57$, $p=0.011$, $F_{1,395}=2,58$, $p=0.077$). Speech rate affects positively the message execution, the credibility and the behavioral intents

($F_{1,395}=6,59$, $p=0.002$, $F_{1,395}=2,90$, $p=0.056$, $F_{1,395}=2,76$, $p=0.065$).

The effects of low, moderate and high intensity on message execution and intelligibility is presented Figure 1. The effects of low, moderate or high speech rate on message execution and credibility are presented Figure 2. Figures 3 show the impact of low, moderate and high intensity and speech rate on mean behavioral intents.

3.2 Impact of source gender

The gender source's voice has no main effect on message perception ($F_{1,395}=1,363$, $p=0.246$) as well as the respondent's gender ($F_{1,395}=0,478$, $p=0.752$). The successive 2-way-effects, source's voice and respondents' gender, source's voice and distinctively voice variables, show no significative effects according to the male or female sources' voice. The male voice is usually better perceived by respondents but it is not significantly different. Figures 4 (4a and 4b) show that women seem not to pay attention if the speaker is a man or a woman, according to our experimental context, but prefer a flat or a very pronounced intonation and not the moderate situation. Men give preferences to a male voice but, as women, give a negative quotation to a marked intonation voice.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The three variables (intensity, intonation and speech rate) were found to have significant impact on the receiver. Male or female voice sources have no main effect on message quality perception and attitudes toward the message. The gender of the respondents has no main effects either on those perceptions and attitudes. According to our data analysis on voice, high intensity has better effects on the message quality perception than low or moderate intensity. Moderate intensity is better perceived according to message execution but enhance bad perception of intelligibility of the message. When voice is moderate, the message seems to be perceived as more pleasant but less understandable. Fast speech rate enhances message execution and credibility. When the speaker speaks fast, the message is perceived as being well done and more credible.

In a telemarketing context, it was understandable to give voice a fundamental role in the persuasion process. In a banking context, we would have thought that a male voice would performed better than a female voice. Our results show that it is not the gender of the source that enhance better attitudes toward the message or the intent to act but variables that are common to both.

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ANNEXE

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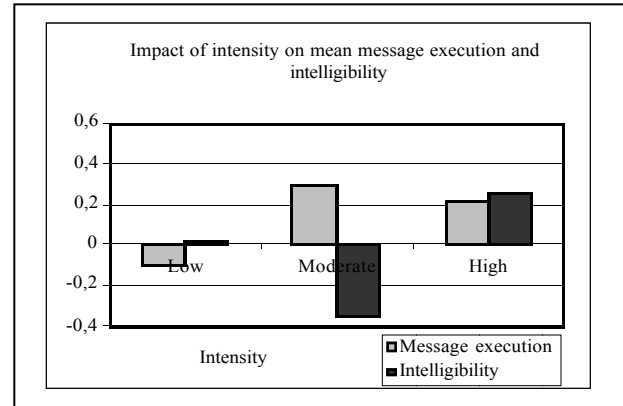


Figure 1. Impact of intensity on message

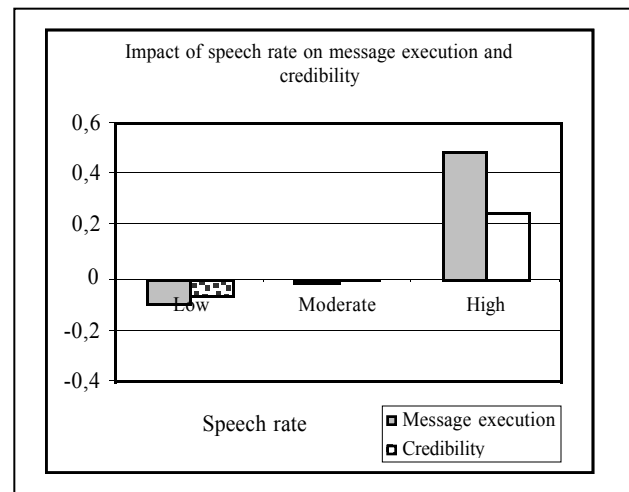


Figure 2. Impact of speech rate on message

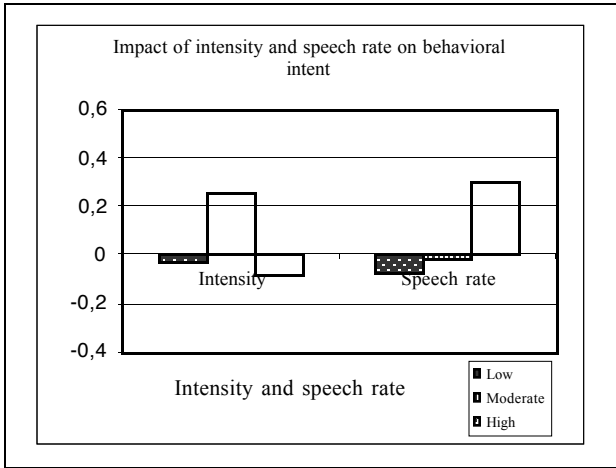


Figure 3. Impact of intensity and speech rate on behavior intents

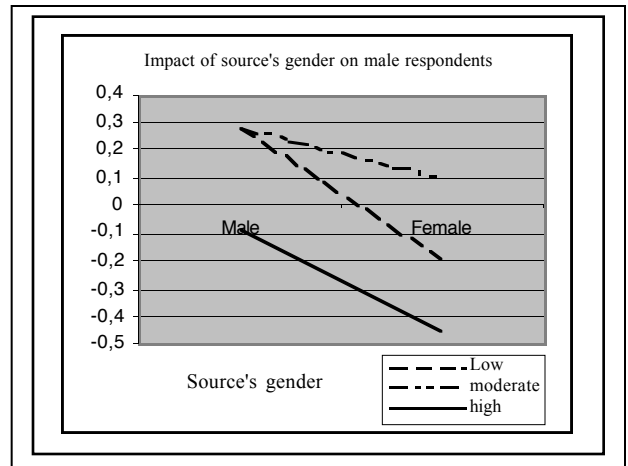


Figure 4b. Impact of source's gender on male respondents.

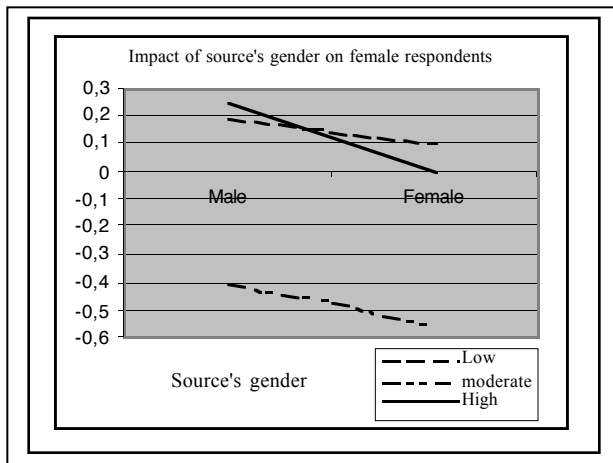


Figure 4a. Impact of source's gender on female respondents.