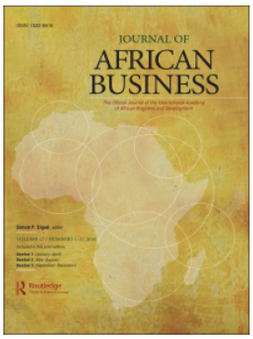

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Does Language Matter When Advertising to Africa's Multilingual Audience? An ELM Study of Audience Language Preference and Responses

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ABSTRACT

Choosing the most effective language is critical when advertising to multilingual audiences as the success of any advertising campaign depends on whether the audience "gets" the message. This paper argues that in Africa, "getting the message" is partly dependent on language given that indigenous languages, colonial legacy languages and blends between them compete for audience attention. Using Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) arguments, the study examines this possibility among a 1000 multilingual audience members in five cosmopolitan cities in Ghana. Findings show that advertisements are not consumed in a language vacuum and that language blends are the most appealing to the multilingual audience. The study also finds that attention to, and belief in advertisements are partly shaped by language preference. Besides these empirical contributions, the study positions the ELM as a viable theoretical lens for analyzing the implications of advertising language. Its use of an African sample to test the ELM's assumptions also introduces novel evidence to the theory's body of scholarship. Recommendations are made on how advertising practitioners and brand communicators may take advantage of language as an important segmentation criterion in advertising strategy.

KEYWORDS

Multilingual African audiences; Elaboration likelihood model (ELM); advertising; colonial legacy languages; indigenous languages

Introduction

Previous knowledge establishes strong links between language and advertising (Coffey, 2008; Heller & Areni, 2004; Nederstigt & Hilberink-Schulpen, 2018) particularly when dealing with multilingual audiences such as in Africa (Nevett & Perry, 2001; Preko et al., 2020). For such audiences, advertising effectiveness is shaped by language in three primary ways, according to extant scholarship. The first is through the activation of identity (Hugo-Burrows, 2004) and perceptions of brands' efforts to accommodate an audience group's needs (Deshpandé & Stayman, 1994). In the second, language determines advertising effectiveness through ease of processing and comprehension (Luna & Peracchio, 1999) while in the third, advertising language is deemed to have a power of invocation by which audiences' emotional sensibilities can be activated and leveraged (Luna & Peracchio, 2005).

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In Africa, where colonial legacy languages (e.g. English, French) remain official and yet less preferred for daily interactions by many, (Darley, 2002; Kurniasih, 2005), the link between advertising effectiveness and language may be even more pronounced. Indigenous languages present, for many, a better understood medium that invokes ethnocentric sensibilities and cultural proximity (Kim & Starks, 2008). On the other hand, legacy languages command presence in business transactions within which advertising is situated (Darley, 2002; Yeboah-Banin et al., 2017). They also enable expressions of modernity and global exposure. These competing loyalties to indigenous versus colonial legacy languages mean that when advertising to Africa's multilingual audiences, language cannot be ignored.

Shin and Maupome (2017) have argued that language preference is critical to how people consume promotional messages and that indigenous languages tend to be preferred by local audiences. Their study of a multilingual Mexican audience in the USA showed preference for Spanish was common among less acculturated audiences and vice versa. Szillat and Betov (2015) have also shared evidence supporting the role of language preference in advertising consumption. They found evidence that Turkish consumers had a clear indigenous language preference for how foreign brands should be advertised to them. Indigenous languages present, for the majority of such populations, a better understood medium. This, coupled with the fact that their use may arouse ethnocentric feelings and cultural pride (Kim & Starks, 2008), makes them a viable strategy default.

However, contrasting evidence has also been reported in the literature. For instance, Hornikx et al. (2010) show that when comprehension in both languages is equivalent, a local Dutch advertising audience actually had a preference for English than local language. Noriega and Blair (2008) have also shown that while the use of a language indigenous to an audience may elicit certain positive emptions, there is little by way of rendering the advertisement more effective in shaping audience responses.

Given these equivocations in the scholarship, this paper considers the value that a blended language format may hold for brands when advertising to Africa's multilingual audiences. Premised on the possibility that both language formats hold unique value for audiences, the paper argues that blending legacy and indigenous languages in the same advertisement may create a viable middle ground that allows advertisers to leverage the benefits of each. It uses data on advertising reception practices of a Ghanaian audience to tests suppositions that language preference is implicated in attention to, and belief in advertisements, and that the blended format is better preferred and more effective. Guided by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the study attempts to answer the following questions:

- Do multilingual audiences with competing loyalties to colonial legacy languages and indigenous languages have defined language preferences when consuming advertisements?
- Does language blending in advertising hold superiority over the solo use of indigenous, and colonial legacy languages?
- Is preference for a language a good predictor of attention to advertisements?
- Is language preference related to the extent to which audience members believe advertising messages?

In doing this, the study highlights language preference as an important segmentation variable, inviting scholars to a deeper interrogation of the success factors for engaging audiences in Africa. Advertising segmentation often privileges other variables (e.g. gender and habits). Even where language is included, it is often to define what is spoken rather than what is preferred by a segment. By showing how language conditions the way multilingual audiences engage with advertisements, the study draws attention to the special place of language blending for such audiences, in acting as a middle ground that accommodates both the local identities of African audiences while being responsive to their other historical exposures (Kelly et al., 2006).

Research shows that for multilingual audiences whose language context is heavily influenced by both indigenous and legacy languages, competing loyalties can reduce specific preference formation toward either (Osoba & Tajudeen, 2016; Shin & Maupome, 2017). For this reason, when advertising to such audiences, a code mixing approach where elements of both are blended can be attractive. This study explores that possibility.

The ELM also affords a scholarly contribution. The existing language and advertising literature generally takes a socio-linguistic theoretical lens (Kelly et al., 2006; Luna & Peracchio, 2002; Micu & Coulter, 2010) with little regard for media theories on audience behaviors. This study positions the ELM as a viable theoretical lens for understanding audience behaviors as informed by language. The study's use of an African sample to test the ELM's assumptions also introduces new evidence to the theory's body of scholarship.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

As a norm, audiences hardly turn on their radio, TV or other media devices just to listen to advertisements, the way they do for music or talk shows. Rather, advertisements are often consumed in multi-tasking contexts where engagement is premised on several factors including language (Ifinedo, 2016; Wang, 2006). Incompetency in a given language can serve as a short-cut to deciding not to stay and engage the advertisement. Likewise, because language use can be sentiment-laden (Shah & Tajima, 2008), individuals with strong loyalties to a given language may easily disregard advertisements in disliked/ill understood languages (Osoba & Tajudeen, 2016).

Previous research has shown that audiences attend to messages differently depending on the language used, highlighting language as a factor that determines the likelihood of elaboration. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), in a persuasion context, the attention paid to messages is contingent on different factors including a motivation to engage. When motivation is high, audiences engage in issue-relevant processing and vice versa (albeit not operating exclusively of each other). The model argues that high motivation drives individuals to a "central route" processing where message arguments are considered on their merit, in the face of things such as prior experience, attitudes and knowledge (Nerghes, 2011). The odds for this are increased by ability to process the message so received. In the reverse scenario, individuals engage in peripheral processing where lack of ability or motivation drives them to use non-issue elements to engage and assess messages.

This study argues that, for multilingual audiences for whom colonial legacy languages and indigenous languages hold competing loyalties, language is imbued with some power of determination of the odds of advertising engagement and the responses thereof. More

so, a blend of the colonial legacy, and indigenous language should hold more predictive power in explaining the likelihood of elaboration. Each of a multilingual's languages holds different associations that renders its use in advertising differentially impactful. Indigenous languages invoke positive affect through their cultural proximity (Kim & Starks, 2008; Mohammed, 2022). They also are often better understood and therefore enhance ability to process advertising messages which ELM suggests is important for the onset of elaboration.

Colonial legacy languages also have their unique attractions to the multilingual speakers. These are both functional and affective. English, French and other such languages offer windows to the world due to their global appeal. Speakers, therefore, may see them as offering opportunity to plug into a global culture, something indigenous languages cannot confer (Bulawka, 2006). Colonial legacy languages also, by virtue of their wide adoption in formal and business sectors, also have functional value for speakers for which reason their use in advertising may enhance elaboration likelihood. It is not surprising, therefore, that the literature is replete with contrasting evidence of the comparative benefits of either language form for enhancing elaboration (see Hornikx et al., 2010; Noriega & Blair, 2008; Shin & Maupome, 2017; Szillat & Betov, 2015). This study attempts to bring some clarity to the contrasting scholarly evidence by exploring a possible middle ground – the benefits of the blended language format.

Preference for language blends and attention to advertisements

Choosing a blended language format should appeal to the unique sensibilities of multilingual African audiences as it enables complementarity benefits. A statement commonly attributed to Nelson Mandela says 'if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.' While the context of original usage suggests a stronger affective preference for the indigenous language, it also provides logic for arguing the value of synergies in negotiating space for engagement. Blended advertising language, therefore, means the opportunity to engage both the heart and head of the multilingual audience. This should make it preferable to the audience, while also boosting the odds that they will pay attention.

In the globalized world, brands are encouraged to think global and act local in their advertising in order to unleash local connections while plugging the audience into the global culture (Onkvisit & Shaw, 2002). Osoba and Tajudeen (2016) argue that preference for legacy and indigenous languages is premised on contextual factors including cultural, economic, educational, and political. A blend of indigenous and colonial legacy languages should activate the benefits of both language forms by, first, signaling to the audience that they have baseline capacity to engage (ability as motivation driver). Secondly, blended language should enhance the motivation to pay attention by arousing the cultural proximity feelings invoked by the indigenous language as well as the modern and global culture invoked by the legacy language (Bulawka, 2006) The blended language should also be well received because it signals advertisers' readiness to accommodate the audience's multiple cultures while respecting their unique exposures (Ahn et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2006; Koslow et al., 1994). Accordingly, the study expects that:

H1: *The audience will display a preference for blended language over the solo use of indigenous, and legacy (English) language.*

H2: *Language preference is positively linked to attention paid to advertisements*

Advertising language and message believability

While the complementarity in a blended language format may be beneficial for increasing the likelihood of elaboration, it appears believability of the message is dependent on which of the two solo languages (indigenous or legacy) individuals owe their strongest allegiance to. This is because while complementarity benefits will move one to attend to the message (refer to arguments in H1), individuals think in a given language and are, therefore, wont to engage in meaningful processing of salient messages in such language including considering their merit (central processing) or discounting them via some cognitive short-cuts (peripheral). Gadzekpo et al. (2020) have shown that audiences give differing levels of credence to media content in English versus indigenous languages. Of the two languages being blended, the one carrying the salient points of the message must fit well with the language to which the audience feels the strongest attachment. Evidence from Kelly et al. (2006) validates this expectation. Their study of advertising believability among a Mexican-American sample shows that people tend to believe advertisements that come in their preferred languages and that the effect is stronger for those in local rather than foreign languages. Evans Jr (2016) has also presented evidence that corroborates this, leading to the expectation that:

H3: *Preferred advertising language is positively linked to belief in advertisements*

Materials and methods

Empirical context of the study

The study sample is comprised of radio listeners in Ghana where radio consumption has always been set within competing language preference and loyalties (Akrofi-Quarcoo & Gadzekpo, 2020). Within this media context, legacy languages (English) enjoyed dominance, only losing power to local languages recently. Scholars have highlighted the unique role language plays in shaping communities of radio consumption across Africa. This makes the language of radio, the continent's most consumed medium (Afrobarometer Press Release, 2018), critical to advertising effectiveness. A linguistic map of radio on the continent will show a mix of at least three language formats – indigenous languages, legacy languages and combinations of the two (Akrofi-Quarcoo & Gadzekpo, 2020). One would find advertisements in any of these language formats. Indigenous languages present, for the majority of the population, a better understood medium and makes sense as advertising language. However, a historical predominance of

colonial languages on radio (including for advertising) means adverts in them are still highly popular. The foregoing sets the context within which the study is situated.

We used Ghana as an exemplar of this broad context (Gyekye, 1992). Ghana bears a lot of commonalities with many African states. It boasts of a vibrant and free media landscape which, while ahead of many African states, shares commonalities in language use for programming. Ghana also shares similarities with the rest of Africa when it comes to socio-cultural life.

Data procedures

We employed a quantitative survey to collect responses from 1000 radio listeners in five cosmopolitan cities in Ghana. The cities – Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Ho and Tamale – were carefully selected to ensure that the audience had options of stations broadcasting in English, indigenous language or blends from which to choose.

Sampling was initially intended to be probability-based, using household data to be sourced from the Ghana Statistical Service. However, a difficulty in accessing such data coupled with resource constraints (which prevented our own mapping of the cities) led to a change in strategy. Accordingly, sampling was by an accidental approach via a mall intercept strategy. While this is not the most ideal, and takes from the study the power to make definitive statements about the population, it does have precedence in scholarship (Blankson et al., 2017).

Busy local congregation centers such as markets, shopping malls, churches, lorry stations etc. served as the sites for data collection. In each empirical site, trained field assistants (Doctoral and MPhil communication studies candidates) chose a random point to begin approaching potential respondents who fit the inclusion criterion of age 18+ (the age of self-determination in Ghana). Three screeners ensured that respondents met the age requirement, gave indication of competency in at least one indigenous language as well as English, and listened to radio. Questionnaires were self-administered after negotiating voluntary participation with individuals.

In a few instances, however, the questionnaires were administered to respondents who did not consider themselves to be adequately competent in the English language to self-administer (NB: Given its long and common use, including as a widely-spoken pidgin, even people with no formal education may have basic competency). Two hundred respondents were selected from each city.

Research instrument

The instrument comprised nominal and ordinal measures for profile variables including gender, age, education and media consumption habits. One of the two dependent variables – attention paid to advertisements – was also a nominal measure asking respondents to indicate what they do when they encounter advertisements while listening to radio (pay attention or not). The second, belief in advertisements had a three point Likert scale by which respondents indicated the extent to which they believe advertisements. The instrument also included a measure of language preference, the main predictor, which was also a nominal measure by which respondents indicated whether their

preferred language for consuming advertisements was local, English or a blend of the two. Respondents who had no language preference had opportunity to indicate so.

Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 16.0 version. Descriptive analysis was used to establish foundational truths about the sample including about their demographics, and relevant behaviors. Frequencies and cross tabulations were deployed to describe the sample based on relevant characteristics such as gender, age, education levels, language competency and preference (for everyday use). To test the first hypothesis that the audience has a preference for the blended language format when consuming advertisements, a Chi Square Goodness of Fit test was conducted. The test is used when researchers seek to establish whether responses will differ on a single categorical variable in a manner that follows an expected pattern of frequencies (Franke et al., 2012). In testing H2's supposition that advertising language preference is positively linked to engagement, we used a multinomial logistic regression test (Bayaga, 2010). H3 argued that language preference is linked to believability and was tested using an ANOVA.

Sample profile

The sample comprised of more males than females with a ratio of about 6:4 (Figure 1). They were relatively young with more than 60% being between 18–29 years. An additional 23% fell within the ages of 30–39. Thus, together, more than 80% of the sample are under 40 years (Table 1). The majority of the respondents had tertiary education (70%) (Figure 2).

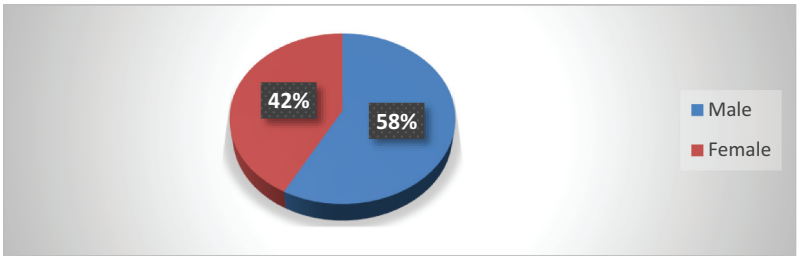

Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents' Gender.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents' Age.

Age	Freq.	%
18-29	606	61.2
30-39	229	23.1
40-49	93	9.4
50-59	43	4.3
60-69	13	1.3
70-79	6	.6
80+	1	.1
Total	991	100.0

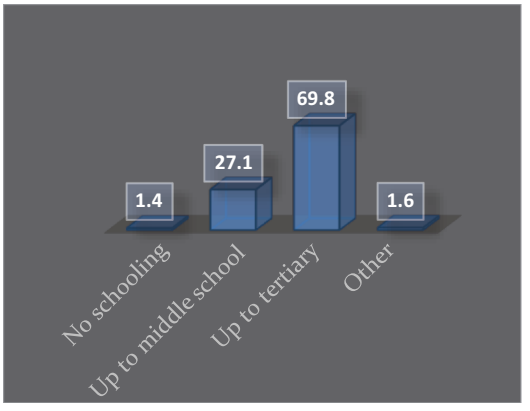

Figure 2. Respondents' Education Profile.

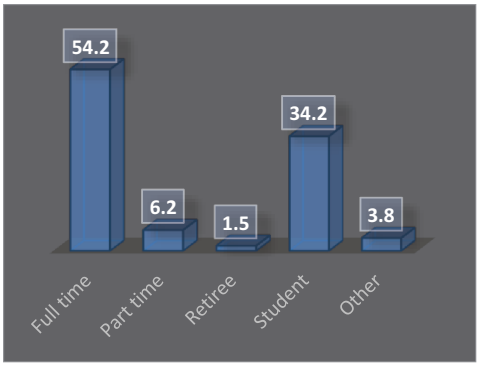

Figure 3. Respondents' Employment Status.

A small majority of the respondents had full time employment working in both the formal (36%) and informal sectors (17%). As Figure 3 shows, a significant number were also not presently in any employment (39.5). This included students (34.2%) and pensioners (less than two percent).

To enable the analysis of issues core to the study, it was imperative to establish whether respondents did consume radio on a regular basis and whether they were also exposed to advertisements. As Figure 4 shows, respondents did have a habit of listening to radio daily with a majority (62%) listening for more than an hour each day. This means that they are frequently exposed to advertisements. However, a small majority indicated that when advertisements start playing while they are listening to radio, they tend not to pay attention (see Figure 5).

Results

The study finds that people may have defined preferences for language when consuming media. We notice marginal differences in the language preferred for listening to radio generally and that for listening to radio advertisements. As Figure 6 shows, while

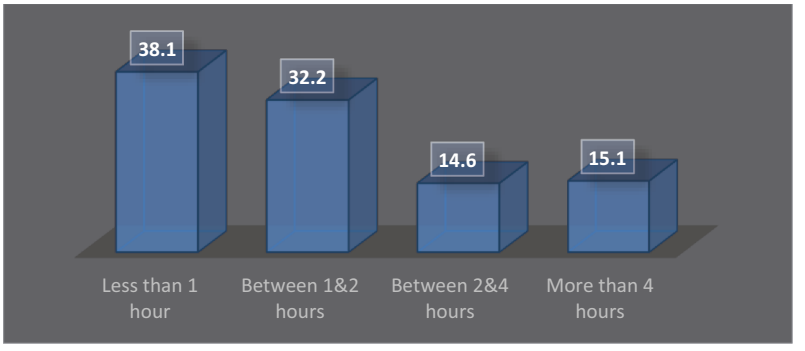

Figure 4. Respondents' Hours Spend Listening to Radio Daily.

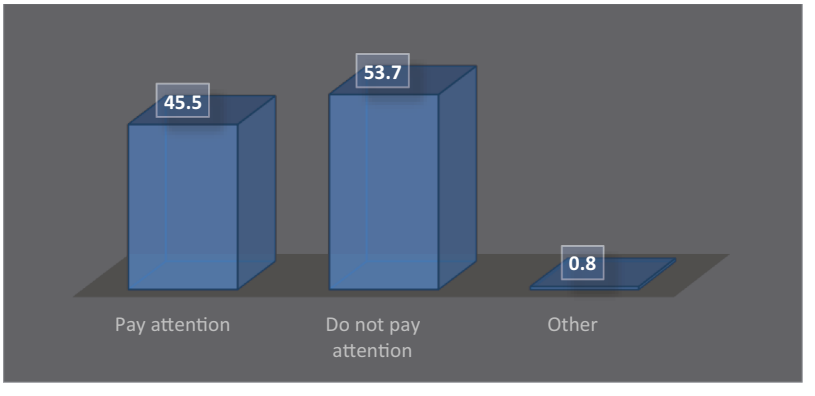

Figure 5. Responses to Advertising Exposure.

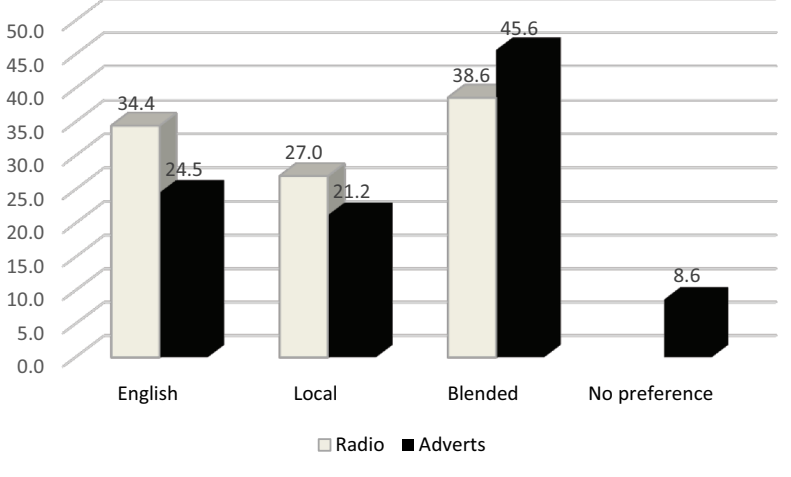

Figure 6. Preferred Language for Listening to Radio, and Adverts.

language preference follows a similar pattern for both, the weights differ somewhat. In both cases, the blended language leads as most preferred followed by English and then indigenous languages in that order. However, about seven percent more people indicate a preference for the blended language when consuming advertisements than when listening to radio generally. Importantly too, there is near parity in the numbers of people who prefer English versus indigenous when consuming advertisements but the margin is slightly larger in the case of the language preferred to consuming radio generally.

More importantly, the study finds in support of H1 that language preference for consuming advertisements favors blending over and above the solo use of either an indigenous or legacy language. As shown in Table 2, the test statistic for the Chi Square Goodness of Fit is statistically significant: $\chi^2(3) = 49.570$, $p < .0005$. The observed cases for the three language preference groups show clearly that the blended language format commands the most preference ($N = 450$) compared to English ($N = 242$) and indigenous ($N = 209$) respectively. Further, whereas the expected counts for both English and indigenous language preference were higher than the observed cases, the reverse is true for that of the blended language. This leads to the conclusion that the null hypothesis (that the blended language is not better preferred than the other two) fails to find support in the data, providing support for the alternate hypothesis.

However, and in contrast to the logic of our second hypothesis that language preference increases the odds of elaboration (defined in the context of this study as attention), the study rather found support for the null hypothesis that the two are not related. In other words, language preference is not a statistically significant predictor of attention. A multinomial logistic regression to test the veracity of H2 failed to find support for it. The hypothesized model did not fit the data well ($X^2(12) = 18.019$, $p > .05$ (see Table 3). Secondly, the independent variable (language preference) failed to improve the power of the specified model to predict attention to advertisements over and above the intercept-only model. Further, and as can be seen from Likelihood Ratio Tests output (Table 3),

Table 2. X^2 Goodness of Fit Test Observations for Advertising Language Preference.

Preferred language	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
English	242	310.0	−68.0
Indigenous	209	243.0	−34.0
Blended	450	348.0	102.0
No preference	85	85.0	.0
Total	986		
Goodness of fit test statistics Advertising language preference			
Chi-Square			49.570[a]
Df			3
Asymp. Sig.			.000

Table 3. Multinomial Logistic Regression Output for Language Preference and Attention.

	Model Fitting Criteria	Likelihood Ratio Tests		
Effect	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
Intercept	68.510a	.000	0	.
Preferred language	86.529	18.019	12	.115

Table 4. Cross Tabulation of Advertising Language Preference and Attention.

	When listening to radio, what do you do during adverts?			
Preferred advertising language	Pay attention	Do not pay attention	Other	Total
English	98	140	1	239
	41.0%	58.6%	.4%	100.0%
Indigenous	115	93	1	209
	55.0%	44.5%	.5%	100.0%
Blend	201	239	4	444
	45.3%	53.8%	.9%	100.0%
No preference	29	53	2	84
	34.5%	63.1%	2.4%	100.0%
Total	**443**	**525**	**8**	**976**
	45.4%	**4.3%**	**.8%**	**100.0%**

Table 5. ANOVA Test of Preferred Advertising Language and Believability.

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	56.230	3	18.743	36.063	.000
Within Groups	493.232	949	.520		
Total	549.463	952			

preferred advertising language does not significantly predict attention. Accordingly, the assumption in H2 that advertising language preference increases attention paid to advertisements is rejected.

Post hoc, we used cross tabulations to unpack the nature of the relationship between preferred advertising language and engagement. Generally, those who prefer advertisements in the indigenous language are slightly more likely to pay attention to advertisements. They outnumbered those who prefer English by 14%, and those who prefer blended language by 10% (see Table 4). However, and as indicated earlier, these differences are not statistically significant to enable any predictions.

There appears, however, to be a close link between preferred advertising language and belief in advertisements as the ANOVA test results in Table 5 show. There is a statistically significant difference between the preference groups (English, indigenous, blend) as predictors of advertising believability (F (3, 949) = 36.063, p = .000).

Discussion

According to Tuchman et al. (2015), audiences make conscious decisions whether to pay attention to advertisements or not. From an ELM point of view, such decisions should be premised on factors such as level of involvement in the advertised product, as well as a motivation to engage arising out of factors including ability to process the message, and interest in the message. The latter two make the language of an advertisement potentially critical for the odds of elaboration, and whether central or peripheral processing will ensue. Language competency, for instance, presents the easy short-cut that is characteristic of peripheral route processing. In contrast, central route processing can arise where salient points in an advertisement are delivered in a language one considers themselves to be adequately positioned to process.

The study makes three key discoveries about the African sample of the study. First, they have defined language preferences when consuming radio advertisements and that

preference privileges a blended language format. In other words, rather than delivering advertisements solely in either language, a better bet may be to adopt a code mixing approach. Secondly, we discover that language preference has very little to do with the level of attention paid to advertisement. However, and thirdly, the study finds that language preference drives belief in advertisements. Thus while the preference for the language of an advertisements may not increase attention levels, it is, none the less critical when it comes to assuring that the audience will believe the message.

Our findings corroborate Szillat and Betov's (2015) and Shin and Maupome's (2017) claims that audiences are conscious of the language of advertisements and even have preferences for it. As argued, the complementarity benefits of language blending makes are superior to the unitary use of either indigenous or legacy languages (Ahn et al., 2017; Bulawka, 2006; Kelly et al., 2006; Koslow et al., 1994). What may not be well understood in one language may be in the other with which it is blended. As Chavez (2003) argues, multilingual audiences may view advertising as a somewhat diglossic context where English and indigenous languages coexist to make meaning better. In that sense, the blended language offers twice as much opportunity to understand the message than either the indigenous or legacy language by itself. It might also be, as argued by Kelly et al. (2006), that bilingual audiences consider advertisements with blended language to respect their local identity while being responsive to their other cosmopolitan exposures.

It was interesting to note, however, the fact that beyond their preference for the blended language, the audience was more inclined toward the use of the legacy rather than indigenous languages in advertisements. This is interesting given the study context. English is a remnant of the colonial experience, something that is still a source of pain among many Africans (Osoba & Tajudeen, 2016). In contrast, indigenous languages carry heritage and reflect the cultural identity of many Africans of which they remain proud, particularly in the face of evolving global conditions. That, this African audience will prefer English over the indigenous language is, therefore, surprising. However, there is precedence in scholarship to corroborate the finding. Mexican-American audiences have been found, for instance, to prefer English over their indigenous languages when consuming advertisements (see Kelly et al., 2006). Perhaps, the audience is so accustomed to hearing English as primary advertising language, that is normalized in their minds. Perhaps the finding draws from the generally youthful age profile of the sample. The majority of respondents are between 18 and 29, indicating they may be millennials who have grown up using the English language more than indigenous languages (Osoba & Tajudeen, 2016). Indeed, for some of them, English may have assumed L1 status for which reason there is more familiarity with it than indigenous languages.

Beyond having defined preferences for advertising language, the multilingual audience does not seem to be tempered by it in deciding whether to pay attention to an advertisement, as we discover with H2. ELM research establishes a link between preference and the likelihood of elaboration. Tam and Ho's (2005) study, modeled on ELM, found that advertising content that matches preference by the audience is more likely to be engaged. However, this study finds the contrary. Preference, by way of advertising language, is no predictor of likelihood of engagement.

This is surprising given extant evidence (e.g. Demont-Heinrich, 2007; Roslow & Nicholls, 1996). However, it finds meaning in earlier Uses and Gratifications theorizing about audiences suggesting their ability to compartmentalize their attitudes to media (e.g.

language preference) and behaviors (e.g. attention) (Levy & Windahl, 1984). This shows that people exercise choice even in the face of content they prefer (Uchida et al., 2017) when consuming media.

The preceding discussion should not, however, be taken to mean that language is of no consequence when targeting advertisements to this multilingual audience. Indeed, as the evidence from H3 shows language preference can have implications for believability of advertisements. For instance, those with a preference for the indigenous language found advertisements in it to be believable. To the extent that language preference inherently signals competency, perhaps, no preference means individuals deem themselves less competent and therefore susceptible to deception or a risk of misconstruing message fine prints. Secondly, we believe that the language of individuals' everyday thought, when used in advertisements, enhances processing of salient messages including considering their merit. This finding lends credence to extant ELM-inspired knowledge describing the role of language as antecedent to the onset of elaboration (see Evans, 2016; Kelly et al., 2006; Susmann et al., 2021; Zhou, 2021).

Study implications

For ELM scholarship, this study's finding that multilingual audiences do not consume advertisements in a language vacuum and that preferences in this regard may be related to how audiences are persuaded by advertisements is insightful. ELM has been widely applied to advertising. However, the resulting body of scholarship has not adequately explored the place of language in cuing up individuals toward elaboration and persuasion. This study extends ELM scholarship by inviting attention to the place of language preference, (particularly toward blends of indigenous and legacy languages) in shaping the odds of elaboration among Africa's multilingual audiences with competing linguistic loyalties. Importantly too, given the finding that language preference is de-linked from attention to advertisements, the study calls for further look into the pathways to elaboration to understand how this partitioning of preference from behavior may account for low elaboration of advertisements.

The study's focus on an African audience whose language use is set within competing linguistic allegiances also introduces new dynamics to ELM scholarship. Built upon empirical evidence from non-African contexts, the ELM body of scholarship has had little to say on how Africa's audiences negotiate their differing language competencies and loyalties when consuming adverts. Employing the theory to discover that this audience does not consume advertising in a language vacuum and that language preference also has implications for believability of advertisements, therefore, extends the scope of variables considered in ELM research both empirically and theoretically.

The findings also have some practical implications. First, the finding that the multilingual sample of this study does have language preferences for consuming advertisements and that such preference favors blending of indigenous and legacy languages is insightful for practice. Brands and advertising professional can take advantage of this when negotiating the linguistic challenges present when segmenting audiences. As the answer to H1 shows, blending indigenous and legacy languages may present a workable middle ground that satisfies both functional and sentimental boundaries of language use. However, practitioners must be tempered in their expectations that this is the cure for the

ever-growing challenge of securing the audience's attention. Our findings in respect of H2 show that language preference has no significant links to attention paid to advertisements. Finally, advertising practitioners and other brand communicators can take a cue from our third finding which suggests that while language preference may not enhance attention levels, it is still critical to persuasion.

Study limitations and future research directions

This study has a number of limitations. Being a cross-sectional survey means that it lacks the power to make any direct causal inferences. Even though it finds, for instance, that language preference drives believability of local language advertisements, the fact that such findings are based on one-off empirical data not gathered through an experimental design limits its reach. Accordingly, we recommend that future research employs more experimental or longitudinal designs to gauge the stability of the findings discovered.

The study focused on radio advertisements, the medium of which is the most pervasive in the lives of Africans (Afrobarometer Press Release, 2018). The TV medium has also seen expansion in recent years as has digital advertising media. However, unlike radio, the balance of languages on these media remains predominantly English. It will be interesting to discover comparative trends in attitudes around the language of TV and digital media and its implications for advertising.

Scholarly opportunity may also lie in examining the issues raised among differing African audiences. For instance, cross-setting comparisons between countries such as Kenya (which combines both English and the local Swahili as official languages), Ghana (which still uses a legacy language, English as official) and Ethiopia (which uses its indigenous Amharic as official) may provide interesting insights. Further opportunity may come from considering message substance e.g. by way of the product being advertised. As shown by Kvasova and Buffington (2019), blending languages in advertisements may not have universal utility across product types. Their analysis of code-switching in health care industry shows that it can have negative implications. Future research should take this into consideration and isolate different conditions under which the findings from this study apply.

Finally, we acknowledge the limits to the study findings occasioned by the absence of qualitative evidence. While the objectivist stance adopted enabled clearly defined inferences, complementary qualitative methods could have enabled richer insights into beneath-the-surface data. For instance, interviews and focus group discussions could elucidate the actual ways in which audience members think about language and the socio-cultural roots of the language preferences observed. Future research may adopt a mixed methods approach to tap both quantitative and qualitative data and have them speak to each other.

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Ethical approval

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