

The Intersubjective Dynamic Regarding Commercial Failures of Foreign Migration of Brands in Food Industry

Philippe Fauquet-Alekhine and Elena Fauquet-Alekhine-Pavlovskaja

Abstract—On the basis of questionnaires and interviews of two samples of subjects (French and Anglo-Saxon) for which two food products were presented (one of the subject's country and one of the foreign country), we have shown how consumers could be sensitive to the label or brand written on the package of the food product. Furthermore, in the light of Intersubjectivity theory, we have shown the necessity for the consumer to find congruence between the direct and meta perspective towards the product for which the producer and especially the marketer is responsible. Taking into account these findings may help to avoid the commercial failure of a brand while exported abroad.

Keywords—Brand, failure, food industry.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN the Consumer-oriented model of marketing suggested by Schultz et al. [1], [2], the “4Cs”, adapted later by others (see for example the “6Cs” of Balmer [3]) were identified to promote a successful marketing. This Consumer-oriented model came after a previous one Producer-oriented elaborated in terms of “Ps”. What is interesting is that among the “Ps”, the one standing for “Promotion” became in the “Cs” model “Communication” [4]. This substitution aimed at pointing out that marketing is not only a matter of promotion of the product to be bought but also and mainly a question of sharing a meaning, thus coming back to the Latin root-word “*communio-communionis*” designating a “state of sharing”.

Communication in the marketing of a product rises in importance when it is submitted to constraints that make the act of communicating difficult: it does not remain as a simple discussion, face-to-face, between the producer and the consumer, but rather a unilateral communication aiming at making the consumer to share a marketing message suggested by the producer. This is done through a mediator (the advertisement or the brand, for example) during a limited time (the length of the TV advertisement while consumer is watching TV, or the time the consumer is presented the brand

on advertising boards while driving in the town) in a bounded space (the advertisement cannot be a long text; the brand is not painted all over every wall of the town).

Among all the possible mediators of communication between the producer and the consumer, the brand or the product label are items of great challenge: few characters with specific design must carry the right image of both the product and the producer towards the consumer.

In case of exportation of the product abroad the original country, the question rises about the impact of these few words on the new panel of consumers. In other words, will these few words will lead people to buy and eat your product, or on the contrary will make them push it away, resulting in a commercial failure for the product. To illustrate this proposal, let us take a few examples. A French chocolate with hazels is called “*duplo*”, in France. Read like that in Russian, it designates the sex of a woman in popular language. S. Roy [5] reports: “The name Coca-Cola in China was first rendered as *Ke-kou-ke-la*. Unfortunately, the Coke company did not discover until after thousands of signs had been printed that the phrase means ‘bite the wax tadpole’ or ‘female horse stuffed with wax’ depending on the dialect.”

Communication through words is of great importance for food product. Studies have shown the influence of words on the acceptance or the perception of the food taste [6]: the use of descriptive names improves perceptions of foods [7], and shows the effects of texts on food labels [8] at a lower degree. Furthermore, with the development of consumption on line, words have acquired a new status [9].

All these studies have not investigated in depth the influence of intersubjectivity in this communicational process of food marketing. Yet, intersubjectivity is fundamental to understand communication [10]. Intersubjectivity may be understood as One's orientation to the orientation of Other [11]. Yet, in the line of Mead [12], [13] suggesting that reflection as part of intersubjectivity may be understood through a perspective-taking approach, Ichheiser [14] proposed the analysis of any inter-relation on the basis of three interactional levels: the individual/group self-perception, the individual/group perception of Other, the perception of individual/group of the Other's perception of themselves. According to Gillespie [15], these three levels may be considered to operate at two levels from the interlocutors' standpoint: “First, there is the level of a person's direct perception of Self or Other, and second there is the level of

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perception of the perspective of Other” which helps “to conceptualize how someone or a group might try to appear trustworthy. To appear trustworthy they must orient to the criteria that they think Other is using in order to determine trustworthiness”. The first level was conceptualized as the “direct perspective” by Laing et al. [16], the second as “meta perspective”, and the authors added as a logical possibility a third level, the meta-meta-perspective: the perception of individual/group of the Other’s perception of their perception of themselves. On the basis of Laing and co-workers studies, Gillespie [15] reformulated how these three levels of perspectives could be important: referring to the Cold War, the authors argued that “the distrust between East and West operated at each of their three levels. Not only did East and West fear each other (direct perspectives), but they were each aware that the other feared them (meta-perspectives), and they each knew that the other was aware that they knew the other feared them (meta-meta-perspectives).” Gillespie [15] emphasized that a context of trust is satisfied when the three levels are fulfilled in congruence.

In the light of the Intersubjectivity dynamic theory and perspective taking [17], we aim at presenting an innovative approach in order to contribute to better understand real or possible commercial failures in the case of exporting food brands and to highlight key points that make consumers confident regarding the food products through the brands and product labels.

II. METHOD

Intersubjectivity dynamic involves subjects or groups of subjects interacting with each other [17]. The method applied in this study consisted in a first step to apply Intersubjectivity dynamic and perspective taking to a derivative object: the brand or label of the food product. Theoretical conditions of success or failure for the marketing of the food product were sought.

In a second step, regarding these suggested theoretical conditions of success, tests were undertaken with French and Anglo-Saxon subjects ($N=24$, 58% male). Subjects were individually suggested two food products, one of their native language country presented after one of the other country. This means for instance that French subjects saw first the English product and then the French product. After the presentation of each product, subjects had to answer a questionnaire the purpose of which was to understand Intersubjectivity dynamic and to assess whether or not they would buy the food product and why (see Appendix I for the English version of the questionnaire).

The English product was a pack of snacks dedicated to children, purchased in a food-store in London (UK). The brand is “organix goodies” and the food label is “mini oaty bites” (Fig. 1).

The problem of such a product for French subjects was assumed to be in the food label involving the word “bites” which could be read and related to the French slang word

“bite” /bit/ meaning “dick”.

The French product was a pack of traditional orange chocolates purchased in a food-store in Paris suburb (France). The brand is “Roland Réauté” and the food label is “Les Fagots”, a plural noun usually designating a pile of wooden branches (Fig. 2).

The problem of such a product for English subjects was assumed to be in the food label involving the word “Fagots” which could be read and related to the English slang word “faggot” /fagət/ meaning “homosexual”.

Yet a main difference existed from a product to the other: for the English Product, the food label “mini oaty bites” was not the pregnant writing on the pack, while on the French product pack, the food label “Les Fagots” was the pregnant writing.



Fig. 1 English product purchased in London (UK)



Fig. 2 French product purchased in Paris suburb (France)

Qualitative complements were obtained in some cases through post-test interviews.

III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A. Adapting Intersubjectivity Dynamic and Perspective Taking to a Derivative Object: The Food Product

Applying the three levels of perspective within the Intersubjectivity dynamic theory to the marketing of a product, and assuming that the confidence in the product by the consumer is linked to the confidence of the consumer in the producer, the ideal situation may be described as follows: Not only the producer/consumer know they are good producer/consumer (direct perspectives), but they are each aware that the other knows they are good producer/consumer (meta-perspectives), and they each know that the other is aware that they know it is a good product (meta-meta-perspectives). These proposals are summarized in Table I.

TABLE I
 THE THREE PERSPECTIVES TAKING FOR PRODUCER / CONSUMER INTERACTION

Perspective	Conceptualization	Examples
Direct perspective	the individual/group self-perception	I think I am a good employee.
Meta perspective	the individual/group perception of Other the perception of individual/group of the Other's perception of themselves	I think he is a good employee. I think they think I am a good employee.
Meta meta perspective	the perception of individual/group of the Other's perception of their perception of themselves	They think I think they are good employees. I think they think that I think I am a good employee. I think they think that I think they are good employees.

Applying this relationship while introducing the derivative object "product", it gives: Not only the producer and the consumer know it is a good product (direct perspectives), but they are each aware that the other knows it is a good product (meta-perspectives), and they each know that the other is aware that they know it is a good product (meta-meta-perspectives).

Table II describes the fulfilled three levels of perspective in congruence for a positive situation of a commercial product (second column). Then it highlights in the next two right columns the possible factors of commercial failure in this multi-perspective approach.

TABLE II
 THE THREE PERSPECTIVES TAKING FOR PRODUCER / CONSUMER INTERACTION INTRODUCING THE PRODUCT

	Positive situation	Negative situation: Producer awareness	Negative situation: Consumer awareness
Direct perspective	the consumer know it is a good product	2-the producer know it is a bad product	1-the consumer knows it is a bad product
Meta perspective	the producer know it is a good product they are each aware that the other knows it is a good product	3-the consumer is aware that the producer knows it is a bad product	4-the producer is aware that the consumer knows it is a bad product
Meta meta perspective	they each know that the other is aware that they know it is a good product	5-the producer knows that the consumer is aware that the producer knows it is a bad product	6-the consumer knows that the producer is aware that the consumer knows it is a bad product

The items #2, 4 and 5 presented in Table II are the producer's point of view. The items #1, 3 and 6 are the consumer's point of view. The producer's point of view is not as important as the consumer's point of view: what is important in order to sell a product on the market is what the consumer feels and thinks, whatever the producer thinks. As said a former President of the American Economic Association in the early twentieth century and quoted by Balmer [3], "we must accept the consumer as the final judge". It means that the consumer must think that the product is good: it is the direct perspective item #1. And whatever the producer thinks, the most important is what the consumer thinks that the producer thinks; it is the meta-perspective, item #3.

From the items #1, 3 and 6 related to the consumer's point of view, we built a questionnaire (Appendix I) aiming at understanding the Intersubjectivity dynamic.

The first question for the English product was: According to you, is it a good writing for sweets? For the French product, the first question was: According to you, is it a good name for a chocolate?

Following questions were built in order to get the insight subjects' feeling related to the corresponding proposals, items #1, 3 and 6 in Table II (see Appendix I).

B. Quantitative Results

Figs. 3 and 4 show respectively the assessment of the brand or label of the product by French and Anglo-Saxon subjects. It appears clearly that the product of the subjects' country obtains a positive evaluation while the foreign product has less success.

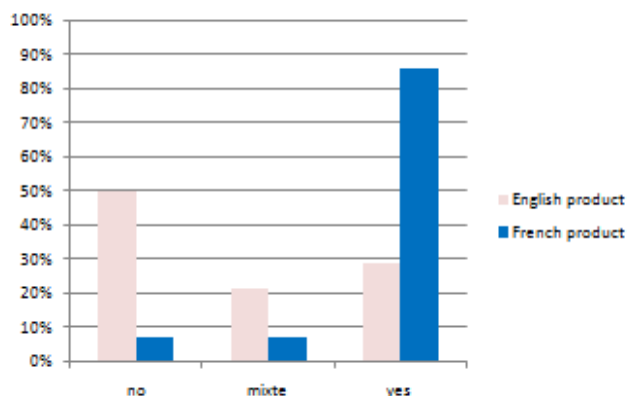


Fig. 3 Assessment of the congruence of the brand or label with the product by French subjects

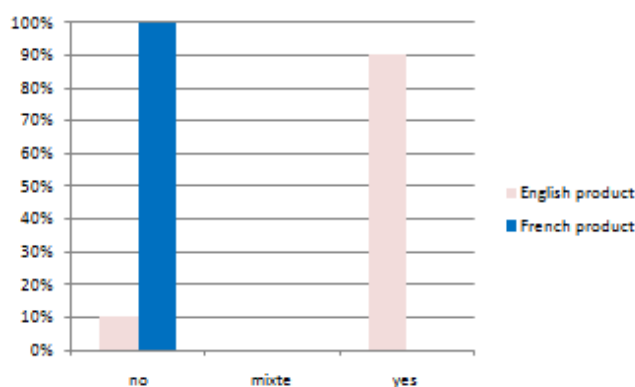


Fig. 4 Assessment of the congruence of the brand or label with the product by Anglo-Saxon subjects

A difference is significant for the foreign product assessment: while the negative assessment is unanimous for Anglo-Saxons, it is mitigated for Frenchs. This difference may be due to the fact that the slang writing for the English product concerned the label and not the brand, while for the French product the slang writing was the brand. Further experiments will be undertaken in a future work to refine this point.

The correlation coefficient between this brand or label assessment with the subjects' intention to buy the product is given in Table III.

TABLE III
 CORRELATION COEFFICIENT BETWEEN THIS BRAND OR LABEL ASSESSMENT WITH THE SUBJECTS' INTENTION TO BUY THE PRODUCT

	French product	English product
French Subjects	$r = 0.99$	$r = 0.28$
Anglo-Saxons subjects	$r = 0.92$	$r = 0.91$

As we can see, the correlation is very high except for the French subjects assessing the English product. Again, this may be due to the fact that the slang writing for the English product concerned the label and not the brand, while for the French product the slang writing was the brand. Yet, the post-test interviews suggest another factor of influence which may

be linked with the national culture: most of the French subjects agreeing to buy the English product explained that they would do it "*pour rigoler*" ("for fun") or "*par curiosité*" ("because we are curious"). However, this first result illustrates the power of the writings which are directly associated to the product.

The feeling of the subject towards the product was assessed by the question 2 of the questionnaire: According to you, this product is: good, strange, bad, a joke, stupid (with an assessment on a Likert scale presented in appendix).

As the assessment of the product is based on the packaging and not on the knowledge of the product itself, the item "neither agree nor disagree" of the Likert scale is always with the highest proportion. Yet, for the foreign product, subjects always have more doubts than for the product of their own country: the item "neither agree nor disagree" is always higher for the foreign product.

Figs. 5 and 6 illustrate clearly that Anglo-Saxon subjects take the French product for something not serious while French subjects have a better consideration for it.

Figs. 7 and 8 illustrate clearly the same for the opposite configuration: Anglo-Saxon subjects take the English product for a good and serious product while French subjects have a worse consideration for it.

The direct perspective (DP) of the subject towards the product was assessed by the question 3 of the questionnaire: You think that the producer of this product agrees with the evaluation of the product you did in 2 (with an assessment on a Likert scale presented in appendix).

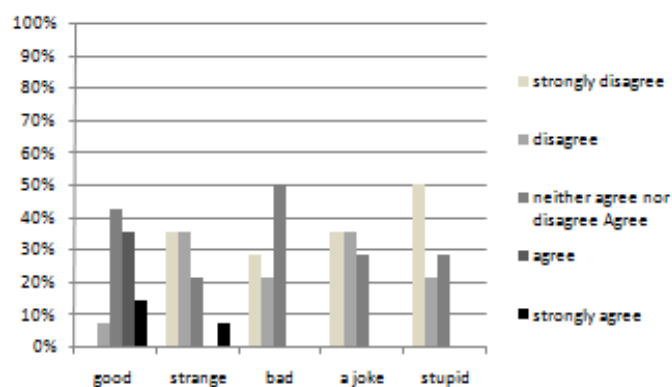


Fig. 5 Feeling towards the French product by French subjects

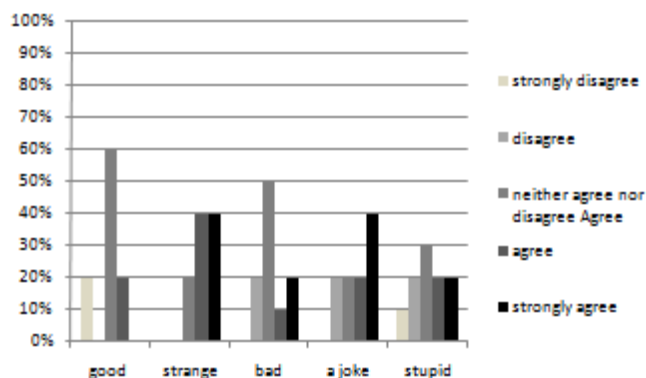


Fig. 6 Feeling towards the French product by Anglo-Saxon subjects

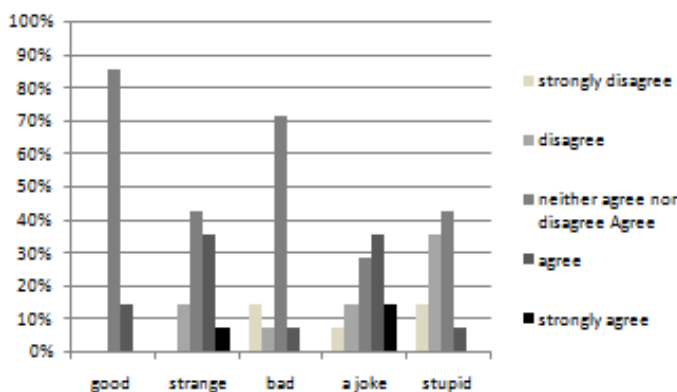


Fig. 7 Feeling towards the English product by French subjects

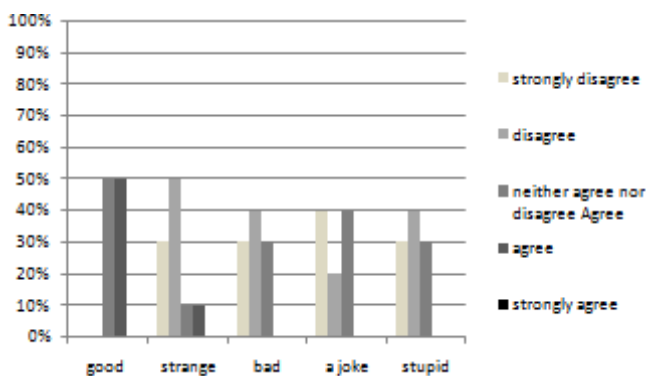


Fig. 8 Feeling towards the English product by Anglo-Saxon subjects

The meta-perspective (MP) of the subject towards the product was assessed by the question 4 of the questionnaire: You think that the producer of this product knows that consumers of your country evaluate the product as you did in 2 (with an assessment on a Likert scale presented in appendix).

Figs. 9 to 12 draw the direct and meta perspectives for each product for both French and English subjects. The graphs illustrate what was predicted by the Intersubjectivity dynamic theory: the product is bought when there is congruence between the direct and meta perspectives. This is seen on the charts by the symmetry which can be observed for each item

3, 4 and 5. The correlation coefficient between the direct and meta perspectives is higher than 0.94 in all cases except for the case of French subjects assessing the French product; here, the coefficient is 0.74. Unfortunately, none of the data (qualitative or quantitative) help to understand this specificity.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study aimed at obtaining the assessment of two food products by subjects on the basis of the writing of the product package.

The results show that the brand or label, if perceived not adapted and strange regarding the product, make the consumer thinks that the product is not serious and the consumer will rather not buy it: a high value for the coefficient correlation between the brand or label assessment and the will to buy has been obtained.

Analysis of the perspective taking of subjects has shown that prediction of the Intersubjectivity dynamic theory was fulfilled: the product is bought when there is congruence between the direct and meta perspectives towards the food product.

All these results demonstrate the power of brand and label on the package of a food product and warn the marketer and the producer about the potential dramatic effect of writings in case of foreign migration of food brands. To deal with such difficulties, a simple model has been developed and suggested in a previous work [18] which may be applied easily.

APPENDIX

ENGLISH VERSION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. According to you, is it a good writing for sweets? / a good name for chocolates? Explain why.
2. According to you, this product is: good, strange, bad, a joke, stupid (with an assessment on a Likert scale).
3. You think that the producer of this product agrees with the evaluation of the product you did in 2 (with an assessment on a Likert scale).
4. You think that the producer of this product knows that consumers of your country evaluate the product as you did in 2 (with an assessment on a Likert scale).
5. You would buy this product (with an assessment on a Likert scale).

The Likert scale was: strongly disagree / disagree / neither agree nor disagree / agree / strongly agree.

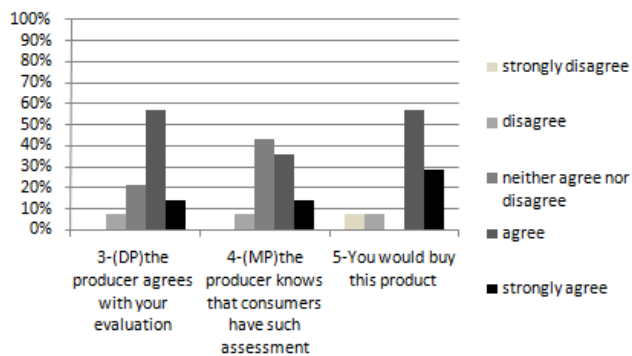


Fig. 9 Direct and Meta perspectives towards the French product by French subjects

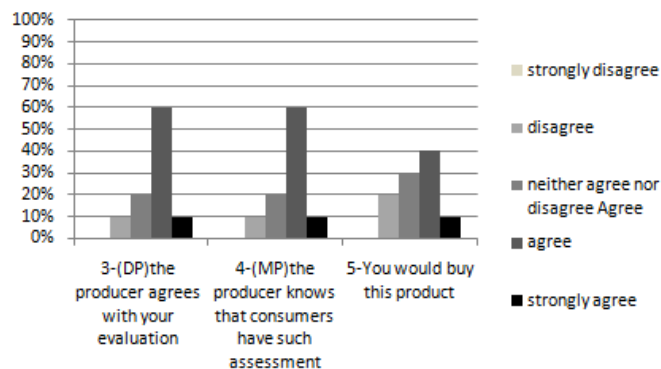


Fig. 12 Direct and Meta perspectives towards the English product by Anglo-Saxon subjects

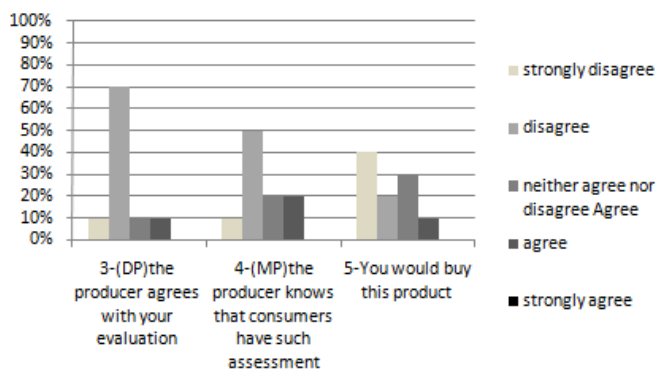


Fig. 10 Direct and Meta perspectives towards the French product by Anglo-Saxon subjects

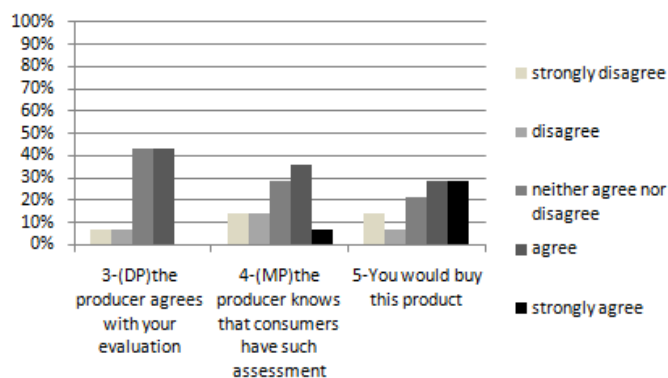


Fig. 11 Direct and Meta perspectives towards the English product by French subjects

TABLE IV
SYMBOLS & UNITS

Symbol	Quantity	USI
N	Number of subjects in a sample	none
r	Correlation coefficient	none

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to thank the research and administrative community of the Institute of Social Psychology, London School of Economics & Political Sciences (London, UK) and more specifically Kevin Corti for scientific exchanges, and both Steeve Bennet and Steeve Gaskell for their technical support.

The author also thanks all the participants to the experiments and observations.

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