THE AMAZING STUDY!

The effect of puffery in advertisement claims on perceived credibility, perceived truthfulness, attitude, and purchase intentions of Dutch and American consumers

Tamara Simons

Tamara Simons

University of Twente
Faculty of Behavioural Sciences
Master Communication Studies

Prof. Dr. A.T.H. Pruyn, University of Twente
Drs. M.H. Tempelman, University of Twente

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to add to the understanding of the effects of puffery in advertisement claims in a cross-cultural setting. In this study, it was investigated to what extent puffery in advertisement claims affects the American and Dutch consumers' perception of the credibility of the advertisement, perception of the truthfulness of the advertiser, attitude towards the advertisement, and the purchase intention. If any effect, to what extent does the masculine culture dimension moderate this effect. Along the process of creating the stimuli for this study, another variable was added to the design that was expected to moderate the effect of puffery on purchase intention: product value type (hedonic / functional).

A 3 (high / low / no puffery) x 2 (masculinity / femininity) x 2 (hedonic / functional) mixed between- and within-subjects research design was used in this study. The level of puffery and the product value type was manipulated in advertisements and by means of an online questionnaire the effects were measured among 219 American students and 204 Dutch students.

This study confirmed that the level of puffery did have an effect on the purchase intention of the consumer and this effect was mediated by perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, and the attitude towards the advertisement. When the level of puffery in an advertisement claim was low, the effects on purchase intention were more positive, than when the level of puffery in the advertisement claim was high. This study could not confirm the expectation that Americans are more masculine and the Dutch more feminine. Also, moderation effects of culture (MAS dimension) and the product value types were not confirmed.

A limitation of this study was that it could not confirm the MAS dimension based on nationality, American or Dutch, therefore, a median split was performed on all subjects together to create a new MAS dimension variable that compared the individual subjects. The MAS dimension is initially a way to compare countries more than to compare individuals.

Marketers could use puffery in advertisement claims, as it can have a positive effect on purchase intention, as long as the level of puffery in the claim is not high. Culture is very complex and if a marketer wants to market products or services in another country, the different cultural values should not be ignored.

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In 2008-2009 I started the pre-master Communication Science. After getting used to the higher level of the study materials and the academic style of reporting in both English as Dutch, I really enjoyed the studies. I was very certain this was the education that would fit me.

During the Master Communication Science, I attended the classes of all subjects that were of interest to me. Because I was interested in most of the subjects offered, I exceeded the required credits for the master course by 20 credits.

One of the subjects I attended classes of was “The Social Construction of Reality: Culture and Consumption”. Prof. Dr. B. Englis was teaching the course and he inspired me to look a bit closer at culture and how it could affect a consumer. One day, we were talking about how I thought that Americans use a lot of superlatives and exaggeration. Words like “hilarious”, “amazing” and “the best” made me think of the infomercials of “The Amazing Discoveries”. This was how the subject for my master thesis came to life and this report presents the results.

I came a long way from the MAVO, HAVO, MBO+, HBO and now the university. I am proud of what I have accomplished as I never thought I would be where I am now. I could not have walked this path without the support of my loving parents. They have always showed me that they were proud of me, no matter what. That always gave me the feeling I could do anything. I had just collected the data for my research, when my father passed away in 2011. This was a very difficult time for me and my family and I had left the research for a while. A while became years, but after 5,5 years I gathered the courage to continue. It was far from easy after all these years, but I am at this point of graduating for my master’s degree. This shows me I can do anything, I just need to want to do it.

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INTRODUCTION

"Mike, the Miracle Blade® is really amazing, it can cut everything!" The Miracle Blade® is a knife which was first promoted on "Amazing® Discoveries" in 1989, an American home shopping program presented by Mike Levey. Is this a true claim? Do people believe these kinds of claims? This claim is a good example of puffery. A claim that obviously exaggerates the representation of the product that, ordinary consumers do not take seriously. Or do they? What is the effect of puffery on consumer perception and attitude? Past research on the effects of puffery found that consumers do believe exaggerated claims and that puffed claims can increase the intention of the consumer to buy the product promoted in the advertisement.

The Miracle Blade® was not only promoted in the United States of America (USA), it was also promoted in other countries, like in the Netherlands. Could cultural differences play an important, moderating role if we use puffery in cross-cultural marketing? Do the Dutch feel the same as the Americans after viewing the commercial of the Miracle Blade®? Do they feel the same after reading a puffed advertisement? This study focuses on the effects of puffery in advertisements on the perception and attitude of consumers living in a masculine culture (USA) and a more feminine culture (the Netherlands).

Exaggerating and vague claims used in advertisements to promote products and services, are called puffery. Preston (1996) identified six levels of puffery; the best, best possible, better, exceptionally good, merely good and specific features. The latter two levels of puffery are the most modest levels.

Advertisements intend to persuade and the claims used in these advertisements are often on the edge of being illegal. Puffery is, according to the law, not deception and therefore not illegal (Preston, 1996).

In the Nederlandse Reclame Code (Art. 7, 2010) as well as in Federal Trade Commission Policy Statement on Deception (103 F.T.C. 174, 1984) it is noted that advertisements should not deceive, but may contain puffery: "Exaggerations reasonably to be expected from a seller as to the degree of quality of his product".

The law will not pursue cases involving obvious exaggerations and puffed presentations, as it is assumed by government policymakers that puffery has no effect on the consumer (Hoffman, 2006; Preston, 1996). Government policy makers believe that reasonable consumers could not possibly treat puffery seriously or be deceived by it. A first assumption that underlies this policy is that consumers are able to identify puffed claims as not to be credible. The second assumption that underlies this policy is that puffed claims will not be incorporated into the evaluations or beliefs of the consumer because the consumer knows and understands that puffery is just an exaggerated claim, so consumers will not rely on puffed claims (Cowley, 2006). Because of their subjective nature, the Federal Trade Commission considers hyperboles as ‘fantastic’, ‘amazing’, ‘hilarious’ and ‘the best’ harmless. It is actually a very complex issue, as scholars have evidence that puffery in advertisements does have an effect on consumers’ believes, attitude and behaviour (e.g. Hoek & Gendall, 2007; Hoffman, 2006; Preston, 1996; Snyder, 1989).

Misleading claims are illegal but it is not always clear whether a claim is puffery or a misleading claim. Hofmann (2006) discusses in his article several cases in which advertisers are sued for misleading consumers with their claims and the advertiser tries to defend by stating that the claim was puffery. In some cases, the advertiser wins the case and in almost similar cases, the plaintiff wins the case. Preston (1996) shows the same in his book: ‘The Great American Blowup. Puffery in Advertising and Selling'.

As mentioned earlier, previous research demonstrates that consumers do believe these puffed claims. Haan & Berkey (2002) found that experience with the product is a factor that influences the belief in the puffed claim. The better the experience with the product the more the puffed claim is believed.

Snyder (1989) showed respondents advertisements with implied superiority claims and non-comparative claims and found that claims for familiar brands were significantly more believed than unfamiliar brands. In the same study, it is shown that implied superiority claims are believed but non-comparative claims are believed more.

Another factor that has an influence on the believability of the claim is the media context in which the advertisement is published. Xu & Wyer (2010) found that when an advertisement with a puffed claim is published in a professional magazine, puffery generally improves the advertisement effectiveness and credibility. Moreover, consumers seem to process these claims as if they were facts as they do not always recognize these puffed claims to be puffery (Preston, 1996). This means that consumers do sometimes rely on claims that are exaggerated, vague and most of the time untrue. It also means that consumers can be deceived by puffery in advertisements and that puffery does have an effect on consumers.

Advertisements are often part of a cross-cultural marketing strategy. Can marketers use the same advertisement in another country? Can they use the same puffed message in all countries and would the consumer respond equally? They can, but does it work?

Converging needs of consumers is assumed to be the consequence of globalization and economic development and it would facilitate the standardization of marketing and advertising (Moon & Chan, 2005). Perhaps the producers of Amazing® Discoveries thought that the Dutch might need a good knife too and they decided that there could be a market for the Miracle Blade® and therefore promoted the Miracle Blade® in the Netherlands in the nineties.

The advertising for the Miracle Blade® was exactly the same as in the USA, only Mike was voiced over by a Dutchman with an American accent. Does the marketing strategy of Amazing® Discoveries work in the Netherlands? Critics claim that markets are very diverse and that standardization of marketing and advertising would not be successful due to cultural differences (De Mooij, 2000). This suggests that the marketing and advertising strategy of Amazing® Discoveries may not have worked in the Netherlands as the Dutch culture may differ from the American culture. It rises the expectation that puffery in advertisement claims could have a positive effect in one culture (American culture), but maybe not in other cultures, like the Dutch culture. It is very important to understand cultural differences and core cultural values, because that could give the marketer the knowledge needed to succeed in advertising across cultures (Pitta, Fung & Isberg, 1999; Moon & Chan, 2005).

These cultural values have a powerful influence on the behaviour of the consumer (Watson, Lysonski, Gillan & Raymore, 2002).

In the past, effort was made by researchers to develop different models on universal values that distinguished cultures that tend to explain cross-cultural differences (Moon & Chen, 2005). Hofstede (1980) developed the first empirically based set of value dimensions that compared different cultures (Watson et al., 2002).

The dimensions of Hofstede (1980) are widely used in cross-cultural marketing and advertising researches and it has proven to be still valid in more recent studies (Möller & Eisend, 2010; Moon & Chen, 2005; Nelson, Brunel, Supphellen & Manchanda, 2006).

Given the above information on the importance of culture in cross-cultural marketing and advertising, this study compares the effects of puffery in advertising in two markets, the USA and the Netherlands. One dimension (masculinity/femininity) of Hofstede's framework is used to investigate how culture is related to the possible effect of puffery in advertisements, because in this dimension the USA and the Netherlands differ significantly (Hofstede, 1991; Möller & Eisend, 2010).

Relevance

Most studies about the effects of puffery are limited to a national setting and are largely focused on USA (Haan & Berkey, 2002; Marks & Kamins, 1988; Preston, 1996). Literature is lacking studies on the effects of puffery in advertising that are performed in other countries, countries like the Netherlands (Haan & Berkey, 2002). Moreover, there is a lack of studies on the effect of puffery in advertising in a cross-cultural setting.

Cross-cultural research has been conducted to investigate the effects of advertising on the attitude and behaviour of consumers (Möller & Eisend, 2010, Nelson et al., 2006). Möller & Eisend (2010) found in their research that members of feminine cultures, like the Netherlands and Sweden, showed a less positive attitude towards banner advertising and less intention to click on the advertisement than members of a masculine culture, Slovakia and Venezuela.

In the research of Nelson et al. (2006) respondents from masculine and feminine countries viewed both self-focused and other-focused ads. The male respondents of the masculine cultures preferred self-focused ads and the women other-focused ads. The opposite was found for men and women of the feminine culture.

There is only little known in the existing literature about to what extent puffery in advertising affects consumers and to what extent cultural differences moderate the effect of puffery in advertising (Pitta et al., 1999). Therefore, this study has theoretical relevance. This study is meant to enforce the existing literature and to extent the literature with new evidence on the effects of puffery in printed advertisements in the USA as well as in the Netherlands, by using Hofstede's Masculine/Feminine dimension of culture values (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 1991).

Besides a theoretical relevance, this study has also a practical relevance. If the marketer desires to sell their product or services abroad, he or she has to understand that culture is a factor which could influence the attitude and behaviour of the consumer towards an advertisement, the product presented and even towards the company behind the advertisement (Moon & Chan, 2005; Nelson at al., 2006).

A better understanding of the effects of puffery used in advertisements in a cross- cultural marketing setting, would enable the marketer to present their products or services in a proper and legal manner, which in turn can lead to more success in different cultures.

Research question

The theoretical and practical relevance are described in the previous section and based on that, the following research question can be formulated:

To what extent does puffery in advertisement claims affect the consumer's perception of the credibility of the advertisement, the consumer's perception of the truthfulness of the advertiser, the consumer's attitude towards the advertisement, and the consumer's purchase intention, and if there is any effect, to what extent does culture (masculine / feminine) moderate this effect?

After a thorough literature review, a theoretical framework for this study is outlined in the following section. In this section, it is described what is already known in the literature on the issues which are relevant to this study. Next, hypotheses are formulated and a conceptual research model is illustrated. A pretest to test the stimulus material, the experimental research method and procedure are described. This all will be followed by the results of the experiment. Finally, the conclusions, discussion, practical and theoretical implications and recommendations will be addressed in the last section of this report.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the years, consumers have been increasingly exposed to exaggerated and vague claims in advertisements. These claims are puffed and nowadays a considerable amount of puffery is used in advertising claims. What is puffery exactly? Why is it used in advertisements and if it has any effect on consumers, what is this effect? The following sections will provide more detailed information in order to help understand the concept of puffery. These sections will also describe the studies that have been conducted, in the past, to investigate the effects of puffery in advertisements.

What is puffery?

Puffery has been defined by several researchers in their own way, but all definitions look very much alike: “Wildly exaggerated, fanciful or vague claims for a product or service” (Cowley, 2006). “Puffery claims praise the advertised item by using subjective terms, stating no fact explicitly, and thus representing no factual content to consumers and so creating no basis for them to believe anything about the item that would affect their purchasing decisions” (Preston, 1996). “Product descriptions that purport to be important but actually provide little if any meaningful information” (Xu & Wyer, 2010).

Levels of puffery

As mentioned earlier, Preston (1996) has identified six levels of puffery in which the first level of puffery is the most deceptive level and the last level of puffery is the most modest level.

The first level of puffery is the superlative puff. “Gilette, the best a man can get” (Gilette) is an example of a puffed claim in this level. This implies that a superiority scale exists, from best to worst and from top to bottom. The advertiser wants the consumer to believe that the product or service advertised is better than its competitor in the described attributes (Preston, 1996).

The second level of puffery is a slightly weaker form of puff. “Perfect rice every time” (Minute Rice) is an example of a puffed claim in this level. The product or service advertised may not be the best in its category but it does imply that it is the best possible. Competitors could be as good but none is better (Preston, 1996).

The third level of puffery contains the ‘better’ claims. “Advil works better” (Advil) is an example of a puffed claim in this level. This is a weaker form of puffery than the previous two levels. It implies that the product or service advertised is not the best but it is better. Competitors could be better or equal (Preston, 1996).

The fourth level of puffery states that the product or service advertised is merely great or especially good. “Super Paint” (Sherwin Williams) is an example of a puffed claim in this level. It implies that the product or service advertised is on a high scale with the competitor but it does not say it is better or best (Preston, 1996).

The fifth level of puffery contains rather weak puffed claims. “You are in good hands with Allstate” (Allstate) is an example of a puffed claim in this level. The advertisement does not claim the product or service is exceptionally good or better than its competitors (Preston, 1996).

The last level of puffery is the weakest form of puffery is the specific features claim. “Something special in the sky” (American Airlines) is an example of a puffed claim in this level. This is a very modest form of puffery, although the intentions of the advertiser may not be as modest as the puffery implies.

The products or services are not explicitly better or the best. These claims can be fantasy or fanciful and are all very subjective and the claim describes specific features of the product or service advertised (Preston, 1996).

Puffery in advertising and its effect

Puffed claims are used a lot in advertising. Almost every advertisement you see contains a certain level of puffery. Puffery seems to work in advertisements (Cowley, 2006; Preston, 1996). Critics like Preston (1996) have argued that the Federal Trade Commission Policy Statement on Deception (103 F.T.C. 174, 1984) has been too indulgent in determining the deception level in puffery cases. Research results provide evidence that puffery does have effects on the consumer's perception of credibility, perceived truthfulness, attitude, and purchase intention (Cowley, 2006; Haan & Berkey, 2002; Kamins & Marks, 1987; Preston, 1996).

Effects of puffery

As mentioned in the previous sections, the law states that consumers do recognize that puffery lacks credibility. Puffery seems to have a negative effect on the perceived credibility and the perceived truthfulness of the advertiser.

Cowley (2006) conducted a study which has shown that consumers are able to identify the puffed claim as less credible, but that it does not mean that claims are judged as not credible. Cowley (2006) also found that if a claim contains a higher level of puffery, the consumer perceives the claim as less credible. Also in the research of Goldberg & Hartwick (1990) it was found that consumers perceive an advertisement containing a high level puffery claim (which is called high extremity claim in their research) as less credible than when an advertisement contains a moderate or no puffery claim. Based on the results of the studies of Cowley (2006) and Goldberg & Hartwick (1990) it can be expected that when the puffery level in an advertisement claim is higher, the consumer will perceive the advertisement as less credible.

Therefore, the first hypothesis is formulated as:

H1 *Consumers will perceive an advertisement to be more credible when the advertisement contains a low level puffery claim, than when the advertisement contains a high level puffery claim.*

Kamins & Marks (1987) showed in their research that participants do not only perceive the advertisement as less credible when it contained a higher level of puffery. The participants also perceived the advertiser to be less truthful when a higher level of puffery was used in the advertisement claim. In their research, the participants saw two levels of puffed claims about a pen in advertisements. Afterwards the participants could try the pen. The participants perceived the advertisements with the higher level puffery in the claims to be less credible and the advertiser was perceived as less truthful. The higher the puffery level the less the participant tended to perceive the advertisement as credible and the advertiser as truthful.

Based on these results, it can be expected that when the puffery level in an advertisement claim is higher, the consumer will perceive the advertiser to be less truthful and the second hypothesis can be formulated:

H2 *Consumers will perceive the advertiser to be more truthful when the advertisement contains a low level puffery claim, than when the advertisement contains a high level puffery claim.*

Marks & Kamins (1988) show in another study that puffed claims have also an effect on the attitude of the consumer. In this study, participants were exposed to different sequences: advertisement-sampling, sampling-advertisement and sampling only. This research shows in the advertisement-sample condition that after being exposed to an advertisement with a high level puffery claim, subjects had a less positive attitude towards the product, than when the subjects were exposed to a low level puffery claim in the advertisement was.

In the sampling-advertisement and sampling only conditions, the attitude towards the product remained the same, as no expectation was created by the level of puffery. In the study of Marks & Kamins (1988), it shows, in the advertisement-sampling condition, that there was an effect of the level of puffery on the consumer's attitude and the results show that the attitude is more positive when exposed to a low level of puffery in the advertisement claim, than when exposed to a high level of puffery in the advertisement claim.

This rises the expectation that a low level puffery claim in an advertisement has a more positive effect on the consumer's attitude towards the advertisement, than when the advertisement contains a high level puffery claim in an advertisement. The third hypothesis can be formulated:

H3 *Consumers will have a more positive attitude towards the advertisement when the advertisement contains a low level puffery claim, than when the advertisement contains a high level puffery claim.*

Mediation of perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, and attitude towards the advertisement.

Attitude towards an advertisement is an important construct which guides the behaviour of consumers (Möller & Eisend, 2010). Burton & Lichtenstein (1988) found that advertisement claims (which were price focused in their research) do have an impact on consumer's attitude towards the advertisement and that the attitude towards the advertisement in turn has an influence on the likelihood to buy the advertised brand. It is reasonable to assume that the purchase intention of the consumer is positive when the consumer has a positive attitude towards the advertisement (Aaker & Day, 1973; Preston, 1996).

If a puffed claim has a negative effect on attitude towards the advertisement and in turn has a negative effect on purchase intention, it could well be that the attitude of the consumer mediates the effect of puffery in advertisement on the purchase intention of the consumer (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986).

Credibility and corporate credibility (truthfulness of the advertiser) is found to be a significant predictor of purchase intention (Goldsmidt & Lafferty, 1999). As mentioned before, puffery seems to have a negative effect on the perceived credibility and the perceived truthfulness of the advertiser.

If puffed claims have a negative effect on perceived credibility and on perceived truthfulness, and in turn have a negative effect on purchase intention, it is likely that perceived credibility and perceived truthfulness mediate the effect of puffery in advertisement claims on the purchase intention. A mediation cannot exist if there is not a direct effect of a puffed claim in an advertisement on the consumer's purchase intention. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that a lower level of puffery in an advertisement claim has a more positive effect on the purchase intention, and that this effect is mediated by consumer's perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, and the attitude towards the advertisement. The fourth hypothesis can be formulated:

H4 *A low level of puffery in an advertisement claim has a more positive effect on purchase intention, than a high level of puffery in an advertisement claim.*

- **H4a** *The effect of puffery in an advertisement claim on purchase intention is mediated by the consumers' perceived credibility of the advertisement.*
- **H4b** *The effect of puffery in an advertisement claim on purchase intention is mediated by the consumers' perceived truthfulness of the advertiser.*
- **H4c** *The effect of puffery in an advertisement claim on purchase intention is mediated by the consumers' attitude towards the advertisement.*

If it is found that high puffery does have a positive effect on consumer and in turn a positive effect on purchase intention, this would be very relevant to the issues concerning the position of the Federal Trade Commission Policy Statement on Deception (103 F.T.C. 174, 1984) about puffery.

Cross-cultural marketing and cultural differences

As a result of the economic development and globalization, a large number of organisations extended their business to other countries to gain more profit and to grow in volume. It is not only a shift initiated by the supply side of sales, consumer's needs all over the world are converging (Moon & Chan, 2005). The internationally operating organisations, like Amazing® Discoveries, are advertising their products in different countries. According to De Mooij (2000) standardization of marketing and advertising in the different markets would be difficult and may not even be successful due to cultural differences. Culture is a very complex construct. It sets the common values, norms and attitudes of a group of humans and provides a kind of 'mental software' (Hofstede, 1991).

Consumers in different cultures will have different norms and values and this could cause different responses to marketing efforts, like advertisements (De Mooij, 2000; Hofstede, 1991, Möller & Eisend, 2010). It could well be that the message in the promotion and advertisements of the Miracle Blade® is received and responded to differently in different cultures. Cultural values have an important effect on consumer behaviour and attitude (Watson et al., 2002).

The need for a universal values model that distinguishes cultures and which explains cross-cultural differences is expressed by researchers (Moon & Chen, 2005). Hofstede (1980) was the first to develop an empirically based set of value dimensions that compares different cultures (Watson et al., 2002). Hofstede's dimensions (1980) are extensively used in research on cross-cultural marketing and advertising and in recent studies it has still proven to be valid and useful (Möller & Eisend, 2010; Moon & Chen, 2005; Nelson et al., 2006).

Hofstede's dimensions

Hofstede (1980) answered to the need of a universal value model by developing a concept that could compare and explain different cultures based on five culture dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity and time orientation. To create a better understanding of the dimensions, a short description of the dimensions is given below.

Power distance refers to the degree to which the less powerful members of society, family or organisations expect and accept power is not equally distributed. Some countries (e.g. Slovakia, 104) score very high on the scale of power distance, other countries very low (e.g. Israel, 13) (Hofstede, 1980, 1991).

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which members of the culture feel comfortable in uncertain and unstructured situations. Some countries (e.g. Portugal, 104) score very high on the scale of uncertainty avoidance, other countries very low (e.g. Singapore, 8) (Hofstede, 1980, 1991).

Individualism versus collectivism refers to the degree to which members of the society are individuals that integrate into a group. Some countries (e.g. Australia, 90) score very high on the scale of individualism, other countries score very low (e.g. Ecuador, 8) which means that these countries are collectivistic. This dimension is the most studied dimension (Hofstede, 1980, 1991).

Time orientation refers to the degree to which the members of the society are focused on long term situations or on short term situations. Some countries (e.g. Hong Kong, 96) score very high on the scale of long term orientation, other countries score very low (e.g. Pakistan, 0) which means that these countries are short term oriented.

Masculinity versus femininity refers to the degree to which emotional roles are distributed between sexes within a society. Members of a masculine culture are assertive and competitive, men as well as women, although men score much higher than women. Achievement, preference in society, and material success are very important in masculine cultures.

Members of a feminine culture are modest and caring, and the difference between men and women is small. In feminine cultures family and personal relationships are very important (De Mooij, 1998; Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; Moon & Chan, 2005). Some countries score very high on the scale of masculinity (e.g. Slovakia, 110; Japan, 95) and some cultures score very low (e.g. Sweden, 5; the Netherlands, 14) which means that these countries are more feminine.

Hofstede's (1991) multidimensional concept of culture is used for this study. The countries in this study, the USA and the Netherlands, score almost equally on all of the dimensions, except on the scale of the dimension masculinity vs femininity (Hofstede, 1991; Möller & Eisend, 2010). These countries show differences in culture values and gender roles, according to masculinity versus femininity. Table 1 shows the scores of the USA and the scores of the Netherlands on the different culture dimensions.

Table 1. Scores of the USA and the Netherlands on the culture dimensions of Hofstede (1980)

Dimension Country	Masculinity / femininity	Individualistic / collectivistic	Uncertainty avoidance	Power distance	Time orientation
USA	62	90	46	40	29
The Netherlands	14	80	53	38	44

Masculine / feminine culture and its effect on advertisements

When a message is congruent with the cultural values of a country, it is more likely that the message is evaluated more positively, than when the message is incongruent (Han & Shevitt, 1994; Nelson et al., 2006). In contrast to masculine cultures, people in feminine cultures value modesty and avoid showing off, exaggerate or arousing envy (Möller & Eisend, 2010). Products or service advertising that focused on achievement, could lead to negative attitudes towards advertising in feminine cultures (Watson, Rayner, Lysonski & Durvasula, 1999). Masculine cultures are more assertive, though, and emphasizing achievement.

Moon & Chan (2005) found in their study that the masculinity vs femininity dimension is an important variable for explaining differences in advertising and they state that advertisements adjusted to the culture, works.

Masculine cultures would create a more positive attitude towards the advertisement which, in turn, would lead to a higher purchase intention (Möller & Eisend, 2010). Hornikx and O'Keefe (2009) found that if persuasive claims in advertisements were adapted to the culture's values of the masculinity vs femininity dimension, the advertisement was liked significantly better than when the advertisement was not adapted. In the USA, which has a more masculine culture, people like to exaggerate claims to point out success and achievement (Hofstede, 1991). Hofstede (1991) found in a study for IBM that employers expect the applicant for a job to exaggerate in order to point out what he or she is worth and capable of. It is uncommon to an American employer if the applicant would not exaggerate during the application procedure. In the Netherlands, which has a more feminine culture, people are more modest and they seem to care less about exaggerated claims in job application procedures (Hofstede, 1991). To a Dutch employer, it would be very unusual if the applicant would exaggerate during the application procedure. Pitta et al. (1999) claim in their article that it is a tradition of the Americans to exaggerate, also in their advertisements. This induces the thought that there could also be a difference between the USA and the Netherlands in the way they respond to exaggeration in advertising and to puffed claims specifically.

As described in the previous sections, there are different levels of puffery (Preston, 1996), from high level puffery to low level puffery. These different levels of puffery in advertisement claims are expected to have an effect on consumer's perceived credibility of the advertisement, truthfulness of the advertiser, attitude towards the advertisement, and purchase intention.

Based on the values of the masculine culture, like assertiveness, showing off, exaggerating, described by Hofstede (1991) and Möller & Eisend (2010), it is expected that high puffed claims in advertisements have a more positive effect on purchase intention in the American, more masculine, culture. The effect of high puffed claims in advertisements on purchase intention would be more negative in the Dutch, more feminine, culture. It is plausible to hypothesize that the culture dimension masculinity / femininity has a moderating role in this expected effect. So, the effect of puffed claims in advertisements on purchase intention is moderated by culture (masculinity / femininity). Therefore, hypothesis five is formulated:

H5 *Low level puffery claims in an advertisement have a more positive effect on purchase intention in more feminine cultures, than in more masculine cultures.*

The effect of hedonic and functional valued products

Products may differ from the way the consumer judges the experience or performance of products. For example, the consumer could judge chocolate rather by experience, adding more hedonic values, like a good or bad taste, than by performance, adding more functional values, like the quality of the cocoa beans. Or, the consumer could judge a laptop rather by performance, by more functional values, like how fast the processor of the laptop is, than by experience, adding more hedonic values, like how much fun one would have. This had risen the expectation that there could be a difference between the different products when more hedonic, or more functional values, are added to the claims. In the example, chocolate would be judged more as an experience product with hedonic values, and a laptop as a performance product with functional values.

Functional values are more factual and therefore also more objective. It is likely that low puffery is more associated with functional values, than high puffery. Hedonic values are based on experience and therefore more subjective. It is likely that high puffery is more associated with hedonic values, than low puffery.

It could be assumed that the effect of a high puffed claim on purchase intention would be more positive when a hedonic valued product is used in the advertisement, than when a functional valued product is used in the advertisement. The effect of puffery in advertisements on purchase intention could be moderated by the product value (hedonic / functional). Therefore, the sixth hypothesis is formulated.

H6 *Low level puffery claims in an advertisement have a more positive effect on purchase intention when the advertisement contains a functional valued product, than when the advertisement contains a hedonic valued product.*

Conceptual research model

The first independent variable in this study is the puffery level in the claim of the advertisement. This is the variable that influences the dependent variables: perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, attitude towards the advertisement, and purchase intention. The effect of the independent variable on purchase intention, could be moderated by the independent variable, culture (masculinity / femininity) and by the independent variable, product value type (hedonic / functional). The effect of the independent variable puffery level on the dependent variable purchase intention, could be mediated by the variables perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, and attitude towards the advertisement. Figure 1 presents the conceptual research model for this study.

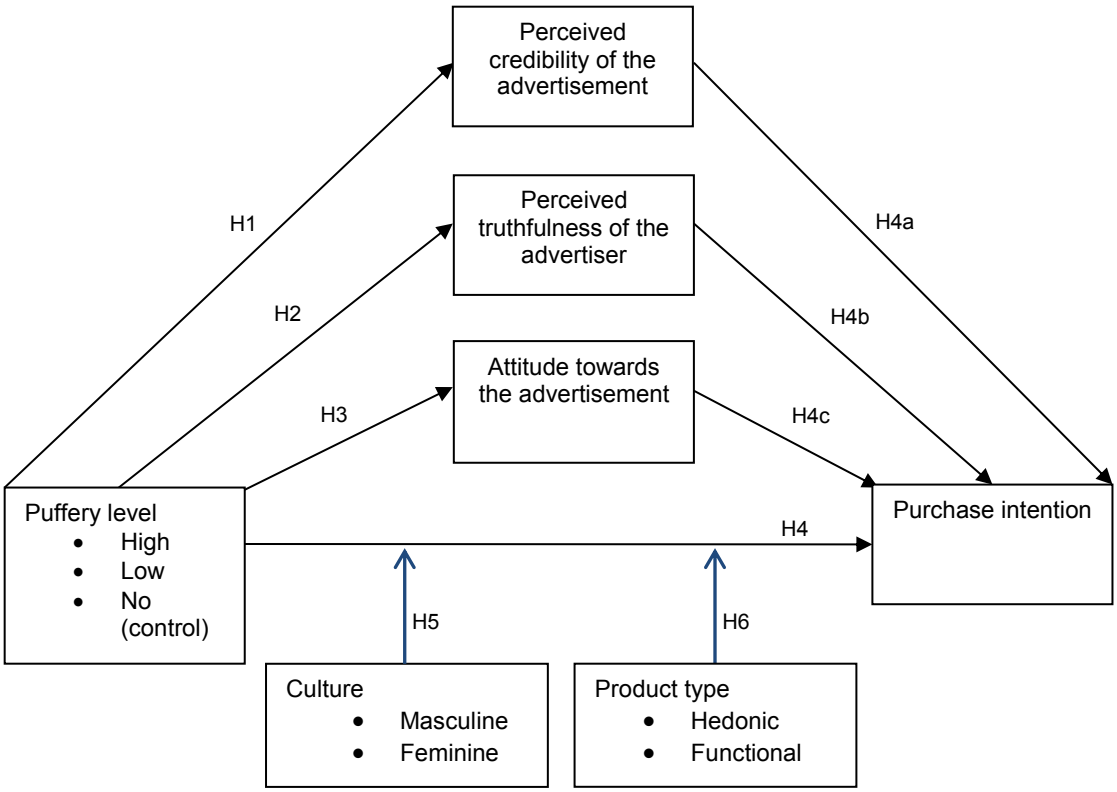

Figure 1. Conceptual research model.

METHOD PRETEST

To select the correct stimulus material for the main study, a pretest was conducted. The main goal of the pretest was to test the advertisement claims on the level of puffery. Only the claims with a significant difference between the three conditions, high, low or no puffery, could be used for the main study. A pretest was conducted in both the Netherlands and the United States of America, but for practical reasons the pretest was conducted in the Netherlands first.

Research design pretest

To test the level of puffery in the claims a 3 (puffery: high puffery / low puffery / no puffery (control)) x 2 (product value type: functional / hedonic) x 2 (culture: masculine / feminine) mixed between and within-subjects design is used. In this design, the first 3 (puffery) x 2 (product value type) is within subjects and the last x 2 (culture) is between subjects. The different research conditions are shown below, in table 2.

Table 2. Research conditions 3x2x2 mixed between and within-subjects design

	US (Masculine)		NL (Feminine)	
	Hedonic	*Functional*	*Hedonic*	*Functional*
High Puffery				
Low Puffery				
No Puffery				

In this study, it was assumed that the American culture is more masculine and that the Dutch culture is more feminine.

Pretest stimulus material

First, six product advertisements were designed (Vivani chocolate, Pensive pens, Minton vitamin fruitwater, Phecda laptop, Iocian mobile phone, and TR Sound MP3 player). All products used in the advertisements are products that are often used by students, as students are the participants of this study. Like in the research of Kamins & Marks (1987), the used product brands were fictive to avoid possible knowledge or preconceptions about the brand. There were three versions of each advertisement: containing a high, low or no puffery claim. The claims were written according to the puffery levels described by Preston (1996). The high puffery level claims contain words like ultimate or the best (in Dutch: ultiem or de beste). The low puffery level claims contain words like good (in Dutch: goede) and the claims without puffery only contain facts about the advertised product.

As described earlier, it is expected that there could be a difference between the different products, when more hedonic, or more functional values, are added to the claims. For example, Vivani chocolate would be judged more as a hedonic product, and a Pechda laptop more as a functional product. Therefore, two versions of the high, low and no puffery claims were created for all the product advertisements: hedonic and functional valued claims. Below, an example of a high puffery level claim with more functional values and an example of a high puffery level claim with more hedonic values in the Pensive pens advertisement.

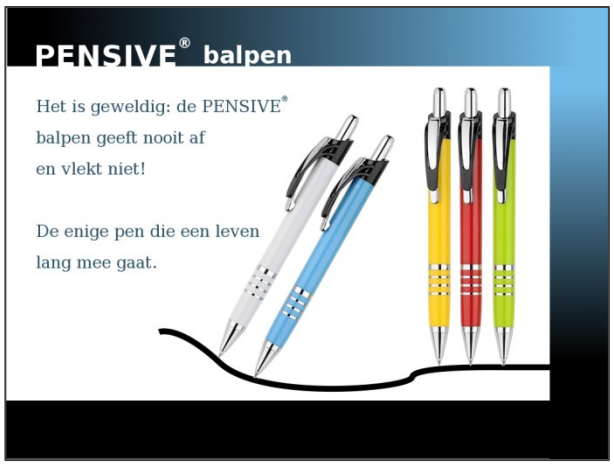

Image 1. Pensive pens advertisement with high puffery level claims with functional values.

Image 2. Pensive pens advertisement with high puffery level claims with more hedonic values.

This resulted in six versions of the six product advertisements, meaning a total of thirty-six advertisements (high, low, no puffery x functional, hedonic claims). All advertisements in the Dutch pretest are presented in Appendix A. The participant would not be able to evaluate thirty-six advertisements, as this would deplete the participant. Also, exposing the participants to all claim conditions using the same product advertisement, could reveal the true purpose of the pretest. Then, six versions of the questionnaire were created, so the participant would see each product advertisement only once. In each version of the questionnaire, there were advertisements with high and low puffed functional claims, high and low puffed hedonic claims, and no puffed claims.

To measure the level of puffery, the participants were asked to answer how exaggerating the claims in each advertisement was. The amount of exaggeration is the amount of perceived puffery. This was measured on 7-point Likert scale (1 = very exaggerated, 7 = not exaggerated at all). They were also asked if they knew the brand, to make sure there was no preconception bias.

Pretest in the Netherlands

Forty-Two Dutch students of the Saxion Hogeschool in Enschede participated in the pretest. These students were all students from the first-year classes of the HEAO Commerciële Economie. All students received an e-mail with the invitation to fill out the online questionnaire, which was prepared in a system called KASS. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix B. The participating student, could click on a link and the system assigned the student randomly to one of the 6 versions of the questionnaire. Among the Dutch participants that filled out their names and e-mail address, three vouchers worth €15 were raffled.

Results Dutch pretest

Because the main purpose of the pretest was to test the differences between the puffery levels, and because all subjects had seen all conditions (high, low, no puffery) in six versions of the questionnaire, the data was combined and a paired-sample t-test was conducted.

Every claim condition of all six product advertisements was compared with the two other claim conditions. This was done for the hedonic claims as well as for the functional claims. The results of the paired-sample t-test are shown in Appendix C. Only the puffery conditions used in the advertisements of Vivani chocolate, Pensive pens, Minton fruit water, and Phecda laptop were significantly different, with a 95% confidence, $p < .05$. This means that, for these products, the high puffed claims were significantly different from the low puffed claims and the claims without puffery, and that the low puffed claims were significantly different from the claims without puffery and from the high puffed claims.

As mentioned previously, for every puffery condition, there was a hedonic and a functional claim formulated. The puffery conditions with a hedonic claim were only significantly different for Vivani chocolate and Minton fruit water, $p < .05$, and the puffery conditions with a functional claim were only significantly different for Pensive pens and Phecda laptop, $p < .05$. These results support the expectation that there is a difference between the products when more hedonic, or more functional values are added to the claims.

This suggests that Vivani chocolate and Minton fruit water are judged as hedonic products and that Pensive pens and Phecda laptop are judged as functional products. A significant difference between hedonic and functional valued claims, per product, was found in this study and this could be a first lead for future studies on how consumers experience or judge products.

As expected, all participants answered “No” to the question whether they knew the brand or not, so none of the participants was familiar with the brands in the advertisements.

Pretest in the USA

The pretest in the USA was conducted after the Dutch pretest. Only the conditions that were significant ($p < .05$) in the Dutch pretest, were used for the American pretest. All advertisements of Iocian mobile phone and TR Sound MP3 player were taken out of the American pretest, as none of those claims were significantly different, $p < .05$, in the Dutch pretest. Also, the conditions with hedonic values and the conditions with the functional values of the other products that did not show significant differences, were excluded from the American pretest. The advertisements of Vivani chocolate and Minton fruit water, including all puffery conditions with hedonic values added to the claim, and the advertisements of Pensive pens and Pechda laptop, including all puffery conditions with functional values added to the claim, remained for translation from Dutch to American English. The translation was performed by a professional translator to best preserve the intended message and the amount of puffery. The American pretest was conducted in the same way as the Dutch pretest, but there were only four product advertisements, as all other advertisements were excluded, as mentioned before. This resulted in three versions of the four product advertisements, meaning a total of twelve advertisements (high, low, no puffery). Image 3 shows the advertisements containing the low puffed condition of Vivani chocolate, Minton fruit water, Pensive pens, and Phecda laptop. All advertisements used in the American pretest is presented in Appendix E.

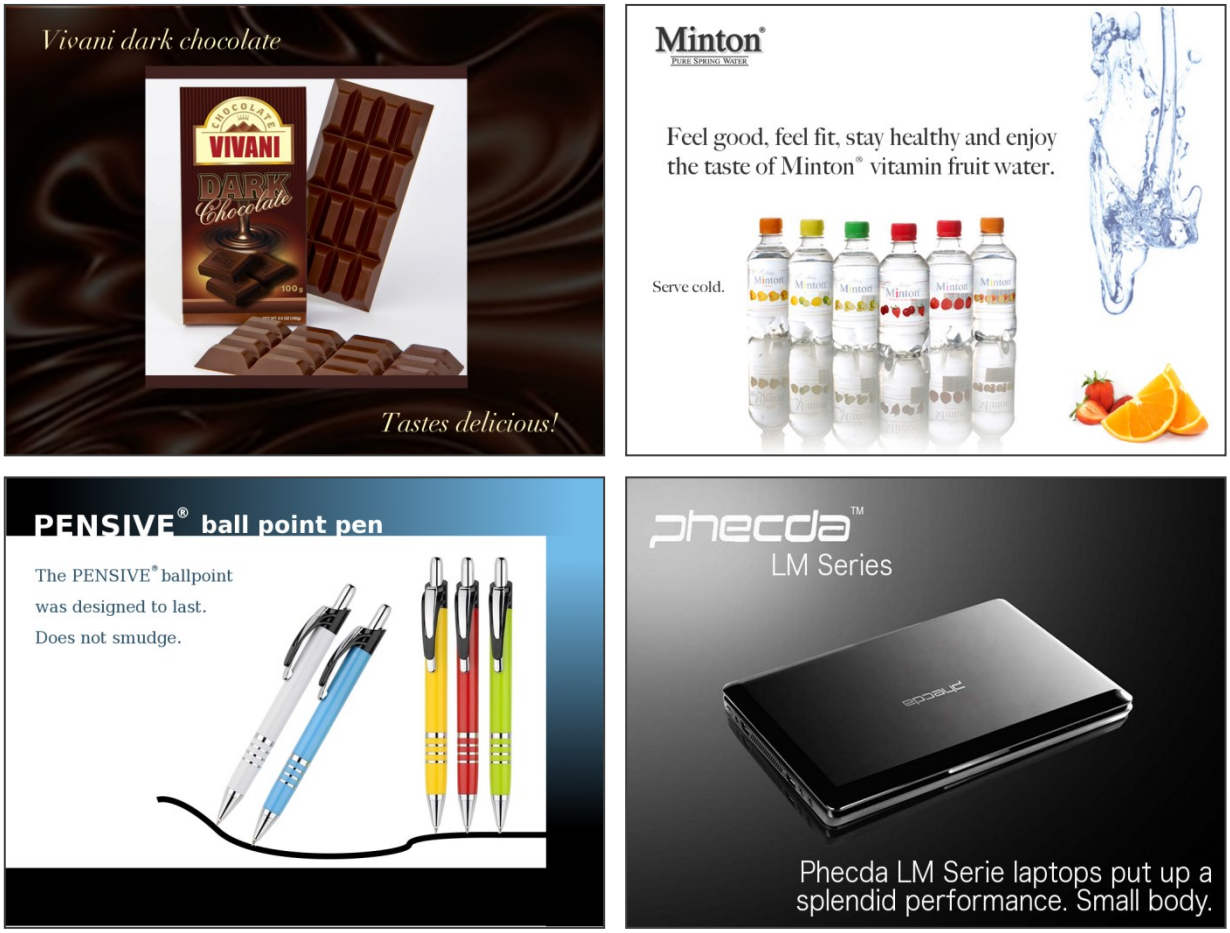

Image 3. Advertisements with low puffed claims condition.

Exposing the participants to all claim conditions using the same product advertisement, could reveal the true purpose of the pretest and therefore three versions of the questionnaire were created. The participant would see each product advertisement only once. In each version of the questionnaires, there were advertisements with high, low, and no puffery claims.

Thirty-Three American students of the Berry College in Mount Berry participated in the pretest. These students were all students from the first-year marketing classes of the Berry College. All students received an e-mail with the invitation to fill out the online questionnaire, which was prepared in KASS. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix D. The participating student, could click on a link and the system assigned the student randomly to one of the three versions of the questionnaire. The American students that filled out the questionnaire got credits for their effort.

Results American pretest

All participants had seen all conditions (high, low, no puffery) in three versions of the questionnaire and, like in the Dutch pretest, the data were combined and a paired-sample t-test was conducted. Every claim condition, of all four product advertisements, were compared with the other two claim conditions. The results of the paired-sample test are presented in Appendix F. The puffery conditions used in the advertisements of Vivani chocolate, Pensive pens, Minton fruit water, and Phecda laptop were significantly different, with a 95% confidence, $p < .05$. This means that the claims that were significantly different in the Dutch pretest, were also significantly different in the American pretest.

For the main study two product advertisements were selected: Vivani chocolate and Pensive pens. These product advertisements were selected because these products are both relatively cheap products, which a student could easily buy for a low amount of money. This ruled out Pechda laptop, which is clearly more expensive than the chocolate, pen and fruit water. Minton fruit water was excluded as the results of the pretests showed less significant differences compared to Vivani chocolate. Vivani chocolate had hedonic values added to the claims and Pensive pens had functional values added to the claims. These two products were compared in the main study.

METHOD MAIN STUDY

In the main study, the effect of puffery (high / low / no (control)) in advertisement claims on the perceived credibility of the advertisement, attitude towards the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, and purchase intention was studied. Also, the hypothesized mediation of the dependent variables and moderation of the masculinity culture dimension (masculinity / femininity) and of the product value types (hedonic / functional) was tested in the main study.

Research design

To test the hypotheses a 3 (puffery: high puffery / low puffery / no puffery (control)) x 2 (culture: masculine / feminine) x 2 (product value type: functional / hedonic) mixed between and within-subjects design is used. In this design, the first 3 (puffery) x 2 (culture) is between subjects and the last x 2 (product) is within subjects. The different research conditions are shown below, in table 3.

Table 3. Research conditions 3x2x2 mixed between and within-subjects design

	US (Masculine)		NL (Feminine)	
	Hedonic	*Functional*	*Hedonic*	*Functional*
High Puffery				
Low Puffery				
No Puffery				

In this study, it was assumed that the American culture is more masculine and that the Dutch culture is more feminine.

Main study stimulus material

Based on the results of the pretest, the advertisements of Pensive pens and Vivani chocolate were selected as stimuli for the main study.

The three conditions (high, low, and no puffery) in these advertisements showed significant differences in the pretest.

Both products were used for this study as the Pensive pens advertisements contained claims with functional values, and the Vivani chocolate advertisements contained claims with hedonic value. In this study, the high and low puffery conditions are used to test the hypotheses and the no puffery condition is a control condition. Image 4 shows the advertisements containing low puffed claims in English and image 5 shows the advertisements containing high puffed claims in English. The advertisements with English no puffed claims (control condition) are shown in image 6. These are the advertisements used in the main study. The advertisements in Dutch used in the main study are presented in Appendix G.

Image 4. Advertisements with low puffed claims in English.

Image 5. Advertisements with high puffed claims in English.

Image 6. Advertisements with no puffed claims in English.

Participants

A total of 427 subjects participated in the main study. 204 Dutch students from the study Communication Science at the University of Twente, Enschede, from the study Commercial Economics at the Saxion Hogeschool, Enschede (second to fourth years students as the first-year students were already asked for the pretest), and from the study Communications at the Hogeschool Utrecht, participated in the study. All students that were enrolled in the educational year 2010-2011 of all three studies received an email with an invitation to fill out the online questionnaire. The age of the participants varied from 18 to 25 years (M = 21.17, SD = 1.82). Among the participants were more women (72.5%) than men (27.5%). To minimize the influence of age and education, the selected target group was homogeneous.

223 American students of the Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia participated in this study. All students that were invited, were second to fourth-year students that were enrolled for the study Marketing.

The first-year students were not invited as they were already invited for the pretest. The age of the participants varied from 18 to 44 years (M = 20.27, SD = 2.73). Among the participants were more women (80.7%) than men (19.3%).

A few American participants (n = 4) of the age between 28 and 44 were excluded from the analysis as their age was significantly higher than the average participant age. An overview of the demographic characteristics is presented in table 3.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics

Nationality, Condition	Participants	Gender		Age	
	N	Male%	Female%	M	SD
USA	219	19.2	80.8	19.97	1.37
High puffery	59	20.3	79.7	20.36	1.24
Low puffery	76	21.1	78.9	19.76	1.48
No puffery	84	16.7	83.3	19.88	1.32
The Netherlands	204	27.5	72.5	21.17	1.82
High puffery	66	31.8	68.2	20.89	1.76
Low puffery	67	26.9	73.1	21.27	1.84
No puffery	71	23.9	76.1	21.34	1.87
Total	423	23.2	76.8	20.55	1.71

Note: The age varied from 18-25, 4 American participants were excluded due to older age. All subjects had seen the functional and hedonic valued products for the assigned puffery condition.

Procedure

The participants were invited by e-mail to take part in this study. They were asked to fill out an online questionnaire. The participants in each country were able to click on a link to start the questionnaire. There were two versions of the questionnaire per condition. The only difference between the two versions was the order of showing the advertisement. In version 1 the hedonic valued product was shown first and in version 2 the functional product was shown first. For example: version 1 was high puffery condition showing hedonic valued product advertisement first, version 2 was high puffery condition showing functional valued product advertisement first, version 3 was low puffery condition showing hedonic valued product advertisement first, and so on. This was to check for order bias.

Per country there were six version of the questionnaire. The system assigned the subjects randomly to one of the six versions of the questionnaire.

In the introduction of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to assess advertisements for new products to mask the real purpose of this study. The participants were given an estimated time for completing of the questionnaire and they were thanked for their participation. The American participants were granted credits for the participation and for the Dutch participants that filled in their names and e-mail address. Three vouchers worth € 20 were raffled among the Dutch participants.

After a brief introduction and explanation of the survey, the participants received questions about culture dimensions (Hofstede et.al., 2008) and questions about personal characteristics.

Then, two advertisements, Vivani chocolate and Pensive pens1, were presented to the participants with the claims of the condition to which they were assigned initially. After each advertisement, the participants had to answer questions that measured the independent and dependent variables of the study. To make sure there was no preconception bias, it was asked whether the participant knew the brand. Finally, several questions about the attitude towards exaggeration and general questions, such as gender, age and, optionally, name and e-mail address, were to be answered. The questionnaire was identical in both countries and no modification of the scales was done, other than translation.

Measures

The items used in the questionnaires to measure the constructs of this study are mostly adopted from previous studies and measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all to 7 = very much). The only adjustment made for this study was using the brand names, for example “How would you rate the advertisement of Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens?” “Attractiveness”.

The subject would rate attractiveness on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The constructs were measured with exactly the same items in the Dutch version of the questionnaire as in the American version of the questionnaire. The questions and items were only translated.

Perceived level of puffery

The level of puffery of the claim was measured by a single item asking the question "How would you rate the claims of this advertisement?" "Exaggerating". The subject would rate exaggeration on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Not exaggerated at all, 7 = Very exaggerated). Exaggeration is the perceived level of puffery. The scale was recoded to (1 = Very exaggerated, 7 = not exaggerated at all) for analysis. This is the manipulation check in this study.

Perceived credibility of the advertisement

The construct perceived credibility of the advertisement was measured by the same six items used for perceived credibility of the advertisement claims, measured on the same 7-point Likert scale. For example, "How would you rate the advertisement of Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens?" "Credible". The subject would rate credibility on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Very incredible, 7 = very credible). Though the Cronbach's alpha scored slightly lower (α = .91) than when perceived credibility of the advertisement claims was measured (α = .94), the score was still high.

Perceived truthfulness of the advertiser

The perceived truthfulness of the advertiser was measured by six items from the credibility scale discussed by Beardon & Netemeyer (1999, p. 770-773) as this scale contains items that measure truthfulness as well. The six items chosen for this construct were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (α = .90) more related to truthfulness.

For example, “How would you rate the advertiser of Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens?” “Truthful”. The subject would rate truthfulness on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not truthful at all, 7 = very truthful).

Attitude towards the advertisement

The construct attitude towards the advertisement was measured by seven items from the attitude scale discussed by Beardon & Netemeyer (1999, p. 75-77). The seven items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale and had a Cronbach’s alpha of α = .87. An example of an item is “How would you rate the advertisement of Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens?” “Interesting”. The subject would rate the item “interesting” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very uninteresting, 7 = very interesting).

Purchase intention

The purchase intention was measured by one single item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very low to 7 = very high): “The likelihood of buying Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens is…”. The item is borrowed from Beardon & Netemeyer (1999, p. 440) and only the brand name was added to fit this study.

Masculinity / femininity culture dimension

As a moderating construct, the masculinity dimension (MAS dimension) was measured with questions taken from the Value Survey Module, 2008 (VSM 08), a questionnaire developed by Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov & Vinken (2008). VSM 08 assesses the culture dimension masculinity on four items and on a 5-point Likert scale (1=of utmost importance to 5=of very little or no importance at all). The four items that measured the MAS dimension were: “In choosing an ideal job, how important would it be to you to get recognition for good performance?”, “- have pleasant people to work with?”, - live in a desirable area?” and “- have chances for promotion?”.

The VSM 08 has evolved from the validated questionnaires VSM 80, VSM 82 and VSM 94, which were developed by Hofstede previous to the VSM 08. VSM 08 was made available by Hofstede et al. (2008) in both languages, Dutch and English. The VSM 08 and the previous VSM's (Hoppe, 1998, De Mooij, 1998) are extensively used and validated by many different researchers in many previous studies about culture and culture dimensions. Therefore, the VSM 08, with the exact same scale (α = .87) was used in this study to measure the masculinity dimension.

Reliability

The Cronbach's alpha calculates the internal consistency of the separate items, that measures a construct. When α >.70, the construct is reliable and the items are internally consistent. An overview of the calculated Cronbach's alpha of this studies' constructs, the number of items measuring the constructs, the mean, and standard deviations are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Construct reliability

	Constructs	Items	Cronbach's alpha (α)	M	SD
1	Credibility of the advertisement	6	.91	3.98	.84
2	Truthfulness of the advertiser	5	.90	3.96	.92
3	Attitude towards the advertisement	7	.87	4.20	1.20
4	MAS dimension	4	.87	2.44	1.02

Note: All constructs were measured on a 7-Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree / 7 = strongly agree). MAS dimension was measured on a 5 – point Likert scale (1 = of utmost importance / 5 = of very little or no importance at all).

Table 4 shows that the constructs are reliable as the Cronbach's alpha varies from α = .87 to α = .91. Purchase intention was determined by a single question and so was perceived puffery of the claim.

Correlation

The relationships between the dependent variables in this study were investigated using Pearson correlation coefficients. A high correlation was found between perceived truthfulness of the advertiser and perceived credibility of the advertisement (r = .81 (423), p < .01) The high correlation coefficients (r > .80) between these dependent variables suggest that the variables measure the same construct. Despite the high correlation of these dependent variables, in this study, the dependent variables were not combined into one single construct. Table 5 shows that the correlation coefficients between all dependent variables are at a significance of p < .01.

Table 5. Correlation matrix

	Dependent variables	1	2	3	4
1	Purchase intention	1			
2	Truthfulness of the advertiser	.64	1		
3	Credibility of the advertisement	.54	.81	1	
4	Attitude towards the advertisement	.63	.67	.64	1

Note: All correlations are significant, p < .01(2-tailed), unless specified otherwise.

Factor analysis

As there were significant correlations coefficients found in the Pearson correlation coefficients test between the variables used in this study, that were higher than .30, a factor analysis (Principal Component analysis) was performed to further investigate this relationship.

In order to perform a reliable factor analysis, the sample size had to be large enough. To test for an adequate sample size, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) was conducted. For an adequate sample size the KMO value should to be higher than .50. In this study, the KMO test revealed a value of .95 which was significant at p < .001.

Factor rotation improves the distribution of variables onto factors and therefore it improves the ease to interpretation of the outcome of the factor analysis. Because it was expected that the dependent variables in this study were related, the Oblimin (oblique) rotation was used in this factor analysis. The variable purchase intention was excluded from the factor analysis as it was only measured by only one item.

The results of the factor analysis revealed two valid components extracted from eighteen items with an Eigenvalue greater than 1: attitude and credibility. These two components explained 68.7% of the variance. This first component had an Eigenvalue 10.144 and explained 56.4% of the variance. The second component had an Eigenvalue of 2.211 and explained 12,3% of the variance.

The two components are presented in table 6. The first component, attitude, consists of seven items that measured attitude towards the advertisement, the second component, credibility, consists of six items that measure credibility of the advertisement and five items that measure truthfulness of the advertiser. The item, convincing, loads on both components, but loaded more on credibility, so the item was added to the component credibility. The factor analysis was mainly conducted to better understand the different variables and relationships between the items. These items explain the most variances within the components. Although the items of credibility of the advertisement and the items of truthfulness of the advertiser reveal to fit into the same component, in this study, the variables were further investigated separately, not combined.

Table 6. Factor analysis of the dependent variables

	Rotated component matrix*	
	1	2
Credibility		
Trustworthy	.708	
Honest	.906	
Credible	.851	
Convincing	.461	
Reliable	.903	
Truthful	.890	
Truthfulness		
Sincere	.571	
Trustworthy	.919	
Honest	.898	
Credible	.858	
Reliable	.570	
Attitude		
Attractive		.898
Interesting		.847
Like		.952
Good		.876
Pleasant		.739
Irritating		.504
High quality		.481
Explained variance	.56	.12

Note: Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
**Factor loadings > .40*

RESULTS OF THE MAIN STUDY

In this section of the report, the results of the main study are presented. The results of tests for the manipulation checks will be presented first, followed by the results of the tests that test the hypotheses of this study.

Manipulation checks

Before the hypotheses of this study could be tested, and main, interaction and moderation effects could be analysed, manipulation checks were performed. The first manipulation check was to check for order bias in the different versions of the questionnaires per puffery condition. The second manipulation check was performed to confirm the differences between the puffery levels in the advertisements. The third manipulation check was performed to compare the country scores of Hofstede (1980) on the culture dimension masculinity / femininity to the scores of this study and to check whether the Americans are more masculine and the Dutch are more feminine (as suggested in this study), or not.

Order bias

In order to test for order bias between the different versions of the questionnaire, an independent T-test was performed. Both versions of each puffery condition were compared for order bias.

Versions high puffery condition

The American versions, version 1 (M = 3.25, SD = 1.22) and version 2 (M = 3.16, SD = 1.11), showed no significant difference for perceived puffery of the claim in the high level of puffery condition ($t(57) = .293$, $p = .771$). The Dutch versions, version 7 (M = 3.51, SD = 1.50) and version 8 (M = 3.90, SD = 1.49) also showed no significant difference for perceived puffery of the claim in the high level of puffery condition ($t(64) = -1.055$, $p = .295$).

This means that there is no order bias found between the different versions of the questionnaire (both American and Dutch versions) in the high level of puffery condition.

Versions low puffery condition

The American versions, version 3 (M = 4.40, SD = .99) and version 4 (M = 4.49, SD = .88), showed no significant difference for perceived puffery of the claim in the low level of puffery condition ($t(74) = -.371$, $p = .711$). The Dutch versions, version 9 (M = 4.35, SD = .89) and version 10 (M = 4.76, SD = 1.49) also showed no significant difference for perceived puffery of the claim in the low level of puffery condition ($t(65) = -1.756$, $p = .084$).This means that there is no order bias found between the different versions of the questionnaire (both American and Dutch versions) in the low level of puffery condition.

Versions no puffery condition

The American versions, version 5 (M = 4.40, SD = .99) and version 6 (M = 4.49, SD = .88), showed no significant difference for perceived puffery of the claim in the no level of puffery condition ($t(82) = -.258$, $p = .797$).The Dutch versions, version 11 (M = 4.35, SD = .89) and version 12 (M = 4.76, SD = 1.49) also showed no significant difference for perceived puffery of the claim in the no level of puffery condition ($t(69) = -.201$, $p = .841$).This means that there is no order bias found between the different versions of the questionnaire (both American and Dutch versions) in the no level of puffery condition.

The level of puffery in advertisement claims

To check the success of the manipulation of the advertisement claims, the significant difference between the puffery conditions was tested by performing an analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The effect of the puffery manipulation was confirmed by a significant main effect on perceived puffery in the claim in the advertisement ($F(2, 423) = 59.37$, $p < .001$). The puffery manipulations for the hedonic product ($F(2, 423) = 31.20$, $p < .001$) and for the functional product ($F(2, 423) = 48.32$, $p < .001$) were successful as well and showed a significant main effect. When the puffery level in the advertisement claim was high, the subject thought the claim was more exaggerated and perceived the puffery level in the advertisement claim to be high as well. When the puffery level in the advertisement claim was low, the subject thought the claim was less exaggerated and perceived the puffery level in the advertisement claim to be low as well. When there was no puffery in the advertisement claim, the subject thought the claim was not exaggerated and no level of puffery was perceived from the advertisement claim. Table 7 presents the findings from the ANOVA analysis.

Table 7. Puffery level in advertisement claims

Product Condition	Participants N	Effect F	Effect Sig.	Statistics M	Statistics SD
Total	423	59.37	.000	4.36	1.30
High puffery	125			3.46	1.36
Low puffery	143			4.49	.94
No puffery	155			4.95	1.13
Hedonic	268	26.38	.000	4.00	1.49
High puffery	125			3.52	1.61
Low puffery	143			4.41	1.22
No puffery	155			4.83	1.36
Functional	268	41.75	.000	4.03	1.59
High puffery	59			3.41	1.63
Low puffery	76			4.57	1.32
No puffery	155			5.06	1.33

Note: Perceived puffery (exaggeration level) in the claim was measured on a 7-Likert scale (1 = very much exaggerated / 7 = not exaggerated at all).

Another ANOVA was conducted to test and show the differences between puffery (high and low combined) and no puffery on perceived puffery of the claim. The difference between the puffed conditions (M = 4.01, SD = 1.27) and the no puffery condition (M = 4.95, SD = 1.13) was statistically significant (F(1,423) = 57.94, p <.001). For the hedonic valued product the difference between the puffed conditions (M = 4.00, SD = 1.49) and the no puffery condition (M = 4.83, SD = 1.36) was statistically significant (F(1,423) = 33.11, p <.001). For the functional valued product the difference between the puffed conditions (M = 4.03, SD = 1.58) and the no puffery condition (M = 5.06, SD = 1.33) was statistically significant (F(1,423) = 47.03, p <.001). The manipulation of the level of puffery in the advertisement claims in all conditions was statistically significant and therefore, the manipulation was successful for this study.

The cultural dimension: masculinity / femininity (MAS)

The manipulation check for the cultural MAS dimension was performed to compare the scores of the Netherlands to the scores of the United States and to investigate if the American participants were more masculine, than the Dutch participants. The score for the MAS dimension was calculated for both countries as described in VSM 08 (Hofstede et. all (2008)). The score measures the cultural dimension between the two countries. The higher the score, the more masculine the country is.

Table 8. MAS scores for the Netherlands and USA, compared with Hofstede's scores.

	The Netherlands (n=204)		United States of America (n=219)	
	Score	Hofstede's score	Score	Hofstede's score
MAS Score	20	14	27	62

Table 8 shows a difference of 7 points on the MAS dimension between the two countries. This study shows less difference between the scores of the two countries than Hofstede (1980) found on the MAS dimension in his study. As shown in table 7, he found a difference of 48 points. A one way one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to test the significance of the difference between the scores of the two countries on the MAS dimension. No statistically significant difference was found at p >.05 between the Dutch (M = 20.07, SD = 50.93) and the American (M = 27.01, SD = 59,71) scores on the MAS dimension, $F(1, 421) = 1.6$, $p = .20$. This study does not confirm the findings of Hofstede (1980). This means that it is not possible to conclude that Americans are as masculine, and the Dutch as feminine, as was suggested in the theoretical framework of this study.

A median split was performed, taking all Dutch and American subjects together, to further investigate the MAS dimension (MED = 35.00, SD = 55.69, MIN = -140, MAX = 210). Using the median split, the MAS scores for all subjects were divided into two equal groups of respondents, masculine (N = 211) and feminine (N = 212) , leaving the nationality out of account. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the significance of the difference between the masculine and feminine groups. A statistically significant difference was found at p >.05 between the masculine (M = 65.36, SD = 37,13) and feminine (M = -17.83, SD = 36.94) scores on the MAS dimension, $F(1, 421) = 533,65$, $p < .001$. This means that the construct can be used for further analysis to test the hypotheses of this study.

Testing the hypotheses

To test the hypotheses of this study, two tests were conducted. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to test the effects of the puffery conditions on perceived credibility of the advertisement, on perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, on the attitude towards the advertisement, and on purchase intention (hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4). The MANOVA was also used to test two-way and three-way interaction effects between the puffery conditions, the MAS dimension, and the product value types on purchase intention, as well as to test the moderation effects of MAS dimension and product value types on the effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention (hypotheses 5 and 6).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the mediation of perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, and attitude towards the advertisement on the main effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention (hypotheses 4a, 4b, 4c).

Main and interaction effects on purchase intention

To test the effects of the puffery conditions in the advertisements on perceived credibility of the advertisement (H1), on perceived truthfulness of the advertiser (H2), on the attitude towards the advertisement (H3), and on purchase intention (H4), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. The main advantage of the MANOVA was that multiple dependent variables could be analysed at the same time and the results of the MANOVA have more power, than the results of an analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Before conducting the MANOVA the data were examined that all underlying assumptions were met. First, univariate normality was assessed with Shapiro-Wilk tests and boxplots and these indicated that each variable in the regression was normally distributed and free from univariate outliers.

The Mahalanobis distance did exceed the critical X^2 for df = 4 (at $\alpha < .001$) of 18.47 at first. Two Dutch cases in the low puffery condition and two American cases, one in the high puffery condition and one in the low puffery condition, had to be removed for the Mahalanobis distance not to exceed the critical value. By removing these cases there were no more multivariate outliers of concern. All subjects had seen both product value type conditions (hedonic / functional), as a within-subjects design. To be able to compare the data a MANOVA, the answers for the product value type conditions were divided, per case, into hedonic and function. A new variable "product value type" was created (1 = hedonic, 2 = functional) and this doubled the number of cases. The design could then be treated as a between- subjects design and the data was prepared to test with a MANOVA. The correlation between the dependant variables were not excessive. They were related, $r > .20$, but there was no multi-collinearity, $r < .90$. Box's M was non-significant at $p > .001$, indicating that homogeneity of variance-covariance could be assumed.

The MANOVA revealed a statistically significant multivariate main effect for the puffery conditions (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.945$, $F(4, 528) = 7.545$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .055$). The power to detect the effect was .997. A statistically significant multivariate main effect was found for the MAS dimension at $p < .10$ (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.982$, $F(4, 528) = 2.362$, $p = .052$, $\eta^2 = .018$, power = .683). The MANOVA revealed no statistically significant multivariate main effect for the product value type (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.997$, $F(4, 528) = .407$, $p = .803$, $\eta^2 = .003$, power = .145).

A significant multivariate two-way interaction effect was found between puffery conditions and MAS dimension (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.981$, $F(4, 528) = 2.470$, $p = .044$, $\eta^2 = .019$, power = .705). The two-way interactions between puffery conditions and product value type (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.998$, $F(4, 528) = .320$, $p = .865$, $\eta^2 = .002$, power = .705) and the multivariate two-way interaction between MAS dimension and product value type (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.998$, $F(4, 528) = .261$, $p = .903$, $\eta^2 = .002$, power = .108) were not significant.

Lastly, the multivariate three-way interaction between puffery conditions, MAS dimension, and product value type (Wilks' Λ = 0.996, *F(4, 528)* = .467, *p* = .760, η^2 = .004, power = .161) was also not significant. Given the significance of the multivariate main effects for the puffery conditions and for the MAS dimension, univariate main effects were examined and further tests were conducted to test the first four hypotheses.

The MANOVA showed that there was a statistically significant main effect for the puffery conditions on perceived credibility of the advertisement (*F(1, 528)* = 25.723, *p* < .00, η^2 = .047). The subjects perceived the advertisement to be more credible when the advertisement contained a low level puffery claim (*M* = 3.95, *SD* = .90), than when it contained a high level puffery claim (*M* = 3.50, *SD* = 1.00). The first hypothesis is supported.

The second hypothesis is also supported as the MANOVA revealed a statistically significant main effect for puffery conditions on the perceived truthfulness of the advertiser (*F(1, 528)* = 13.751, *p* < .001, η^2 = .048). The subjects perceived the advertiser to be more truthful when the advertisement contained a low level puffery claim (*M* = 3.95, *SD* = .99), than when it contained a high level puffery claim (*M* = 3.43, *SD* = 1.08).

The effect for the puffery conditions on the attitude towards the advertisement was also statistically significant (*F(1, 528)* = 4.536, *p* = .034, η^2 = .009). The subjects had a more positive attitude towards the advertisement when the advertisement contained a low level puffery claim (*M* = 4.16, *SD* = .96), than when it contained a high level puffery claim (*M* = 3.98, *SD* = .99). This main effect confirms hypothesis three.

The MANOVA revealed a statistically significant main effect for the puffery condition on the purchase intention ($F(1, 528)$ = 13.751, p < .001, η^2 = .026). When an advertisement claim contained a low level puffery claim (M = 3.78, SD = 1.48) the purchase intention was higher, then when the advertisement claim contained a high level of puffery (M = 3.30, SD = 1.49). Hypothesis four was supported. Table 9 shows the means and standard deviations of the main effects of puffery on the dependent variables. Table 10 presents an overview of the results of the MANOVA conducted to measure the effects of the puffery conditions, MAS dimension and product value type on the dependent variables perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, attitude towards the advertisement, and purchase intention.

Table 9. Means and standard deviation main effects of puffery on the dependent variables

Puffery condition	Dependent variable	M	SD
High	Attitude	3.98	.99
	Credibility	3.50	1.00
	Truthfulness	3.43	1.08
	Purchase Intention	3.30	1.49
Low	Attitude	4.16	.96
	Credibility	3.95	.89
	Truthfulness	3.95	.99
	Purchase Intention	3.78	1.48

Table 10. Main and interaction effects 2x2x2 MANOVA

	Dependent variable	DF	F	Sig.
Puffery Condition	Attitude	1	4.536	.034**
	Credibility	1	25.723	.000*
	Truthfulness	1	26.274	.000*
	Purchase intention	1	13.751	.000*
MAS dimension	Attitude	1	.875	.350
	Credibility	1	1.120	.290
	Truthfulness	1	5.189	.023**
	Purchase intention	1	.010	.920
Product value type	Attitude	1	.168	.682
	Credibility	1	.000	.984
	Truthfulness	1	.531	.466
	Purchase intention	1	.504	.478
Puffery Condition * MAS dimension	Attitude	1	3.919	.048**
	Credibility	1	.016	.900
	Truthfulness	1	.697	.404
	Purchase Intention	1	.976	.324
Puffery Condition * Product value type	Attitude	1	.586	.444
	Credibility	1	.184	.668
	Truthfulness	1	.293	.588
	Purchase Intention	1	.346	.557
MAS dimension * Product value type	Attitude	1	.260	.610
	Credibility	1	.524	.469
	Truthfulness	1	.251	.617
	Purchase Intention	1	.041	.839
Puffery Condition * MAS dimension * Product value type	Attitude	1	.066	.798
	Credibility	1	1.182	.277
	Truthfulness	1	1.365	.243
	Purchase Intention	1	.363	.547

*Note: * p < .001, ** p < .05*

Table 10 also presents the results for the two-way interaction effects between the puffery conditions and MAS dimension, the two-way interaction effects between the puffery conditions and product value type, the two-way effect between the MAS dimension and product value type, and the three-way effect between the puffery conditions, MAS dimension and product value type.

For purchase intention, no statistically significant two-way interaction effects were found between the puffery conditions and MAS dimension ($F(1, 528)$ = .976, p = . 324, η^2 = .002), between the puffery conditions and product value type ($F(1, 528)$ = .346, p = . 557, η^2 = .001), or between the puffery dimensions and product type value ($F(1, 528)$ = .041, p = . 839, η^2 = .000). There was also no statistically significant three-way interaction effect found between the puffery conditions, the MAS dimension and product value type ($F(1, 528)$ = .363, p = . 547, η^2 = .001).

The two-way interaction effect between the puffery conditions and MAS dimension was not statistically significant. The assumption was that high level puffery claims in an advertisement would have a more positive effect on purchase intention on masculine subjects, than on feminine subjects. The results show a trend towards the opposite effect . When the advertisement contained a low level puffery claim, masculine subjects had a higher purchase intention (M = 3.85, SD = 1.50) than the feminine subjects (M = 3.70, SD = 1.46). When the advertisement contained a high level puffery claim, masculine subjects had a lower purchase intention (M = 3.22, SD = 1.54), than feminine subjects (M = 3.34, SD = 1.47). Based on these findings the fifth hypothesis cannot be confirmed. Therefore, the assumption that the MAS dimension could have a moderating role on the effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention cannot be confirmed either. Table 11 shows the means and standard deviations for the effects between the puffery conditions and MAS dimension, divided into hedonic and functional product value type on purchase intention.

Table 11. Means and standard deviations puffery condition x MAS dimension

Puffery Condition	MAS dimension	Product value type	M	SD
High Puffery	Masculine	Hedonic	3.19	1.69
		Functional	3.26	1.38
		Total Masculine	*3.22*	*1.54*
	Feminine	Hedonic	3.36	1.58
		Functional	3.32	1.35
		Total Feminine	*3.34*	*1.47*
Low Puffery	Masculine	Hedonic	3.82	1.62
		Functional	3.88	1.39
		Total Masculine	*3.85*	*1.50*
	Feminine	Hedonic	3.56	1.58
		Functional	3.84	1.31
		Total Feminine	*3.70*	*1.46*

The two-way interaction effect between the puffery conditions and product value type was not statistically significant. It was hypothesized was that low level puffery claims in an advertisement would have a more positive effect on purchase intention when the advertisement contains a functional valued product, than when the advertisement contains a hedonic valued product. When the advertisement contained a low level puffery claim and a hedonic valued product the purchase intention was lower (M = 3.70, SD = 1.60) than when it contained a functional valued product (M = 3.86, SD = 1.35). But when the advertisement contained a high level puffery claim and a hedonic valued product the purchase intention remained exactly the same (M = 3.30, SD = 1.62) than when it contained a functional valued product (M = 3.30, SD = 1.35). Though, this effect was not statistically significant and therefore, the sixth hypothesis cannot be confirmed. Since there was no significant effect, the assumption that product value type moderates the effect of puffery on purchase intention cannot be confirmed by these results. Table 12 shows the means and standard deviations for the effects between the puffery conditions and product value type, divided into masculine and feminine MAS dimensions on purchase intention.

Table 12. Means and standard deviations puffery condition x product value type

Puffery Condition	Product value type	MAS dimension	M	SD
High Puffery	Hedonic	Masculine	3.19	1.69
		Feminine	3.36	1.58
		Total Hedonic	*3.30*	*1.61*
	Functional	Masculine	3.26	1.38
		Feminine	3.32	1.35
		Total Functional	*3.30*	*1.36*
Low Puffery	Hedonic	Masculine	3.82	1.62
		Feminine	3.56	1.58
		Total Hedonic	*3.70*	*1.60*
	Functional	Masculine	3.88	1.39
		Feminine	3.84	1.31
		Total Functional	*3.78*	*1.48*

The MANOVA did reveal a statistically significant effect for the two-way interaction effect between puffery conditions and MAS dimension on attitude towards the advertisements ($F(1, 528)$ = 3.919, p = . 048, η^2 = .007). This was the only significant interaction effect found in the results of the MANOVA. When the advertisement contained a low level puffery claim, the masculine subjects had a more positive attitude towards the advertisement (M = 4.28, SD = .91) than the feminine subjects (M = 4.02, SD = .99). However, when the advertisement contained a high level puffery claim the masculine subjects had a less positive attitude towards the advertisement (M = 3.92, SD = 1.107), than the feminine subjects (M = 4.01, SD = .928). The effect of puffery on attitude towards the advertisement is stronger for a masculine subject, than for a feminine subject. The MAS dimension therefore influences the effect of puffery on attitude towards the advertisement. The means and standard deviations are presented in table 13. The MANOVA did not reveal a significant main effect of MAS dimension on attitude towards the advertisement.

Table 13. Means and standard deviations puffery condition x MAS dimension

Puffery Condition	MAS dimension	M	SD
High Puffery	Masculine	3.92	1.11
	Feminine	4.01	.93
Low Puffery	Masculine	4.28	.91
	Feminine	4.02	.99

The MAS dimension van not be influenced by the puffery condition. The masculinity dimension therefore moderates the effect of the puffery conditions on attitude towards the advertisement. This is presented in figure 7.

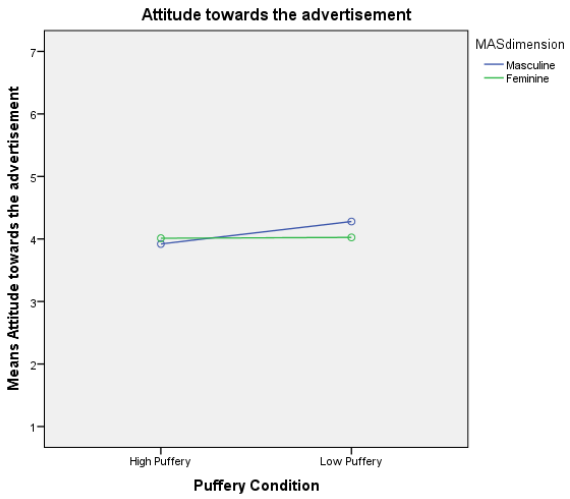

Figure 7. Moderation effect MAS dimension on the effect of puffery dimensions on attitude of the advertisement.

Mediation

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict purchase intention based on puffery conditions, attitude towards the advertisement, perceived credibility of the advertisement and perceived truthfulness. The program PROCESS v2. 16.3, Model 4 by A.F. Hayes was used to conduct the multiple regression calculation. Puffery condition was coded as 1 = high puffery, 2 = low puffery, and perceived credibility of the advertisement, attitude towards the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser was measured with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) in which a higher value means a most positive rating.

Mediation of perceived credibility

A significant regression equation was found ($F(2, 265) = 54.54$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .29$) for the regression model which explains the mediation of perceived credibility of the advertisement. This means that 29% of the variance in purchase intention was predicted by the predictors puffery condition and perceived credibility of the advertisement. Puffery predicts purchase intention controlling for perceived credibility of the advertisement. The statistically significant mediation of the perceived credibility of the advertisement is shown in figure 4. The puffery conditions had a significant effect on perceived credibility of the advertisement ($F(1, 266) = 24.83$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .09$) and puffery conditions were a significant predictor of perceived credibility of the advertisement, path a ($b = .48$, $t(266) = 4.98$, $p < .01$). Perceived credibility of the advertisement reveals to be a significant predictor of purchase intention, path b ($b = .73$, $t(265) = 9.74$, $p < .01$). The effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention was significant ($F(1, 266) = 10.58$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .04$) and the puffery conditions were a significant predictor of purchase intention, path c, the total effect ($b = .45$, $t(265) = 9.74$, $p < .01$). The direct effect in this equation was not significant, path c' ($b = .10$, $t(265) = .77$, $p = .44$). The total effect is larger than the direct effect and the Sobel test (normal theory test) also confirms there is a significant mediation ($Z = 4.42$, $p = < .01$).

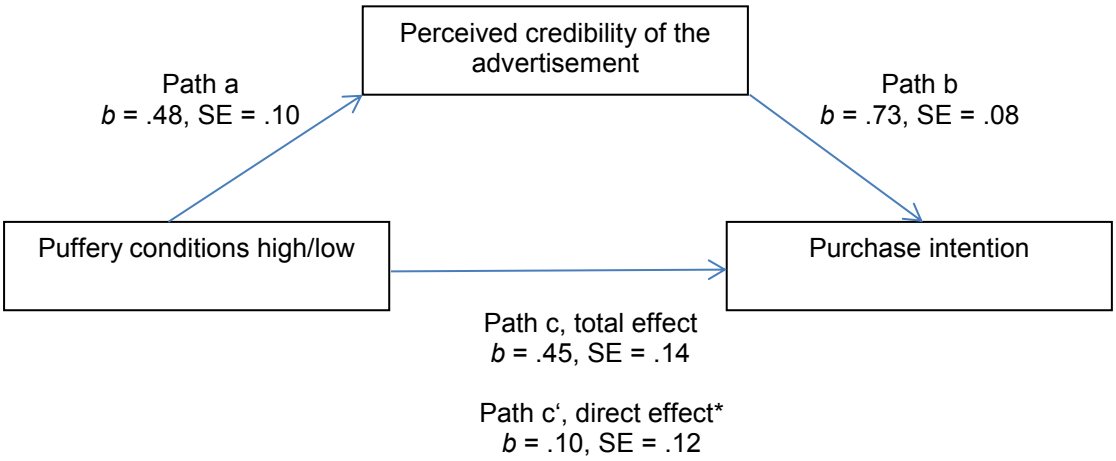

Figure 4. Mediation of credibility of the advertisement. Note: Path c'is not significant, p = .44.

Mediation of truthfulness of the advertiser

A significant regression equation was found ($F(2, 265) = 110.80$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .46$) for the regression model which explains the mediation of perceived truthfulness of the advertiser. This means that 46% of the variance in purchase intention was predicted by the predictors puffery condition and perceived truthfulness of the advertiser. Puffery predicts purchase intention controlling for perceived truthfulness of the advertiser. The statistically significant mediation of the perceived truthfulness of the advertiser is shown in figure 5. The puffery conditions had a significant effect on perceived truthfulness of the advertiser ($F(2, 265) = 27.73$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .04$) and puffery conditions were a significant predictor of perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, path a ($b = .56$, $t(266) = 5.27$, $p < .01$). Perceived truthfulness of the advertiser reveals to be a significant predictor of purchase intention, path b ($b = .83$, $t(265) = 14.25$, $p < .01$). The effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention was significant ($F(1, 266) = 10.58$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .04$) and the puffery conditions were a significant predictor of purchase intention, path c, the total effect ($b = .45$, $t(265) = 3.25$, $p < .01$). The direct effect in this equation was not significant, path c' ($b = -.03$, $t(265) = -.27$, $p = .77$). The total effect is larger than the direct effect and the Sobel test (normal theory test) also confirms there is a significant mediation ($Z = 4.22$, $p = < .01$).

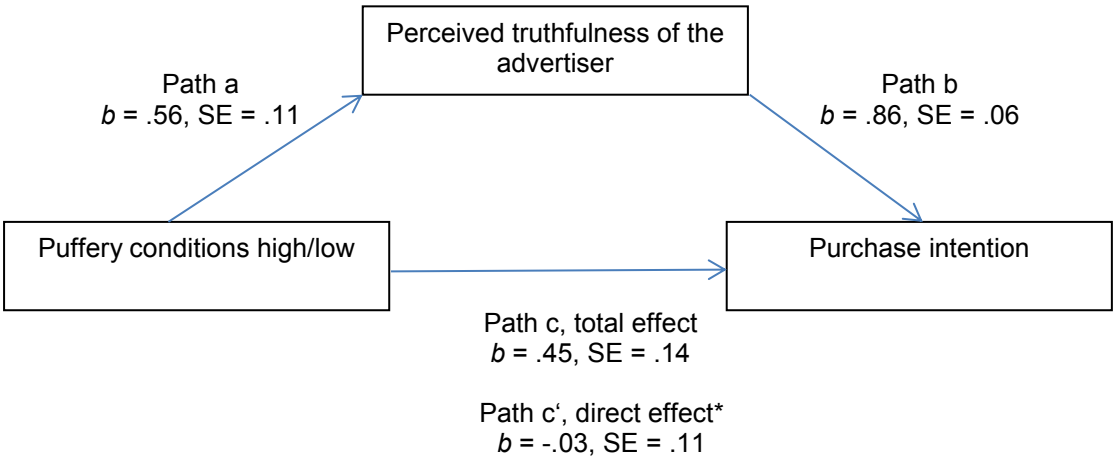

Figure 5. Mediation of truthfulness of the advertiser. Note: Path c' is not significant, p = .77.

Mediation of attitude towards the advertisement

A significant regression equation was found ($F(2, 265) = 99.57$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .42$) for the regression model which explains the mediation of attitude towards the advertisement. This means that 42% of the variance in purchase intention was predicted by the predictors puffery condition and attitude towards the advertisement. The level of puffery predicts purchase intention controlling for attitude towards the advertisement. A partial mediation of the attitude towards the advertisement is shown in figure 6. The puffery conditions had no statistically significant effect on attitude towards the advertisement ($F(1, 266) = 3.54$, $p < .06$, $R^2 = .01$) and the puffery condition was not a significant predictor of attitude towards advertisement, path a ($b = .19$, $t(266) = 1.88$, $p = .06$). Though the results show that the puffery has a non-significant effect on attitude towards the advertisement and in turn, could not be interpreted as statistically significant predictor of purchase intention, there is a trend to significance. It could be referred to as marginally significant. Attitude towards the advertisement did reveal to be a significant predictor of purchase intention, path b ($b = .89$, $t(265) = 13.45$, $p < .01$). The effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention was significant ($F(1, 266) = 10.58$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .04$) and the puffery conditions were a significant predictor of purchase intention, path c, the total effect ($b = .45$, $t(265) = 3.25$, $p = .001$). The direct effect in this equation was significant ($b = .28$, $t(265) = 2.64$, $p = .009$). This means there is a partial mediation, as the absolute size is of path c' is less than path c, but the direct effect is still significant. The total effect is larger than the direct effect, but the Sobel test (normal theory test) confirms there is only a marginally significant mediation ($Z = 1.86$, $p = < .06$).

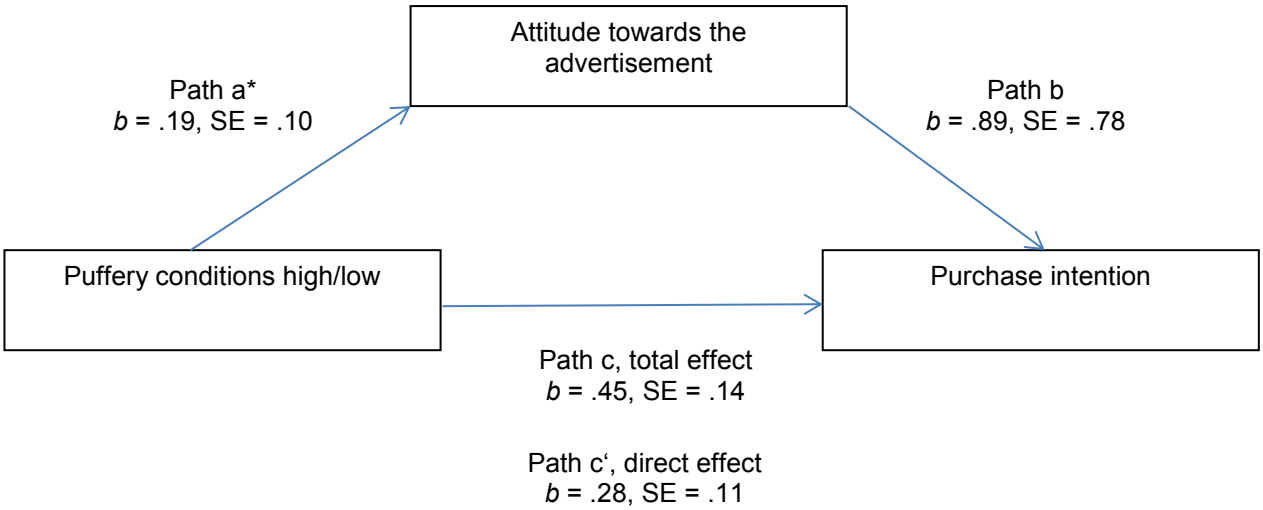

*Figure 6. Mediation of attitude towards the advertisement. Note: *Path a is not significant, p = .06.*

Overview of the hypotheses

The results of the study showed that the level of puffery in advertisement claims had statistically significant main effect on perceived credibility of the advertisement. A low level puffery claim had a more positive effect on the perceived credibility of the advertisement, than a high level puffery claim and therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported. Hypothesis 2 was supported as well, as a low level puffery claim had a more positive effect on the perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, than a high level puffery claim. Hypothesis 3 was supported as well: A low level of puffery in an advertisement claim had a more positive effect on the attitude toward the advertisement, than a high level puffery claim. The results demonstrate that puffery in advertisement claims do have a main effect on purchase intention and this supports hypothesis 4. The effect of puffery on purchase intention was mediated by perceived credibility of the advertiser, H4a was supported, and by perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, H4b was supported.

There was only a marginally significant partial mediation found for attitude of the advertisement on the effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention. Therefore, H4c was supported, but with the side note that it is not a strong significant mediation. An overview of the hypotheses is presented in table 14.

Table 14. Overview of the hypotheses

	Hypotheses	Result
H1	Consumers will perceive an advertisement to be more credible when the advertisement contains a low level puffery claim, than when the advertisement contains a high level puffery claim.	Supported
H2	Consumers will perceive the advertiser to be more truthful when the advertisement contains a low level puffery claim, than when the advertisement contains a high level puffery claim.	Supported
H3	Consumers will have a more positive attitude towards the advertisement when the advertisement contains a low level puffed claim, than when the advertisement contains a high level puffed claim.	Supported
H4	A low level of puffery in an advertisement claim has a more positive effect on purchase intention, than a high level of puffery in an advertisement claim.	Supported
H4a	The effect of puffery in an advertisement claim on purchase intention is mediated by the consumer's perceived credibility of the advertisement.	Supported
H4b	The effect of puffery in an advertisement claim on purchase intention is mediated by the consumer's perceived truthfulness of the advertiser.	Supported
H4c	The effect of puffery in an advertisement claim on purchase intention is mediated by the consumer's attitude towards the advertisement.	Supported*
H5	Low level puffery claims in an advertisement have a more positive effect on purchase intention in more feminine cultures, than in more masculine cultures.	Not Supported
H6	Low level puffery claims in an advertisement have a more positive effect on purchase intention when the advertisement contains a functional valued product, than when the advertisement contains a hedonic valued product.	Not Supported

*Note: *The main effect of the puffery condition on attitude towards the advertisement (path a) was only marginally significant at p = .06.*

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the understanding of the effects of puffery in advertisement claims in cross-cultural settings. To add to the existing literature about to what extent puffery in advertising affects consumers and to what extent cultural differences moderates the effect of puffery in advertising in the United States of America and the Netherlands, by using the masculinity / femininity cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1980). The research question for this study was: "*To what extent does puffery in an advertisement claim affect the consumer's perception of the credibility of the advertisement, the consumer's perception of the truthfulness of the advertiser, the consumer's attitude towards the advertisement, and the consumer's purchase intention, and if there is any effect, to what extent does culture (masculine / feminine) moderate this effect?"* An online experiment was conducted among American and Dutch students to answer the research question. In this section, the results of this study are discussed, followed by the practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research. The last part of this section are the conclusions of this study.

Main findings

After a thorough literature review, it was hypothesized that consumers would have a more positive perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertisement, attitude towards the advertisement, and purchase intention when the advertisement contained a low level puffery claim, than when the advertisement contained a high level puffery claim. This study reveals significant main effects for the effect of puffery in claims on the dependent variables as expected. These results confirm the findings of Cowley (2006), Kamins & Marks (1987) and Marks & Kamins (1988). A small amount of puffery in an advertisement claim is positive, but a higher amount puffery in an advertisement claim has negative effects on a consumer.

Too much puffery makes an advertisement less credible and truthful and the consumer may not buy the product as the purchase intention is lower. A bit of puffery in an advertisement claim may make the advertisement more lively, than when the claims are just factual. The initial thought was that a low level of puffery would have a positive effect on the credibility of the advertisement and the truthfulness of the advertiser compared to using a high level of puffery.

As hypothesized in this study, perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, and attitude towards the advertisement showed a significant mediation between the puffery conditions and purchase intention. These results were in line with the previous findings of Aaker & Day (1973), Goldschidt & Laverty (1999) and Möller & Eisent, 2010. This means that a high level of puffery in an advertisement would lead to a more negative perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser and attitude towards the advertisement and in turn leads to a lower purchase intention. This suggest that a high level of puffery in an advertisement claim does have a direct and indirect effect on the purchase intention, but it would not necessarily mislead the consumer, as they may perceive the puffery as (too) high and recognize the level of puffery.

In this study, it was expected that the Americans were more masculine and that the Dutch were more feminine. This expectation was also valid according to the MAS dimension of culture by Hofstede (1980). Furthermore, a moderation effect of MAS dimension on the effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention was expected. A low puffery claim in advertisements would have a more positive effect on purchase intention in more feminine cultures, than in more masculine cultures. No statistically significant difference was found at $p > .05$ between the Dutch ($M = 20.07$, $SD = 50.93$) and the American ($M = 27.01$, $SD = 59{,}71$) scores on the MAS dimension. It was not possible to confirm the expectation that the Americans are more masculine and the Dutch more feminine. An explanation for these findings may be that students are more internationally focused.

For example, in the Netherlands, a lot of study materials are from all over the world and students have access to international media, like the internet or television programs from the USA. Through globalisation the differences between Western cultures are decreasing (De Mooij, 2000).

Using the median split, the MAS scores for all subjects were divided into two groups, masculine and feminine, leaving the nationality out of account. This is a common approach for researchers, but it reduces the power. Every value above and below the median are considered equal, so a value just above the median is considered equal to value at the far end above the median. This way those values lose power (Aiken & West,1991). This may account for the non-statistically significant moderation of the MAS dimension (which was determined by the median split) on the effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention. An alternative median split could be researched by splitting all participants into three groups and removing the middle group with average values. The downside of this approach is that a third of the participants would have to be removed. In this study, it was not confirmed that a low level puffery claim in an advertisement has a more positive effect on purchase intention in more feminine cultures, than in more masculine cultures. Though the two-way interaction effect was not significant between the puffery conditions and the MAS dimension, the effect showed a light trend towards the opposite effect, than the effect that was hypothesized; that a low level puffery claim in an advertisement has a more positive effect on purchase intention in more masculine cultures, than in more feminine cultures. There was a significant two-way interaction found between the puffery conditions and the MAS dimension on attitude towards the advertisement. This interaction was not hypothesized, it is discussed in the results section in this study, as this was the only significant two-way interaction effect found in this study. This effect needs to be interpreted with care, as the MAS dimension is based on a median split and the concerns about the median split are discussed previously.

There were no statistically significant main effects found for product value type on either of the dependent variables and there was no two-way interaction found between the puffery conditions and product value type (hedonic / functional). It was expected that there would be a moderation effect of product value type on the effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention and that low puffery claims in advertisements would have a more positive effect on purchase intention when the advertisement contains a functional valued product, than when the advertisement contains a hedonic valued product. This hypothesis could not be confirmed. There was no difference between Vivani chocolate (hedonic value type) and Pensive pens (functional value type) in relation to a high or low puffed claim in an advertisement. This study also did not confirm the three-way interaction between the puffery conditions, the MAS dimension, and product value type. A reason for these non-significant outcomes could be that the variable product value type was added to this study because there was an expectation that there could be a difference between the two values types, hedonic and functional, but there was not extensive theoretical framework to support the expectations.

Limitations and future research directions

There are several limitations concerning this study that need to be taken into account.

The pretest of this study, was to test the differences between de levels of puffery in the claims and to test the differences between the product values. The subjects were exposed each puffery condition (high, low, no puffery) x product value claim (hedonic / functional) x advertisement (chocolate, pens, MP3 player, laptop, fruitwater, mobile phone). In total, there were thirty-six advertisements which were divided into six versions of the questionnaire. Repeating the same questions, six times, per subject may have led to depletion of the subject and it could be that they paid less attention to the last few advertisements in the questionnaire.

To avoid depletion in future studies, it would be better to expose the subjects to less advertisements, for example, only two or three product advertisements per subject.

Because the subjects were exposed to all the conditions, the pretest was analysed with an paired-sample t-test. The comparison between every possible combination of conditions in pairs of two, resulted into a very large table that was not easy to interpret, see Appendix C and F. In future studies, conditions could be recoded into new variables so the design turns from a within-subjects design into a between-subjects design. Then it is possible to conduct an ANOVA to compare the means, this would save a lot of time and the outcome is easier to interpret.

In the main study, purchase intention and perceived puffery of the claim were measured by a single item, only one question. The constructs would have had a better internal validity and would have been more reliable, if those were measured by more than one item. Future studies should measure purchase intention and perceived puffery of the claim on multiple items.

In the questionnaire of the main study, the subjects were exposed to both product value type conditions (hedonic / functional), which resulted into a mixed research design; between-subjects and within-subjects design. This made it more difficult to process the results afterwards. It was required to split the conditions in order to perform a MANOVA. A simpler research design with only between-subjects could be achieved dividing the product value type conditions and present the conditions in different versions of the questionnaire. As the product value type conditions were added to the study while developing the design, more research could be performed to investigate the hedonic and functional values of a product. A better understanding of these values is required.

The products selected for the main study were products commonly used by students. Vivani chocolate and Pensive pens were selected based on the results of the pretest. The two products have a low cost and are very affordable. They could be considered to be very common and would not require much thought before the purchase decision. In future studies, this study could be repeated but with more expensive products which would require more thoughts before the purchase decision. This to investigate the effects of cheaper or more expensive products on the effect of puffery in claims on purchase intention.

As discussed previously, this study could not confirm the difference between the Americans and the Dutch on the MAS dimensions, therefore, a median split was performed on all subjects together to create a new MAS dimension variable that compared the individual subjects. The MAS dimension is initially a way to compare countries more than to compare individuals. Besides that the median split weakens the variable, it could also well be that the two countries are similar because both are Western countries. There could be more significant results if the comparison between, for example, a Western country and an Asian country was investigated. In future studies, also the effects of other culture dimensions, like uncertainty avoidance or time orientation, could be investigated. The effect of these dimensions on the effect of the puffery conditions on purchase intention. Culture has many aspects and many ways to be interpreted, which makes culture an interesting subject to study in future researches.

Practical implications

Practical implication can be drawn from the results from this study. In this study, it was confirmed that the level of puffery in advertisement claims do have an effect on the dependent variables perceived credibility of the advertisement, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, attitude towards the advertisement, and purchase intention.

High level puffery claims in advertisements had a more negative effect on the dependent variables, than a low level of puffery in claims. When a marketer designs an advertisement claim, the marketer should make sure the level of puffery is not high. The claim should not contain much exaggeration and many superlatives. Eventually this will have a negative effect on the purchase intention of the consumer. A low level of puffery can be used in an advertisement claim without creating a negative effect on purchase intention.

Although, this study did not reveal significant differences between the American and the Dutch subjects on the culture (MAS dimension), it does not mean that a marketer that wants to advertise in other countries, should not consider culture values carefully when adding puffery to the advertisement claim.
Culture is very complex and can be interpreted in many ways. The theoretical framework in this study shows that, in the past, researchers had found significant effects of puffery in claims in cross-cultural settings.

Conclusion

The assumption that the high puffed claims in the advertisements of the Miracle Blade knives would have a different effect on Americans and the Dutch, on the masculinity culture dimension, is not confirmed by this study. However, it is confirmed that the level of puffery in advertisement claims does affect the consumer´s perceived credibility of the advertisements, perceived truthfulness of the advertiser, attitude towards the advertisement, and purchase intention. A higher level of puffery has a more negative effect, and a lower level of puffery a more positive effect on the consumer´s perception, attitude and purchase intention. This study adds to the understanding of how advertisement claims, and specifically puffed claims, affect the consumer and it also supports and confirms the findings of previous research done in the field of puffery in advertisement claims.

This study suggests also a new construct, product value type (hedonic and functional), to investigate further and to obtain a better understanding of. The effects of culture may not be confirmed in this study, the concept of culture and culture values is very complex and can be interpreted in many ways. Hofstede's masculinity dimension is only one way to interpret culture. Due to the complexity of culture and its values, culture remains an interesting subject to research in future studies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Pretest Questionnaire used in the Netherlands

Questionnaire

Welkom en hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan deze studie.

Het doel van de vragenlijst is om gegevens te verzamelen over de reacties van consumenten op advertenties. Na de vragen over de advertenties, volgen enkele algemene vragen.

Deze vragenlijst zal ongeveer 10 - 15 minuten in beslag nemen. Het is belangrijk dat u de hele vragenlijst invult. Onvolledige vragenlijsten zijn onbruikbaar voor het onderzoek.

Wanneer u aan het einde van de vragenlijst uw naam en email adres invult, wordt u meegenomen in de verloting van een waardebon van 15 euro naar keuze (VVV, V&D, H&M of Jack & Jones). Uw naam wordt uiteraard niet gebruikt voor commerciële doeleinden en uw privacy zal worden gewaarborgd.

Met vriendelijke groet,
Tamara Simons

Bekijkt u de advertenties aandachtig en beantwoord de bijbehorende vragen.

Stimulus according to condition

1) Kent u het merk ……? Ja - Nee

2) In hoeverre vindt u deze advertentie (7-puntsschaal van 0-6):

Helemaal niet aantrekkelijk	O O O O O O O	Heel erg aantrekkelijk
Helemaal niet interessant	O O O O O O O	Heel erg interessant
Helemaal niet leuk	O O O O O O O	Heel erg leuk

3) In hoeverre vindt u dat de tekst van de advertentie (7-puntsschaal van 1-7):

Helemaal niet overdreven	O O O O O O O	Heel erg overdreven
Helemaal niet geloofwaardig	O O O O O O O	Heel erg geloofwaardig

Algemene vragen

1) Wat is uw geslacht?
   O Man
   O Vrouw

2) Wat is uw leeftijd? …….. jaar.

3) Wat doet u in uw dagelijks leven?
O Werk (voltijd)
O Werk (deeltijd)
O Werk (deeltijd) en studie (deeltijd)
O Studie (voltijd)
O Geen werk en geen studie

Ding mee naar een waardebon ter waarde van 15 euro.

Naam ……..
Email adres ……..

Voorkeur waardebon
O H&M O V&D
O VVV O Jack & Jones Bedankt!

Appendix B

Pretest advertisements used in the Netherlands

Vivani chocolate high puffery hedonic

Vivani chocolate high puffery functional

Vivani chocolate low puffery hedonic

Vivani chocolate low puffer functional

Vivani no puffery

Minton fruit water high puffery hedonic

Minton fruit water high puffery functional

Minton fruit water low puffery hedonic

Minton fruit water low puffery functional

Minton fruit water no puffery

TR SOUND MP3 high puffery functional

TR SOUND MP3 high puffery hedonic

TR SOUND MP3 low puffery functional

TR SOUND MP3 low puffery hedonic

TR SOUND MP3 no puffery

Pensive pens high puffery hedonic

Pensive pens high puffery functional

Pensive pens low puffery hedonic

Pensive pens low puffery functional

Pensive pens no puffery

Phecda laptop high puffery hedonic

Phecda laptop high puffery functional

Phecda laptop low puffery hedonic

Phecda laptop low puffery functional

Phecda laptop no puffery

Iocean mobile high puffery hedonic

Iocean mobile high puffery functional

Iocean mobile low puffery hedonic

Iocean mobile low puffery functional

Iocean mobile no puffery

Appendix C

Results Dutch Pretest, Paired Sampled T-Test

Paired Samples Test Hedonic Claims Pretest NL

			Condition 1 Chocolate High/Low Puffery	Condition 2 Chocolate Low/No Puffery	Condition 3 Chocolate No/High Puffery	Condition 4 Fruit High/Low Puffery	Condition 5 Fruit Low/No Puffery	Condition 6 Fruit No/High Puffery	Condition 7 Pen High/Low Puffery	Condition 8 Pen Low/No Puffery	Condition 9 Pen No/High Puffery	Condition 10 Laptop High/Low Puffery	Condition 11 Laptop Low/No Puffery	Condition 12 Laptop No/High Puffery	Condition 13 Mobile High/Low Puffery	Condition 14 Mobile Low/No Puffery	Condition 15 Mobile No/High Puffery	Condition 16 MP3 High/Low Puffery	Condition 17 MP3 Low/No Puffery	Condition 18 MP3 No/High Puffery
Hedonic	Mean		3,71	2,29	0,86	4,43	2,43	1,29	3,43	2,57	1,43	2,29	2,29	1,14	2,71	2,86	0,86	3,14	2,14	4,14
	Std. Deviation		0,76	1,25	1,46	1,40	1,27	0,76	1,90	1,40	0,98	1,80	1,80	1,46	2,36	2,48	1,22	1,77	1,35	1,86
	N		7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Paired Differences	Mean		1,420	1,430	-2,850	2,000	1,140	-3,140	0,860	1,140	-2,000	0,000	1,150	-1,150	-0,150	2,000	-1,850	1,000	-2,000	1,000
	Std. Deviation		1,272	1,397	1,574	2,160	1,215	1,069	2,545	1,773	2,160	3,101	2,795	2,637	3,934	2,582	2,410	3,000	3,000	2,309
	Std. Error Mean		0,481	0,528	0,595	0,816	0,459	0,404	0,962	0,670	0,816	1,172	1,056	0,997	1,487	0,976	0,911	1,134	1,134	0,873
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	0,252	0,136	-4,312	0,002	0,019	-4,132	-3,211	-0,497	-3,998	-2,440	-1,442	-4,010	-3,781	-0,388	-4,086	-3,775	-0,775	-3,136
		Upper	2,605	2,721	-1,402	3,998	2,267	-2,154	1,496	2,782	-0,002	3,297	3,727	0,867	3,495	4,388	0,372	1,775	4,775	1,136
t			2,970	2,705	-4,804	2,449	2,489	-7,778	-0,891	1,706	-2,449	0,366	1,082	-1,577	-0,096	2,049	-2,039	-0,882	1,764	-1,146
df			6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Sig. (2-tailed)			**0,025**	**0,035**	**0,003**	**0,050**	**0,047**	**0,000**	0,407	0,139	0,050	0,727	0,321	0,166	0,927	0,086	0,088	0,412	0,128	0,296

Paired Samples Test Functional Claims Pretest NL

			Condition 1 Chocolate High/Low Puffery	Condition 2 Chocolate Low/No Puffery	Condition 3 Chocolate No/High Puffery	Condition 4 Fruit High/Low Puffery	Condition 5 Fruit Low/No Puffery	Condition 6 Fruit No/High Puffery	Condition 7 Pen High/Low Puffery	Condition 8 Pen Low/No Puffery	Condition 9 Pen No/High Puffery	Condition 10 Laptop High/Low Puffery	Condition 11 Laptop Low/No Puffery	Condition 12 Laptop No/High Puffery	Condition 13 Mobile High/Low Puffery	Condition 14 Mobile Low/No Puffery	Condition 15 Mobile No/High Puffery	Condition 16 MP3 High/Low Puffery	Condition 17 MP3 Low/No Puffery	Condition 18 MP3 No/High Puffery
Functional	Mean		2,86	2,57	1,57	3,86	3,57	1,14	4,14	3,00	1,29	4,86	2,00	1,14	3,29	2,43	1,86	3,86	2,14	2,00
	Std. Deviation		1,57	1,13	1,62	1,46	1,13	0,69	0,69	0,82	0,76	0,90	0,82	0,90	1,80	1,27	0,69	1,07	1,57	1,53
	N		7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Paired Differences	Mean		0,290	1,000	-1,290	0,290	2,430	-2,720	1,140	1,710	-2,850	2,860	0,860	-3,720	0,860	0,570	-1,430	1,720	0,140	-1,860
	Std. Deviation		2,563	2,380	1,799	2,059	1,272	1,254	1,215	1,113	0,900	1,574	0,900	1,113	1,345	1,718	2,149	1,976	2,116	1,952
	Std. Error Mean		0,969	0,900	0,680	0,778	0,481	0,474	0,459	0,421	0,340	0,595	0,340	0,421	0,508	0,649	0,812	0,747	0,800	0,738
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	-2,085	-3,202	-2,950	-1,618	1,252	1,555	0,019	0,685	-3,689	1,402	0,025	-4,743	-0,387	-1,018	-3,416	-0,113	-2,100	-3,662
		Upper	2,657	1,202	0,379	2,190	3,605	3,874	2,267	2,743	-2,025	4,312	1,689	-2,685	2,101	2,161	0,559	3,542	1,814	-0,052
t			0,295	-1,111	-1,890	0,367	5,050	5,729	2,489	4,076	-8,402	4,804	2,521	-8,832	1,686	0,880	-1,759	2,295	-0,179	-2,517
df			6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Sig. (2-tailed)			0,778	0,309	0,108	0,726	0,002	0,001	**0,047**	**0,007**	**0,000**	**0,003**	**0,045**	**0,000**	0,143	0,413	0,129	0,061	0,864	0,045

Appendix D

Pretest Questionnaire used in the United States.

Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this study.

The purpose is to collect data on consumers' reactions to print advertisements. At the end of this questionnaire I will ask you to answer a few general questions.

This questionnaire will take app. 10 minutes to complete. It is important that you answer all of the following questions.

Kind regards,

Tamara Simons

Please, look at the advertisements and answer the questions following

Stimulus according to condition

1. Before today, had you heard of the brand …….? No - Yes

2) How would you rate this advertisement (7-point scale 1-7):

Not attractive at all	O O O O O O O	Very attractive
Not interesting at all	O O O O O O O	Very interesting
Dislike very much	O O O O O O O	Like very much

3) How would you rate the claims in this advertisement (7-point scale 1-7):

Not exaggerating at all	O O O O O O O	Very exaggerating
Not credible at all	O O O O O O O	Very credible

General questions

1) What is your gender?

O Male
O Female

2) What is your age? ……

3) What is your daily occupation?

O Employed (full-time)
O Employed (part-time)
O Employed (part-time) and student (part-time)
O Student (full-time)
O Not employed and not a student

Your name and email address are required in order to give you credit for the participation.
Name ……
Email address ……...

Thank you!

Appendix E

Pretest advertisements used in the United States.

Vivani chocolate high puffery

Vivani chocolate low puffery

Vivani no puffery

Minton fruit water high puffery

Minton fruit water low puffery

Minton fruit water no puffery

Pensive pens high puffery

Pensive pens low puffery

Pensive pens no puffery

Phecda laptop high puffery

Phecda laptop low puffery

Phecda laptop no puffery

Appendix F

Results American Pretest, Paired Sampled T-Test

Paired Samples Test Claims Pretest US

			Condition 1 Chocolate High/Low Puffery	Condition 2 Chocolate Low/No Puffery	Condition 3 Chocolate No/High Puffery	Condition 4 Fruit High/Low Puffery	Condition 5 Fruit Low/No Puffery	Condition 6 Fruit No/High Puffery	Condition 7 Pen High/Low Puffery	Condition 8 Pen Low/No Puffery	Condition 9 Pen No/High Puffery	Condition 10 Laptop High/Low Puffery	Condition 11 Laptop Low/No Puffery	Condition 12 Laptop No/High Puffery
	Mean		4,82	3,00	1,45	4,18	2,45	1,27	5,27	2,73	1,18	4,91	2,91	1,36
	Std. Deviation		1,08	1,79	1,44	0,87	1,29	0,91	1,01	1,01	1,25	1,22	1,45	1,50
	N		11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Paired Differences	Mean		1,820	1,550	-3,370	1,730	1,180	-2,910	2,540	1,550	-4,090	2,000	1,550	-3,550
	Std. Deviation		1,722	2,296	1,690	0,905	1,250	0,944	1,508	1,635	1,375	2,145	2,067	1,293
	Std. Error Mean		0,519	0,692	0,509	0,273	0,377	0,285	0,455	0,493	0,415	0,647	0,623	0,390
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	0,662	0,003	-4,499	1,120	0,342	-3,543	1,533	-2,644	-5,015	-3,441	0,157	2,677
		Upper	2,975	3,088	-2,229	2,335	2,022	-2,275	3,558	-0,447	-3,167	-0,559	2,934	4,414
t			3,503	2,232	-6,603	6,333	3,135	-10,222	5,600	-3,135	-9,867	-3,093	2,480	9,092
df			10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Sig. (2-tailed)			0,006	0,050	0,000	0,000	0,011	0,000	0,000	0,011	0,000	0,011	0,033	0,000

Appendix G

Stimuli main study used in the Netherlands

Advertisements with low puffed claims in Dutch.

Advertisements with high puffed claims in Dutch.

Advertisements with no puffed claims in Dutch.

Appendix H

Questionnaire main study used in the Netherlands

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan deze studie.

Het doel van de vragenlijst is om gegevens te verzamelen over de reacties van consumenten op advertenties. Eerst zullen er vragen gesteld worden over u in een ideale baan en over u als persoon. Vervolgens zult u advertenties zien waarover vragen worden gesteld en tenslotte volgen nog enkele algemene vragen.

Wanneer je je naam en je email adres invult aan het einde van de vragenlijst, ding je mee naar één van de drie waardebonnen ter waarde van 20 euro naar keuze (VVV, H&M, Jack & Jones, V&D). Dit is geen verplicht onderdeel van de vragenlijst. Uiteraard wordt het email adres niet gebruikt voor commerciële doeleinden en wordt privacy gewaarborgd.

Deze vragenlijst zal ongeveer 15 minuten in beslag nemen. Het is belangrijk dat u de hele vragenlijst invult. Onvolledige vragenlijsten zijn onbruikbaar voor het onderzoek.

Klik op “Volgende” om de vragen van de vragenlijst te beantwoorden.

Stel je een ideale baan voor – los van je huidige bezigheden. Bij de keuze van een ideale baan, hoe belangrijk is … (één antwoord per regel):

1 = van het grootste belang
2 = heel belangrijk
3 = tamelijk belangrijk
4 = van weinig belang
5 = van heel weinig of geen belang

1. erkenning voor goede prestaties	1	2	3	4	5
2. prettige mensen om mee te werken	1	2	3	4	5
3. prettige woonomgeving	1	2	3	4	5
4. promotiemogelijkheden	1	2	3	4	5

Klik op “Volgende”

---

5. Als je iets duurs heel graag wilt kopen, maar je hebt niet genoeg geld, wat doe je dan?

1. Altijd eerst sparen, dan kopen
2. meestal eerst sparen
3. soms sparen, soms lenen om te kunnen kopen
4. meestal lenen en later afbetalen
5. altijd nu kopen, later afbetalen

6. Hoe vaak voel je je nerveus of gespannen?

1. altijd
2. vaak
3. soms
4. zelden
5. nooit

7. Ben je dezelfde person op je werk (of op school) en thuis?

1. helemaal dezelfd persoon
2. meestal dezelfde persoon
3. weet ik niet
4. meestal verschillend
5. total verschillend

8. Alles bij elkaar, hoe zou je je huidige gezondheidstoestand beschrijven?

1. heel goed
2. goed
3. redelijk
4. slecht
5. heel slecht

Klik op “Volgende”

In hoeverre ben je het eens of oneens met de volgende uitspraken? (één antwoord per regel):

1 = volkomen mee eens
2 = mee eens
3 = weet niet
4 = niet mee eens
5 = volstrekt niet mee eens

9. Je kun teen goede chef zijn zonder op elke vraag van een medewerker over zijn of haar werk een precies antwoord te hebben	1	2	3	4	5
10. Aanhoudende inspanning is de zekerste weg naar resultaat	1	2	3	4	5
11.Bedrijfsregels moeten niet overtreden worden, zelfs niet als de medewerker denk dat dit beter voor de zaak is	1	2	3	4	5
12. We behoren onze helden uit het het verleden te eren	1	2	3	4	5

Klik op “Volgende” en beantwoord de vragen over de advertenties.

Advertentie Vivani chocolade of Pensive pennen met puffery conditie

13.Heb je ooit eerder van het merk Vivani chocolade / Pensive pennen gehoord? Ja – Nee

14.In hoeverre vind je de advertentie van Vivani chocolade / Pensive pennen (één antwoord per regel) :

Erg onaantrekkelijk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg aantrekkelijk
Erg oninteressant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg interessant
Helemaal niet leuk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg leuk
Erg slecht	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg goed
Erg onplezierig	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg plezierig
Erg irritant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Helemaal niet irritant
Helemaal niet te vertrouwen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg te vertrouwen
Erg oneerlijk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg eerlijk
Erg lage kwaliteit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg hoge kwaliteit
Erg ongeloofwaardig	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg geloofwaardig
Helemaal niet overtuigend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg overtuigend
Erg onbetrouwbaar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg betrouwbaar
Helemaal niet waar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Helemaal waar

Klik op “Volgende”

---

15. In hoeverre vind je het product (Vivani chocolade / Pensive pennen) (één antwoord per regel):

Erg onbelangrijk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg belangrijk
Erg saai	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg boeiend
Helemaal niet relevant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg relevant
Helemaal niet opwindend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg opwindend
Betekent helemaal niets	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg betekenisvol
Erg onaantrekkelijk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg aantrekkelijk
Helemaal niet fascinerend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg fascinerend
Waardeloos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg waardevol
Helemaal geen betrokkenheid	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Veel betrokkenheid
Erg onnodig	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg nodig

Klik op “Volgende”

---

16. In hoeverre vind je de tekst in de advertentie van Vivani chocolade / Pensive pennen (één antwoord per regel):

Helemaal niet te vertrouwen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg te vertrouwen
Erg oneerlijk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg eerlijk
Erg lage kwaliteit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg hoge kwaliteit
Erg ongeloofwaardig	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg geloofwaardig
Helemaal niet overtuigend	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg overtuigend
Erg onbetrouwbaar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg betrouwbaar
Helemaal niet waar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg waar
Helemaal niet overdreven	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg overdreven

Klik op “Volgende”

---

17. In hoeverre vind je de adverteerder van Vivani chocolade / Pensive pennen (één antwoord per regel):

Helemaal niet oprecht	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg oprecht
Helemaal niet te vertrouwen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg te vertrouwen
Niet waarheidsgetrouw	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg waarheidsgetrouw
Erg oneerlijk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg eerlijk
Erg ongeloofwaardig	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg geloofwaardig
Erg onbetrouwbaar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg onbetrouwbaar

18. De waarschijnlijkheid dat je Vivani chocolade / Pensive pennen zou aanschaffen is … (één antwoord per regel):

Erg laag	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Erg hoog

Klik op “Volgende” om naar de volgende advertentie te gaan. (same questions as above)

Algemene vragen

Wat is jouw geslacht? Man / vrouw

Wat is jouw leeftijd? ☐

Indien je wenst meet e dingen naar een waardebon naar keuze ter waarde van 20 Euro, vul dan hieronder jouw naam en emailadres in. De trekking zal binnen 3 weken geschieden. Indien je de gelukkige bent, neem ik contact met je op via het opgegeven emailadres. Uiteraard worden jouw gegevens niet gebruikt voor commerciële doeleinden en word jouw privacy gewaarborgd.

Naam ☐

Emailadres ☐

Voorkeur waarde bon H&M V&D VVV Jack & Jones

Klik op “Volgende” om de vragenlijst te beëindigen.

Bedankt voor jouw deelname.

Appendix G

Questionnaire main study used in the United States

Thank you for participating in this study.

The information gathered from this survey/questionnaire will be used for a research project about print advertising. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. There are no risks or benefits to you in participating in this survey. You may choose to participate or not. You may answer only the questions you feel comfortable answering, and you may stop at any time. If you do not wish to participate, you may simply return the blank survey, with no penalty to yourself. If you do participate, completion and return of the survey indicates your consent to the above conditions.

The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. First I will ask questions about your ideal job and about you as a person, followed by questions regarding several advertisements. At the end of the survey/questionnaire I will ask you a few general questions.

Survey participants who complete all questions in the survey will be entered into a drawing. I will be giving a gift certificate that can be used on Amazon.com. A $50 certificate will be awarded.

Please click "Continue" to answer the questions of this survey.

Please think of an ideal job, disregarding your present job, if you have one. In choosing an ideal job, how important would it be to you to ... (one answer in each line across):

1 = of utmost importance
2 = very important
3 = of moderate importance
4 = of little importance
5 = of very little or no importance

1. get recognition for good performance	1	2	3	4	5
2. have pleasant people to work with	1	2	3	4	5
3. live in a desirable area	1	2	3	4	5
4. have chances for promotion	1	2	3	4	5

Please click "Continue"

---

5. If there is something expensive you really want to buy but you do not have enough money, what do you do?

1. always save before buying
2. usually save first
3. sometimes save, sometimes borrow to buy
4. usually borrow and pay off later
5. always buy now, pay off later

6. How often do you feel nervous or tense?

1. always
2. usually
3. sometimes
4. seldom
5. never

7. Are you the same person at work (or at school if you're a student) and at home?

1. quite the same
2. mostly the same
3. don't know
4. mostly different
5. quite different

8. All in all, how would you describe your state of health these days?

1. very good
2. good
3. fair
4. poor
5. very poor

Please click “Continue”

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (one answer in each line across):

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = undecided
4 = disagree
5 = strongly disagree

9. One can be a good manager without having a precise answer to every question that a subordinate may raise about his or her work	1	2	3	4	5
10. Persistent efforts are the surest way to results	1	2	3	4	5
11. A company's or organization's rules should not be broken - not even when the employee thinks breaking the rule would be in the organization's best interest	1	2	3	4	5
12. We should honour our heroes from the past	1	2	3	4	5

Please click “Continue” and please answer the questions about the advertisements.

Advertisement Vivani chocolate or Pensive pens with puffery condition

13. Before today, had you heard of the brand Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens? Yes – No

14. How would you rate the advertisement of Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens :

Very unattractive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very attractive
Very uninteresting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very interesting
Don’t like at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Like very much
Very bad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very good
Very unpleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very pleasant
Very irritating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not irritating at all
Not trustworthy at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very trustworthy
Very dishonest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very honest
Very low quality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very high quality
Very incredible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very credible
Not convincing at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very convincing
Very unreliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very reliable
Not truthful at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very truthful

Please click “Continue”

---

15. How would you rate this product (Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens):

Very unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very important
Very boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very boring
Very irrelevant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very relevant
Not exciting at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very exciting
Means nothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Means a lot
Not appealing at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very appealing
Not fascinating at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very fascinating
Worthless	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very much worth
Not involving at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very involving
Not needed at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very needed

Please click “Continue”

---

16. How would you rate the claims in this advertisement (Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens):

Not trustworthy at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very trustworthy
Very dishonest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very honest
Very low quality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very high quality
Very incredible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very credible
Not convincing at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very convincing
Very unreliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very reliable
Not truthful at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very truthful
Not exaggerated at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very exaggerated

Please click “Continue”

---

17. How would you rate the advertiser of this advertisement (Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens):

Not sincere at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very sincere
Not trustworthy at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very trustworthy
Not truthful at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very truthful
Very dishonest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very honest
Very incredible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very credible
Very unreliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very reliable

18. The likelihood of buying Vivani chocolate / Pensive pens is…

Very low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very high

Please click “Continue” and look at the next advertisement (same questions as above)

General questions

What is your gender? Male / female

What is your age? ☐

Your name and email address are required in order to enter you into the drawing.

Name ☐

Email address ☐

Please click “next” to finalize the questionnaire.

Thank you for participating.