



duolingo

Creative Insight Report

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Executive Summary

For Duolingo, a creative insight report was created. Understanding and outlining the client's objective and competitors helped me identify the business issue—that users aren't coming back to the app and doing their lessons. Due to the problem being with existing users, that was the main goal for the campaign. How to make old users get back to the Duolingo app and do their lesson?

First, the target audience was studied in detail to have a better understanding of the users by looking at their lifestyles and demographics. Then a survey about the users was conducted to make sure the target audience's choice was correct.

Furthermore, research was done that led to a triangulation between netnography and the primary research, in this case, the survey about the primary insight.

The main insight was that users believed that the character Duo is generally passive-aggressive and would one day be rude to them. In addition, the research also showed that users don't appreciate Duo's efforts to make them do their lessons positively.

From the research insights, ideas were generated to solve it, and it was decided that the campaign would focus on the idea that Duo would have a different system now. Focus more on gamification, where users must attend their lesson together at least 50% of the time; otherwise, Duo will become more negative and rude to the users.

The goal of the idea is to create interactions between users on social media and make them motivate each other. What better way to remind users to do their lessons other than using other users as constant reminders?

The outdoor campaign would be located in areas where people commute as well as major tourist attractions that are visited by the greatest number of people. Numerous people will notice the outdoor advertisement, and since this resonates so much with Duolingo users, they will be surprised by the copy made in the ads. As a result, they will take action, which will eventually help Duolingo as a brand.



Interpretation of the Brief

Introduction

A creative insight report was created for **Duolingo**. Understanding and outlining the client's objective and competitors helped me identify the business issue — that people aren't coming back to the app to keep their streaks.



The brief

With Duolingo being the world's #1 language learning app—used by hundreds of millions of learners around the world—come many challenges. Duolingo's current challenge is getting existing users to return to the app on a daily basis. Duolingo wants to be part of people's routines, which can be difficult.

Despite having access to features like daily streaks, gamified XP, leaderboard rankings, learning with friends, inspirational push notifications, and even passive-aggressive reminders from Duo, many language learners give up and miss out on the advantages of learning a language. However, learning a language requires dedication, regardless of how much fun it may be. The hardest aspect of learning is maintaining motivation. In most cases, life events interfere with routines, people change their habits, and some people gradually stop doing their daily language lesson.

The advertising challenge

To better understand the brief, it was read multiple times to realise that the challenge that Duolingo is facing is making sure that existing users keep coming back for their daily lessons. "How can Duolingo get learners to do their daily language lesson in an innovative way?" In other words, Duolingo wants to get inside people's routines and be part of them in a creative way. In terms of execution, Duolingo gives the creative team complete freedom, but besides the app and the app design, they want something big, something that could create a halo effect for a wider audience.

The brand

Duolingo as a brand is considered to be inspiring, inclusive, curious, and quirky. They have shown this in their past advertising campaigns. In the past, Duolingo's campaigns have been different in terms of collaborations and the way the brand presents itself as "cool" and young with cultural jokes from shows or trending topics. This makes Duolingo, especially Duo, relatable and viewed more as an actual character than a brand. Two of the past campaigns that were very different were "Duolingo - calling all Emilys" where Duolingo used the trendy show Emily in Paris to its benefit, and also "The unignorable notification" where a drone showed how many days people ignored the Duolingo app notification.

Duolingo as an app has a wide array of languages in which to target multiple skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The competitors

Duolingo is in a market that is beyond language. Due to being in the app market, apps are always trying to do the most in terms of keeping their users loyal. There are currently 3.5 million apps in 2022 in the Google Play and 2.2 million apps in the Apple App Store (Statista, 2022). Due to being in the app market, apps are always trying to do the most in terms of keeping their users loyal. Duolingo's indirect consumers go from the most played games—Subway Surfers and Candy Crush—to the biggest social media apps like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. Their direct competitors are the existing learning language apps. Bus, Rosetta Stone, Babbel, Lingo Deer, and Lingvist are a few examples.

The main competitor is Rosetta Stone. Rosetta Stone is an app that also focuses on language learning, but their brand identity and tone of voice are very different. Duolingo, for example, is a fun app that interacts with users in a more personal way that makes us feel like we know them. Whereas Rosetta has this very distinctive look that resembles a more old-fashioned style of learning.



Target audience

Duolingo's 2021 language report affirms that they have 500 million users around the globe in 2021. So for that reason, choosing the target audience was a challenge.

According to some research regarding the target audience, and since the target audience is existing users, we were able to determine that Duolingo's users are mostly under 30 years old. In fact, in many countries around the world, people under 30 make up about 60% of all language learners. The data from Duolingo also shows that just five countries got older last year: Latvia, the U.K., Finland, Ireland, and Estonia, with the median age on Duolingo rising to 26 in the U.K. which contrasts with other major markets for Duolingo, like the US, where learners got younger. Which means that the target audience is quite vague. For that reason, the target audience of this campaign tends to be mainly existing users between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. To make the target audience more specific, there needs to be a focus on which language should be the target. According to Duolingo's research, the main languages that are learned are English, Spanish, and French (Blanco, 2022).

Most popular languages studied in the U.K.



1. Spanish



2. French



3. German

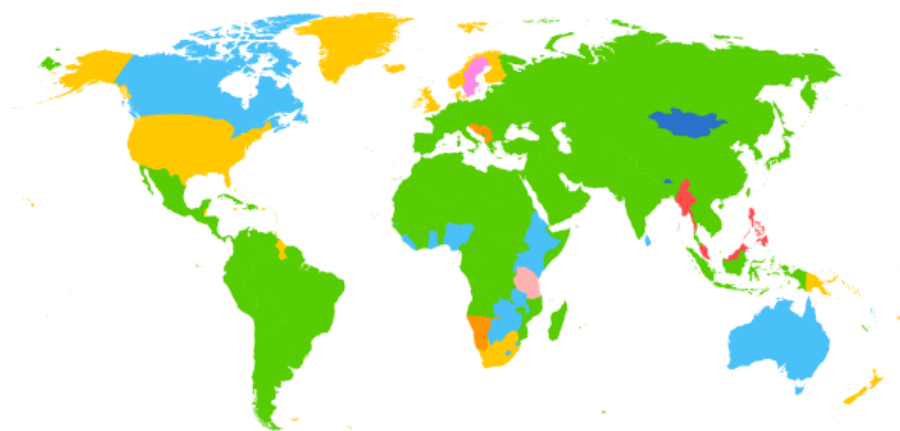


4. English



5. Italian

Most popular language studied in each country in 2021



Consumer profile

Mary, 28

Female



- Account for a big firm,
- Married, 1 child;
- Her husband is French and they travel 5-6 times a year to Italy to keep in touch with the other side of the family
- She would like to learn French but "It's too much work" and the motivation is not there.
- She likes traveling mostly to Europe: Mediterranean countries mostly
- She doesn't read books, she likes to read Financial Times and The Economist once a week to keep updated.
- Her favorite TV show is "Emily in Paris" on Netflix
- Uses social media as a gateway of life and to keep herself busy by looking at articles and what friends are doing.
- She understands advertising but only notices when something is intriguing
- Uses Duolingo from time to time when her husband reminds her;

John, 24

Male



- Freelance photographer;
- In a relationship, 1 dog;
- Likes to travel to countries in Europe;
- He tries to make himself more knowledgeable on other matters such as art, design, and history;
- He supports Arsenal and tries to go to games if they are on the weekend, if he is in London
- He is on his phone 4-5 hours on average + 2-3 on the TV;
- Since he is a freelancer he likes to go to different countries within Europe and stay there as long as 6 month;
- Only notices advertising when is something unique and unusual.
- Uses mostly Instagram to keep up with friends, some work, uses twitter and reddit to find interesting topics that he could participate in.
- Likes to read books/magazine about design, architecture, photography...
- His favorite TV show is "Money Heist" on Netflix;
- Uses Duolingo to learn Spanish occasionally;



Seeking Insight - netnography

As part of gaining insight, I started with netnography. Since the brief implies that the target audience is existing and make them do their lesson, it was best to start by understanding what do people think and talk about the brand and how do they feel about it in general.

As a start, research was done on the Duolingo Reddit to see what people thought about Duolingo as an app. I came to realise that Duolingo is so much more than a brand. As of now, there are 3 main Duolingo subreddits where people are active daily, with 65 000 followers up to 190 000 followers. Which shows that there is a community around the brand, which is quite rare.

On Reddit, it was also understood that Duo plays a big role within the Duolingo brand. People love the green bird. Even though Duo is considered passive-aggressive by the users, they really seem to like him in general.

Duo is made into a meme by some subreddits, which explains why users have a special feeling for him because he is more than a brand; he is a character in himself.

In addition, Reddit provided some great research about the users. Not only did it provide good knowledge about the brand and how big Duo is to it, but it also helped understand the community and the commitment of some of the users. Some users had a 2000-day streak, which shows the commitment that Duolingo users have towards the brand.

Furthermore, research on other platforms on social media was done. For instance, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, and Facebook, which are the main platforms. Within this research, I was able to see a pattern in all of them. Most of the comments made are jokes with a comic purpose. From calling Duo names, interacting with the posts, or even users interacting with each other.

This also comes from Duolingo itself, which tries to interact with some random posts online to try and keep the users entertained. Duo also tries to be a part of viral memes and trends in order to provide users with a more personal connection.

With netnography, I was able to understand that Duolingo users are very dedicated and loyal to the brand, as well as very comical about it. They see Duo more as a friend than a teacher, which then explains this relationship with the users.



Examples from netnography

Duolingo @duolingo · 8 de nov
as an empath, i'm sensing some strong feelings


The Notorious J.O.V. @whotfisjovana · 8 de nov
NOOO NOT THE DUOLINGO BIRD ON THE GRILL!!!!
[Mostrar esta sequência](#)



131 2.040 35 mil

r/duolingo · Posted by u/Eworonuk 1 year ago · 1.6k


We surprised my dad with a Duolingo themed cake for reaching a 1000 day streak!



38 Comments Award Share Save

Posted by u/KochamOle de eo ru nb hu cs · 3 years ago · 2.8k


My girlfriend made a cake to celebrate my 1000 day streak today



82 Comments Award Share Save

Posted by u/GoldFinger_911 11 months ago · 1.9k


Duo is getting more aggressive with the notifications...



42 Comments Award Share Save

Posted by u/GrizzlyBaird2112 6 months ago · 1.7k

Made a Duo cake for my 1000 day streak!



86 Comments Award Share Save

Duolingo @duolingo · 28 de out
tag yourself, i'm "man in green bird costume"


big boy @bigboyelias3000
I missed one French lesson




239 4.452 72,8 mil

Duolingo @duolingo · 25 de out
living in your head rent free

Normal people's nightmares:



My nightmares:



Cómo se dice "beg for mercy?"

549 11,8 mil 141 mil

Ethnography

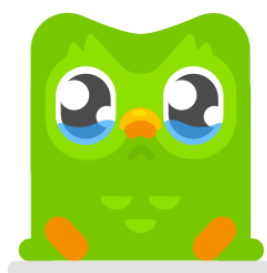
Ethnography was the most challenging part of the research. Nevertheless, some interesting facts appeared. One of them was a girl at a club at 3:30 a.m. going to the bathroom so she could do her Duolingo lesson and not lose her streak. It wasn't possible to record or take pictures during the action due to the circumstances. However, it was a very important moment for the research. It showed how Duolingo users are so passionate and dedicated to the brand.

Another interesting fact is that most English people don't know how to speak more than one language. When I talked to some English people in the pub or on the street, 3 out of 10 said they could speak another language besides English. When asked why, they answered that it wasn't a necessity for them due to speaking such a well-known language.

In addition, from my observations on the tube and train during people's commutes, I came to the conclusion that depending on the method of transportation by which people commute, the things they do are also different. This happens due to some factors, like WiFi connections or outside noise.

Despite not having an internet connection, more people on the tube listen to podcasts, music, play games, or even read the news or a book. This might be because the tube is a transport without a view, which makes people try to occupy their eyes with something else like a book or an article that they download online before taking the tube. They also see their photo galleries and delete some old photos or remember some old memories. Whereas on the bus, people tend to just look outside and have a moment for themselves with the music that they are listening to. On the bus, there are a lot more things to do during the commute since wifi data from people's phones is involved.

Planes were also taken into consideration during this research process, and it came to the conclusion that since the journey is longer, sleeping is also a way to pass the time, as well as watching TV series, or in this case, Netflix.



Primary Research

As part of primary research, a focus group was conducted to better understand people's feelings towards learning a new language and commuting. The participants were between the ages of 20 to 24 which isn't the average Duolingo user in the U.K. Nevertheless, it was helpful to understand commuting.

When asked about how the participants commute, the answer was almost unanimous, with 7 out of 8 people saying that they commute by bus. In terms of how long it takes them, the answers were very different. Every day, the participants could spend anywhere from 50 minutes to 2 hours. The moderator then asked, "What do you do in your commute?" The majority said they listen to music. Only when the commute is longer, like going on a plane, do they consider other things like reading, doing some work, playing games, or anything else they consider to be productive.

When asked about Duolingo, only one participant said they tried to use the app, and the main reason for that was family communications.

With the research gained from netnography, ethnography, and focus groups, a survey was made to gain more knowledge regarding Duolingo users and what they think of the brand, their age, and most importantly, their relationship with Duo.

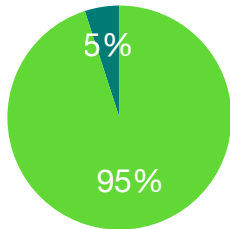


Survey

This survey was conducted by a variety of Duolingo users. From the oldest users to the most recent ones, have data from both sides and try to understand how they feel towards the brand. The survey itself was posted in the Duolingo subreddit, where people talk about the app in general, their accomplishments, and fun images they post on it. I also asked friends of mine who are users of Duolingo to do the survey; nevertheless, the majority of answers came from online communities like Reddit.

Survey results

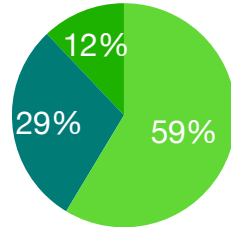
1 Do you think Duo is a good thing to the app?



● Yes ● No

60 responses

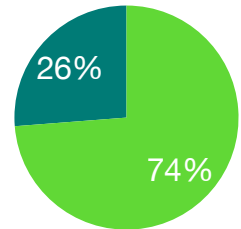
2 What is your age gap?



● 18 - 24 years old
● 25 - 35 years old
● 36 and above

58 responses

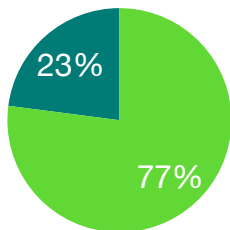
3 If Duo was gone would you miss him?



● Yes ● No

61 responses

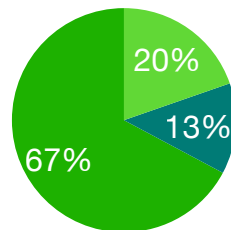
4 Do you consider Duo to be passive-aggressive?



● Yes ● No

61 responses

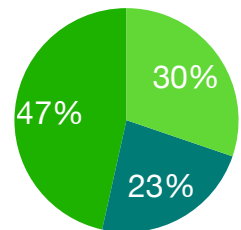
5 If Duo was rude to you, I would...



● Feel insulted
● Not care
● Find it funny

61 responses

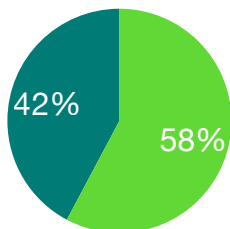
6 How long have you used Duolingo?



● Less than 1 year
● Between 1-2 years
● 2 years and above

43 responses

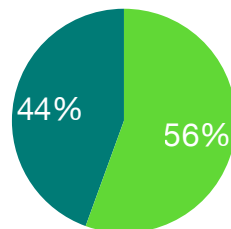
7 Would you consider you have loyal towards Duolingo?



● Yes ● No

45 responses

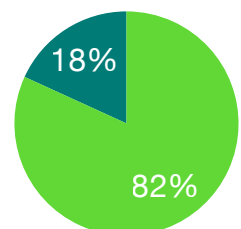
8 Is Duolingo an app you would recommend?



● Yes ● No

45 responses

9 Do you use Duolingo every day?



● Yes ● No

44 responses

Conclusions from the Survey

The consistency with which some users use the app surprised me. With the majority of answers in graph 6, 47% of people use Duolingo for more than 2 years. However, in graph 2, we understand that Duolingo users are mostly young, between 18 and 24 years old.

The survey also questioned users regarding if they would recommend the app, with 56% saying yes (graph 8), as well as making users think about their loyalty towards the brand, with 58% of users saying yes (graph 7). In addition, on graph 9, where users are asked if they use Duolingo every day, the answer is clear, with 82% of users saying yes.

All of these questions made me wonder why the brand and its users have such a positive relationship. The answer was clear: it was Duo, the Duolingo character. Then I started asking questions regarding Duo and his importance to the Duolingo brand. In Graph 1, 95% said that Duo was good for the brand. However, in graph 3, only 74% say that they would miss Duo if he were removed from the app. Nevertheless, the response was still very positive and clear; Duo is crucial to the brand.

Finally, questions about Duo's personality were raised. The question on graph 4 was made due to the observations made on netnography where users describe Duo as passive-aggressive, and the answer was clear with 77% agreeing. From there the idea of having Duo, being somewhat aggressive came to live and as graph 5 shows 67% would find it funny which was very surprising.

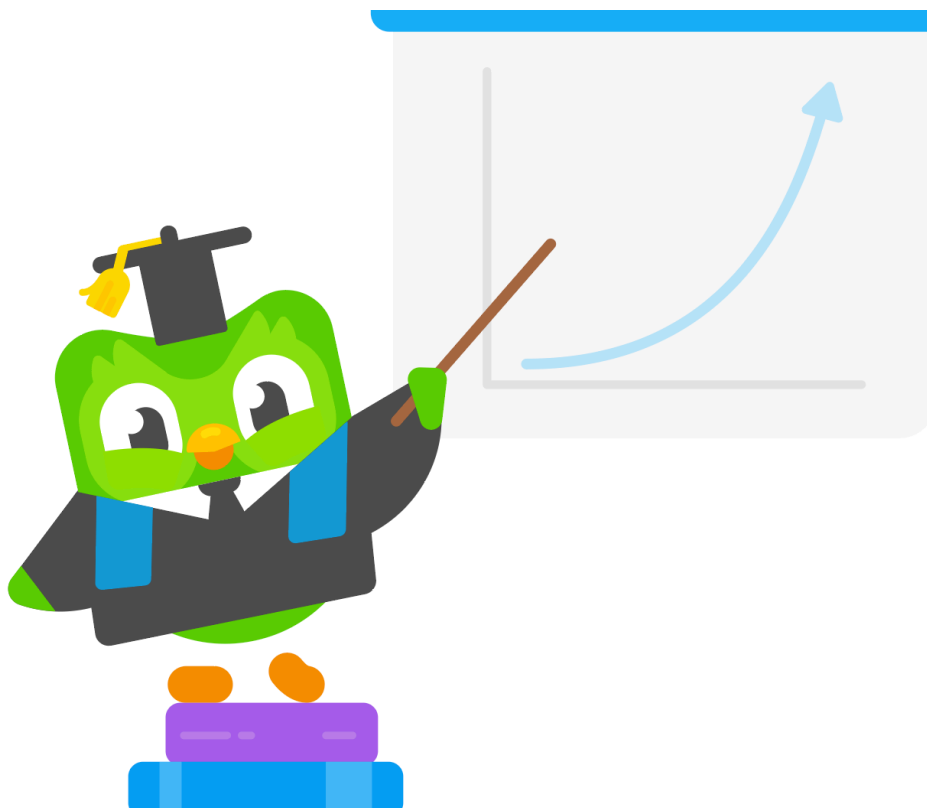


Triangulation

What is triangulation in data? Triangulation is the process of using several techniques or data sources in qualitative research to create a thorough knowledge of a phenomenon (Patton, 1999). Triangulation has also been considered a qualitative research technique to examine validity by bringing together data from many sources.

From the netnography, I was able to find out that users see Duo as a funny character that they can interact with. Not only this, but his primary personality trait is being passive-aggressive toward the users. This is what makes him unique compared to other characters from other brands. I triangulated this finding with the survey above, and the conclusion is clear. Most users find Duolingo's personality passive-aggressive, and they also think that's what makes it funny and entertaining.

Exploiting this aspect of Duolingo to its advantage may be what separates them from the competition. By digging into his peculiar and unique personality trait, users will connect even more to the character.



Insight - the big idea

All things are considered, from netnography to ethnography to primary research. Ideas were generated to start the creative process. The main goal of the idea is to be big. Something that will be talked about in social media, something that will make people interact, and something that is simple. These are the primary things to consider about the idea.

After having some ideas that could work for this project, none of them seem right besides one. Why not exaggerate Duo's personality? The question is, how can that be done?

After some thought, the answer became more and more clear. Use this passive-aggressive personality trait of Duo to make people intrigued as to why he is doing this. The primary research shows that users will not take it as an insult and will in fact find it funny. Since Duo is so big in the Duolingo brand, this could be an opportunity to boost this aspect and create something that the users talk about every day: him being passive-aggressive.



The first idea was to have another character to support Duo in this. In a way, we have a "good cop" and a "bad cop". I then realised that, by doing this, the focus of the idea would be lost. Just because Duo is the one who needs to be more aggressive and mad, not other characters. The way this idea works is that users have to do at least 50% of their weekly lessons; if not, Duo's personality is going to change and he will be mad at them.

The notifications will start being even more passive-aggressive, and the interactions with Duo will be a bit more dry and somewhat rude. Since users don't appreciate Duo's efforts, Duo won't care anymore, he will be rude until you do your lesson.

This idea is based on the usage of "gamification," which is something that Duolingo as an app is known for. The idea can be used in two ways: as an individual gamification, for example, users could turn this service on or off depending on whether they would like it or not. The other way would be as group gamification, as in users versus Duo. Meaning that Duolingo users had to agree on a goal; in this case, 50% of the weekly lessons had to be completed; if not, Duo will be more aggressive, which means that users will encourage other users to complete their lessons. This second option makes people interact with each other and encourage each other to do their lessons. A great example of this would be a user who does not like this campaign and wants Duo to remain as it was, would ask their Duolingo friends to make their lessons to ensure Duo remains relaxed.



In a way it's changing the way that the notification comes to the users. Instead of coming from a character that people don't respect, it's going to start coming from friends or family or even from random online strangers, which can create a big buzz for Duolingo in social media.

Secondary research

To support this idea, secondary research around types of reinforcement and motivation was made to have a better understanding of the idea.

According to Zhao (2021), "...students exposed to stronger peer pressure have demonstrated better learning outcomes, i.e., a higher average grade and a smaller variance of the grade distribution." That is, students who are subjected to peer pressure from their peers perform better in learning situations. It is also said that peer pressure via social media has not been investigated yet, but according to Zhao, social media is so big in young people's lives that it would almost feel normal.

This also reflects in the words of affirmation and positive reinforcement, which is what Duolingo has always done. However, negative reinforcement is recommended to remove a specific behavior, in this case, a habit. The difference between both is clear; according to Hitching (2022), "Positive punishment is the adding (+) of a stimulus to reduce an undesired behavior. Negative punishment is the removal (-) of a stimulus to reduce an undesired behavior."

In addition, excessive positive reinforcement can also be something that does not help learners; excessive positive reinforcement can have detrimental effects such as complacency, loss of motivation, reliance, and the loss of the development of self-directed behavior. Meaning that students who receive prizes, accolades, treats, and praise as positive reinforcement suffer long-term consequences. Their primary goal is the reward rather than achieving exceptional academic success (Maag, 2001).



Negative reinforcement should not always be the go-to. However, only having positive reinforcement is not the answer to Duolingo's problems. The theory of negative reinforcement for this idea is called retributive justice, which is a very old way of doing justice, but the principal idea behind this theory is what matters. The theory states that "when an offender breaks the law, justice requires that they suffer in return, and that the response to a crime is proportional to the offence." (Hart and Gardner, 2008). In the case of Duolingo, it means that if the user does not do their lesson, they are "breaking the law" and therefore they should be "punished" according to their "offense".

The punishment would be Duo being more aggressive toward them; in this scenario, users would have a balanced reinforcement system that would make them stay motivated.

On one hand, they have Duo being Duo, which is the positive reinforcement for when they do their lesson; if not, they would have a punishment, which is Duo being more aggressive in the notifications and interactions in general.



Creative execution

For the creative execution, the main medium will be outdoor advertising. This is something that both Duolingo as a brand and its users are comfortable with. The twist is that Duo is dressed in some sort of outfit and making comments about people's knowledge of languages. The copy is used to relate to Duo's outfit in some way so that Duo also makes sense in the billboard.



The main idea behind the execution of these billboards is to make people find them funny and intriguing. Make users wonder why Duo is so aggressive but also so funny. The goal with this was to keep Duo's personality as a funny character but give it a twist in terms of the approach used to create it. The other billboards below also play with this idea of Duo being smarter than most people in languages and the "threat" that is being made.





Effectiveness

This idea will be powerful because Duolingo users will first notice that he is wearing some sort of outfit, which is the eye-catcher for the billboard. Then they will get intrigued by the situation and read the copy, which is short and straight to the point, so people could quickly read it without stopping during their commute or their walk.



Also, the research supports the fact that Duolingo users already interact with Duo on social media and in online communities. As shown in the pictures on netnography (page 9), when Duolingo's campaigns are more passive-aggressive, they tend to be more talked about. Users also have a reputation for interacting with Duo online for the most minor actions. Most times, it is not even the Duolingo brand that starts them but the users themselves.

Then move into gamification, where secondary research showed the importance of keeping a reward system controlled and balanced to help users be motivated in the long term. As well as the idea of users exerting positive peer pressure on others to ensure that they complete their lessons.

For the reasons stated above, this campaign will ultimately be focused on existing users and will have intrigued them enough to the point of sharing with others to then create a big buzz online and reach the masses through its uniqueness and unpredictability. The concept has a strong basis to resonate with the target audience in every way possible, thanks to the research insights.



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The end.

