

The Impact of Cultural Symbols and Spokesperson Identity on Attitudes and Intentions

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Abstract

In today's multicultural societies, ethnic targeting is an increasingly important marketing strategy. Two main approaches to target ethnic minorities have emerged in recent years: messaging consumers when their ethnic identity is most salient, and doing so with spokespeople or models with the same heritage as the targeted minority. In this paper, we conduct conceptual replications of two influential articles representative of these research streams: Forehand and Deshpandé (2001) and Deshpandé and Stayman (1994). Our studies show that the effects of such practices on minority consumers are not homogeneous. The findings identify generational status (first vs. second generation) as an important boundary condition for these ethnic targeting strategies. This has important conceptual and practical implications for choosing an effective ethnic targeting strategy.

We conceptually replicate two influential papers in the ethnic minority targeting literature: Forehand and Deshpandé (2001) which has been cited 154 times to date; and Deshpandé and Stayman (1994), which has been cited 213 times (Google Scholar). These papers are two of the best-known findings from the stream of marketing research on ethnic minority targeting. First, identity primes have been shown to positively affect responses to targeted advertisements by increasing identity salience (e.g. Reed, Forehand, Puntoni and Warlop 2012; Forehand and Deshpandé, 2001; Forehand, Deshpandé and Reed, 2002; Chattaraman, Rudd and Lennon 2009; Dimofte, Forehand and Deshpandé 2003). Second, spokespersons and models who are ethnically similar to the distinctive target group have been shown to have a positive impact on advertisement evaluation (e.g. Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier 2000; Antioco et al. 2012; Brumbaugh and Grier 2006; Deshpandé and Stayman 1994; Green 1999; Grier and Brumbaugh 1999; Grier and Deshpandé 2001; Martin, Lee, and Yang 2004; Whittler, 1991).

The literature in this area tends to assume, whether explicitly or implicitly, that the effectiveness of these strategies is similar among all members of an ethnic minority. Yet, first-generation ethnic consumers, who were born in another country and later relocated to the host country, and second-generation ethnic consumers, who were born in the country their parents had relocated to, experience their identity differently. In particular, second-generation ethnic consumers more often identify as biculturals (Giguère, Lalone and Lou 2010), for whom both the heritage (ethnic) culture and the mainstream culture play an important part in their lives (Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2004). Because of this, we argue that consumers' generational status is an important factor that determines the effectiveness of standard minority targeting approaches.

Since second-generation minority consumers are more likely to identify as biculturals than first-generation minority consumers, whose ethnic identity is already chronically accessible, we predict that the effect of ethnic priming on responses to targeted advertisements through increased ethnic identity salience (e.g. Forehand and Deshpandé, 2001; Forehand et al., 2002) will be stronger in second-generation minority consumers. In addition, because of the relative weakness of ethnic identity in second-generation consumers, we predict a greater impact of spokespeople with the same heritage on first-generation than

second-generation minority consumers. Because this moderation is driven by differences in the strength of consumers' ethnic identity, we predict that this effect is mediated by the strength of identification with the heritage culture (mediated moderation). In sum, we expect ethnic identity primes to have a more positive impact on responses to ethnic ads among second-generation than first-generation minority consumers (Study 1) and, at the same time, ethnic spokespersons to have a more positive impact on responses to ethnic ads in first-generation than in second-generation ethnic minority consumers (Study 2).

Study 1: Generational status and ethnic identity priming

Our first study focuses on ethnic identity priming and constitutes a conceptual replication of Forehand and Deshpandé's (2001) first experiment. Our replication relies on a very similar manipulation: in the priming condition, an additional advertisement, which primes ethnic awareness, is shown immediately before the target advertisement, which features an ethnic actor. Our stimuli are included in the detailed report. The analysis showed a significant interaction between ethnic prime and generational status ($F(2, 101) = 15.56, p < .001$) on spokesperson liking: while there was a significant effect of ethnic prime for second-generation ($F(1, 102) = 69.18, p < .001$) as well as for first generation participants ($F(1, 102) = 6.94, p = .01$), the effect size was significantly smaller in the latter case.

Table 1: Comparison of results

Sample N	Forehand & Deshpandé (2001) - Study 1 Asians (US West Coast) 52		Study 1 Chinese (Netherlands) 106					
	Priming	Control	Priming			Control		
Gen. status	overall	overall	overall	first	second	overall	first	second
DV	<i>spokesperson liking</i> 4.90 4.05		5.17	5.19	5.15	4.00	4.62	3.40

Similar results were found for identification with the ethnic spokesperson; these results can be found in the detailed report. In other words, previous exposure to ethnic symbols had a more positive impact on ad responses among second-generation than among first-generation ethnic consumers.

Study 2: Generational status and spokesperson heritage

Our second study focuses on ethnic spokespeople and models and constitutes a conceptual replication of Deshpandé and Stayman (1994). This effect has been shown in a number of articles since the 1960s; a 1991 review by Whittler cites 14 papers (Whittler 1991). At least 15 more have been published since (e.g., Antioco et al. 2012). Once again, we used the same manipulation, modifying the spokesperson's name accordingly to reflect a different heritage. Participants completed the Vancouver Acculturation Index (Ryder et al., 2001) to measure identification with ethnic and host culture. (For a more detailed description of our method and stimuli, please refer to the detailed report.)

The analysis revealed a significant interaction between generational status and spokesperson heritage on attitude towards the organization ($F(1, 266) = 9.76, p = .002$) and attitude towards the spokesperson ($F(1, 266) = 31.78, p < .001$). The effect of spokesperson heritage on attitude towards the organization was significant for first-generation participants ($F(1, 266) = 7.71, p = .006$), but ran in the opposite direction for second-generation participants ($F(1, 266) = 2.81, p = .095$); in the case of attitude towards the spokesperson, it was significant for both first-generation participants ($F(1, 266) = 15.00, p < .001$) and for second-generation participants ($F(1, 266) = 16.77, p < .001$) but again in opposite directions. We had not anticipated this reversal of the positive effect of ethnic spokespersons; we speculate that the negative effect for second-generation participants may stem from negative stereotypes in Dutch culture about the ethnic minority. The analysis revealed similar effects for attitude towards the ad and willingness to support; these results can be found in the detailed report.

Table 2: Comparison of results

Sample N	Deshpandé & Stayman (1994) Hispanics (Austin) - Anglos (S. Antonio) 181				Study 2 Turkish (Netherlands) 270					
Manipulation Condition	spokesperson heritage				spokesperson heritage					
Gen. status	<i>minority</i>	<i>majority</i>	<i>minority</i>	<i>majority</i>	<i>minority</i>			<i>majority</i>		
	overall	overall	overall	overall	overall	first	second	overall	first	second
DV1	<i>spokesperson trustworthiness</i>				<i>attitude towards the spokesperson</i>					
	3.21	2.68	3.62	2.83	4.52	4.95	4.04	4.53	4.44	4.63
DV2	<i>brand attitude</i>				<i>attitude towards the organization</i>					
	5.09	3.80	5.35	3.88	4.72	5.03	4.69	4.79	4.70	4.90

A mediation analysis was conducted using Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes' (2007) MODMED macro to investigate whether the effect of generational status on attitude towards a targeted ad was mediated by strength of ethnic identity as measured by the VAI. The analysis confirmed a significant mediation effect by identification with the heritage culture (95% confidence interval: $-0.17 < C.I. < -0.15$) on attitude towards the ad. Identification with the heritage culture was significantly stronger ($p < .001$) in first-generation ($M = 4.20$) than in second-generation respondents ($M = 3.90$).

These findings show that generational status is an important boundary condition for the two effects discussed by Forehand and Deshpandé (2001) and Deshpandé and Stayman (1994). In addition to serving as a warning to both researchers and practitioners regarding the dangers of holding simplistic assumptions about the relative homogeneity of ethnic minorities, our studies also have more specific implications. The results of Study 1 suggest that the positive effects of ethnic identity cues often demonstrated in the literature depend on the level of chronic accessibility of the target identity. The results of Study 2 expand on the recent findings of Antioco et al. (2012) in several ways. For example, they highlight the role of differences within the same ethnic minority (vs. across different ethnic minorities) and show the process by which identification processes explain variation in the effectiveness of ethnic spokespeople and models in targeted advertising. In addition to their importance for the understanding of identity salience effects, we hope that these findings will help practitioners in selecting the most appropriate ethnic targeting strategy depending on the population targeted.

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