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Appeals? The Moderating Role of Product Involvement

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As marketers begin planning their campaigns and strategic approach for next year, the list of the most desirable consumer targets is not necessarily a copy of years past. With a significant spending power, the African American segment is one of the most lucrative, interesting and complex targets for national and local advertisers. Reaching the African American consumer can help marketers expand their consumer base, increase revenue and build brand awareness. African Americans comprise more than 13% of the U.S. population today—some 39.2 million people— and are expected to spend about $799 billion in 2008 alone, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business (Humphreys, 2007). By July 2050, census estimates are that about 61.4 million African Americans will live in the United States, the population growth in this segment gives marketers reason enough to market to African Americans and create inventive ways of reaching out to them.

As this consumer segment continues to grow in importance, marketers need to focus on what types of products could benefit from African American-targeted advertising. Major corporations have certainly taken notice. Marketing giants such as Coca-Cola, Daimler Chrysler, and L'Oreal, have instituted special divisions within their marketing departments to develop targeted strategies for communicating to African Americans through traditional advertising media as well as through other diverse channels. Marketers are definitely paying attention. These days whenever we watch TV or look through a magazine African Americans appear in more advertisements than ever before. African Americans have become more and more prominent in advertising in recent years. In the 2008's Super Bowl alone Coca-Cola paid $2.6 million each for three commercials celebrating Black History Month. Advertising in ethnic media increased in the last decade at a pace dramatically beyond increases in advertising as a whole. Winslow (2005)

reported that in 2004, marketers spent about $1.8 billion in advertising to communicate specifically with African American consumers. African American media receives the largest share of ethnic media spending.

Armed with the US Census data providing an official validation of the strength and size of the African American market, more corporations including Pepsi, Ford and Johnson & Johnson are investing marketing dollars into the African American market than ever before (TNS Media Intelligence, 2005). Also, corporations who have targeted these buyers for some time have increased their investment. Examples include Procter&Gamble, GM and Dell (TNS Media Intelligence, 2005). In 2007 L'Oréal USA beauty company teamed up with Essence magazine as a way to target African American women (Nagel, 2007). What are those dollars chasing? According to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, spending power in the African American market has increased to $799 billion from approximately $318 billion in 1990. African American buying power is expected to be higher than that of any other ethnic minority and it is projected to be $1023 billion in 2010, a 41% increase that outshines the growth among other ethnic groups (Humphreys, 2007).

Even though real life advertisements appear to make heavy use of ethnicity when targeting a specific segment of the population, research of African American-targeted advertising is not extensive. Other than content analyses and few other studies, relatively little is known about the role of ethnicity in advertising. Several studies have looked at how African Americans respond to ethnic advertising (Whittler 1989; Williams and Qualls 1989; Whittler and DiMeo 1991; Green 1999; Appiah 2001) however, ALL of these studies used low involvement product ads to test the effects of ethnic identity on advertising response. We aim to examine if using high involvement products could make a difference. The purpose of our research is based on

distinctiveness theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model and how these two theories can help us explain previous findings and test the idea that ethnic targeting works better for low involvement products.

Even though previous studies have explored the attitudes of minority consumers towards advertisements targeted to them they have not studied the role of product involvement and how this may affect their responses (Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier 2000; Webster 1990; Webster 1992). The research issue in this study, whether we can define certain product characteristics or dimensions that are responsible for favoring African American-targeted advertising, despite its importance, has not been adequately addressed in current advertising studies. Practitioners need to understand how to target African Americans more effectively by using their advertising dollars more efficiently. Therefore, in this study, we aim to shed light onto what specific products benefit the most from using African American-targeted advertisements.

A content analysis by Bailey (2006) found that African Americans have become more visible in advertising and their presence has become more significant in recent years. Research regarding African Americans in advertising over the years (Taylor 1955; Cox 1970; Bush, Resnick, and Stern 1980; Green 1999; Lee Fernandez, and Martin 2002; Martin, Lee, and Yang 2004) has found that their presence in advertising has increased consistently. Many of these studies have looked at the frequency with which African Americans appear in advertising (Bush, Resnick, and Stern 1980; Licata and Biswas 1993; Stevenson 2002; Bailey 2006) and they all agree that African Americans have become more prominent in both TV and print advertising.

Although previous research on ethnic advertising has studied several factors influencing advertising responses, a critical factor is empirically neglected. Researchers suggest that product involvement may affect consumer responses; and they emphasize that this relationship has

received inadequate scholarly attention (Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier 2000; Webster 1990; Webster 1992). To overcome this research lacuna, we examine the effects of product involvement in African American-targeted advertisements. The contribution of our research is to shed light on how African Americans respond to advertising targeted to them, and how their responses are moderated by ethnic identification and product involvement.

Theoretical Framework

This study tested a conceptual framework that considers the impact of advertising targeted to African Americans on attitudes toward the advertisement of low and high involvement products. The goal of this research was to study attitudinal differences between strong and weakly identified African Americans. The ethnicity of the character on the advertisement should impact respondents' attitudes, depending on their strength of ethnic identification. This relationship should be stronger for low involvement products, where noticeable attributes such as ethnicity can easily influence response. For high involvement products, ethnicity may not be as noticeable since consumers consider several other attributes.

Our study proposes that strong and weak African American identifiers will rate African American-targeted advertising differently. The difference in rating for African American character advertisements between strong and weak African American identifiers will be less for high involvement products and more for low involvement products. Before presenting a description of how the model was tested and what results emerged, it seems sensible to justify two arguments: that advertising targeted to ethnic minorities logically should be disproportionately effective based on two constructs, distinctiveness and ethnic identification, and that our third construct, involvement, differentiates the amount and saliency of attributes consumers consider when evaluating advertising. We selected these three constructs because

together they help us explain how African Americans respond to advertising featuring African American models for both high and low involvement products.

<div align="center">Distinctiveness and Identification Theory</div>

The first argument rests on distinctiveness theory; our first research area of interest. Distinctiveness theory supports the idea that a person's distinctive traits in relation to other people in the environment will be more salient to the person than more common traits (McGuire et al. 1979; McGuire 1984). Thus, a person's ethnicity is more likely to be spontaneously evoked in social contexts in which others of the same ethnic group are few. This idea supports the notion that targeting a minority ethnic group buys more favorable attention than does targeting a majority ethnic group.

Specifically, minority targeting has been found to result in more identification with and trust of a source similar to the buyer, and increased favorability toward the advertisement and brand (Aaker 1999; Wooten 1995). One significant cue of similarity between a viewer and the character in an advertisement is ethnicity. This may be especially true for ethnic minorities for whom ethnicity is more salient. The ethnicity of a model in an advertisement may be particularly instrumental in inducing ethnic minorities to infer similarity or dissimilarity (Whittler 1989). Such research findings are consistent with those focused on spokesperson ethnicity effects, which have demonstrated that minorities respond more favorably to one of their own as spokespersons than members of a majority ethnic group do to one of their own ethnicity (Whittler 1989). Going further, Deshpande and Stayman (1994) found that members of minority (versus majority) groups perceived ethnic advertising targeted to them to be more trustworthy, perceptions that led to more positive attitudes toward the brand being advertised.

A second area of research findings applies a construct called strength of ethnic

identification. Appiah's (2001) study examined whether the strength of ethnic identification influenced adolescents' responses to advertisements and found that subjects with strong ethnic identities identified more strongly with and responded more favorably towards advertisements with characters matching their own ethnicity. The relevance of this finding becomes clearer when advertisers consider evidence that ethnic identification is high among minority group members in the U.S. (Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu 1986). Thus, H1 is proposed:

> H1: African American consumers with higher levels of ethnic identification will perceive themselves more similar to African American characters in advertisements than consumers with lower levels of ethnic identification.

> Consumers' attitudes and behaviors are related to their identification with ads that contain ethnic cues (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995; Maldonado, Tansuhaj, and Muehling 2003). Compared to untargeted ethnic consumers, targeted ethnic consumers who identify with an ad based on its ethnic cues develop more positive views of that ad (Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier 2000; Forehand and Deshpande 2001; Grier and Brumbaugh 1999; Grier and Deshpande 2001; Pitts et al. 1989). Consumers evaluate an ad more positively when its actors/models are of similar ethnicity (Appiah 2001; Green 1999; Whittler 1989; Williams and Qualls 1989). Hence, H2 is tested:

> H2: African American consumers with higher levels of ethnic identification will have more positive attitudes toward African American character advertisements than consumers with lower levels of ethnic identification.

High vs. Low Involvement Products

In their Elaboration Likelihood Model (hereafter ELM) Petty & Cacioppo (1986a) posited that people form attitudes via two routes to persuasion: A central route, in which careful

and thoughtful consideration occurs for the true merits of the information presented in support of a message; and a peripheral route, in which some cue in the persuasion context permits attitude change without scrutinizing the message arguments. In our research, we expect that source characteristics (e.g., model's ethnicity) may serve as a peripheral cue and that it becomes more evident and influential for low involvement products.

The role of a model's race has been well researched and its role as a peripheral cue has been established (Whittler and Spira 2002). A study by Whittler and Spira (2002) explored the role of ethnicity in an advertising context based on the ELM and Social Categorization Theory. Their study examined minority viewers' use of ethnic cues on exposure to product advertising. In their study African American adults rated an advertisement that featured either a White or an African American model. Consistent with distinctiveness and ethnic identification theory, product and advertising evaluations were more favorable given an African American than a White model, but only for African American participants who identify strongly with their culture. African Americans who identified weakly with their culture evaluated the product and advertisement similarly given a White or an African American model. The results also showed that the African American model's ethnicity motivated African Americans, particularly those with strong racial attitudes, to process the message in a biased manner. In particular, the African American (versus White) model's ethnicity positively influenced the African American participants' thoughts about the product, which in turn yielded more favorable product evaluations.

The authors explored how the model's ethnicity, consistent with the ELM's contention, may play different roles (peripheral cue, increase the level of elaboration or as an argument). By collecting thought listing data and measuring both valence of thoughts and elaboration, they

found that model's ethnicity may influence persuasion in more than one way. Their research suggests that model's ethnicity can play two roles. In one role, model's ethnicity may operate as a peripheral cue. With respect to model's ethnicity, its role as a peripheral cue has been established in several past studies (e.g., Whittler, 1989; Whittler & DiMeo, 1991). Their study supports a second but limited role for model's ethnicity. In this second role, model's ethnicity may affect the direction of argument elaboration by producing a positive or negative motivational bias to related thoughts. This role is limited because it only emerged with racially sensitive viewers.

Whittler and Spira (2002) found that even though model's ethnicity can play different roles, it acts mainly as a peripheral cue. Whittler and Spira point out that "A key contention of the ELM is that the influence of central and peripheral processing on attitudes varies along a continuum from low to high levels of elaboration. As elaboration likelihood increases, the influence of centrally processed information increases, whereas the influence of peripheral cues declines. Typical ELM studies raise (lower) elaboration likelihood by increasing (decreasing) an individual's desire to produce an accurate judgment. This accuracy motivation presumably leads individuals in the high involvement condition to carefully process a persuasive message." They further argue that not incorporating product involvement in their study was a limitation of their research and suggest this as an important and crucial contribution to the literature "To better understand how a model's ethnicity influences African Americans' attitudes and related processing, future research could include such a manipulation. We argue that High-Identification African Americans are motivated to produce favorable thoughts and evaluations in response to a African American model, leading to biased processing. However, this motivation may (or may not) be depressed by a concurrent accuracy motivation (i.e., the manipulation) under high

involvement. Would High-Identification African Americans exhibit objective processing to arrive at an "accurate" judgment, or would they engage in biased processing stimulated by their feelings toward the African American model? Competing hypotheses may be tested in a controlled experiment. The results may shed some additional light on when and how model's ethnicity affects cognition and evaluations."

Our main objective in this study is to answer these questions by incorporating product involvement as a moderator. Even though researchers have studied the attitudinal differences between strong and weakly identified minority group members (Deshpande et al. 1986; Webster 1992; Koslow, Shamdasani, and Touchstone 1994, Deshpande and Stayman 1994; Whittler 1989; Whittler and DiMeo 1991; Whittler and Spira 2002) product involvement and differences between strong and weakly identified African Americans have not been explored in the literature. Ethnic identification should impact attitudes toward the ad, depending on the ethnicity of the character in the advertisement. The relationship between ethnic identification and ad character's ethnicity should be stronger for low involvement products where by definition fewer attributes are considered and as a result ethnicity can emerge as a more noticeable peripheral cue. In the case of high involvement products, ethnicity may not emerge as an important cue since the consumer considers more attributes.

We expect that:

H3: Involvement will moderate Aad, such that reactions to ads that use African American characters featuring low involvement products (vs. high involvement products) will be more positive as ethnic identification increases.

The concept of perceived similarity has also been well research in the marketing literature (Whittler, 1989; Webster 1990; Whittler and DiMeo 1991; Webster 1992; Deshpande

and Stayman 1994; Green 1999; Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier 2000; Appiah 2001; Whittler and Spira 2002). This line of research suggests an asymmetry in responses to targeted advertising depending on the numeric status of both the model in the advertisement and the viewer of the advertisement. "Because numerically rare traits like ethnicity have a greater influence on an individual's self-concept than do commonly held traits, perceived similarity between a viewer and a model in an advertisement should be stronger when the basis of that similarity is a distinctive versus nondistinctive trait. This heightened perceived similarity should result in stronger target market effects" (Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier 2000).

In the preceding discussion, it was suggested by distinctiveness theory that, as a result of being a numeric minority, ethnicity is extremely salient for African Americans. Also, the discussion on ethnic identification implied that strong African American identifiers because of their greater connection to their ethnicity may appreciate and feel more targeted by advertisements with African American models than African Americans with weaker ethnic identities. These behaviors are consistent with identification theory, which suggests that identification often occurs, when individuals infer that their taste and preferences are similar to the model in an advertisement. For high ethnic identifiers, ethnicity of the model should emerge as a distinctive peripheral cue and become a salient communication characteristic that better enable them to make similarity judgments as compared to low ethnic identifiers. According to the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo 1986a), consumers in a high-involvement situation tend to process more attributes whereas they pay greater attention to peripheral cues in a low-involvement situation. Ethnicity of the model in an advertisement is a peripheral element and should emerge as a more important cue when consumers are not highly involved with the ad message. Based on the overall discussion, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H4: There will be an ethnic identification x product involvement interaction, such that the difference in perceived similarity for advertisements that use African American characters between high involvement products and low involvement products will be greater as ethnic identification increases.

Method

The present study examines the role of source's ethnicity in persuasion and tries to determine whether viewers process messages differently depending on the model's ethnicity. The purpose of this study is to clarify the role of ethnicity in advertising by examining its influence on African Americans' message processing as well as its function as a peripheral cue. Based on our conceptual framework, the level of involvement of the product being advertised moderates the relationship between ethnic identification and advertising attitudes.

Design

The impact of the advertising model's ethnicity on post-exposure attitude toward ads of high and low involvement products was explored. The experiment employed a 2 (Ethnic identification: strong vs. weak) X 2 (involvement: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Level of ethnic identification and high vs. low involvement product were included in the analysis as independent variables. The two dependent variables were: perceived similarity to characters and attitude toward the advertisement.

Stimulus materials

To enhance external validity, real advertisements were used and digitally modified to vary only the product being advertised. A total of 10 African American models were pretested with a total of 47 respondents who did not participate in the study. Each model was rated for likeability (Erdogan, Baker and Tagg 2001), credibility (Erdogan, Baker and Tagg 2001) and

identification (respondents were asked to identify the ethnicity of the model). From the set of 10, two models more clearly representing African Americans were identified as being most strongly associated with this ethnicity and least associated with the other ethnicities by all respondents. Objectives in designing and pre-testing the ads included (1) achieving equivalence of the ads in everything except the product being advertised and (2) having the ethnicity of each model be recognizable. Because the ads were digitally modified to vary only the product category, we also pretested them for realism (Swanson and Kelley 2001) and selected those judged most realistic. These two models were used in our two experimental conditions: high involvement and low involvement product.

Every study participant was exposed to two treatment ads randomly sequenced. To avoid bias associated with using ads for existing products, fictitious brands –Excel car, Precise watch, Shine shampoo and Aqua soft drink—appeared in the test ads (see appendix). We pre-tested fictitious name brands and selected the ones that were perceived as more realistic (Swanson and Kelley 2001). Test ads were derived from real ads that were digitally modified. To enhance internal validity, only the product differed among ads; the same copy and model were included in all ads and the featured product was positioned similarly. The four ads were identical in their layout and their one line of copy: Made just for you. Four filler ads were included to disguise the purpose of our study and to avoid the artificiality of an uninterrupted sequence of ads with the same copy line. Filler ads included only products and brands. One was for an athletic shoe, perfume, coffee, and toothpaste.

Stimuli consisted of full-page color photographic advertisements for four products: Car and watch (high involvement) and soft drink and shampoo (low involvement). These four categories were identified in a study by Ratchford (1987). The author classified these four

categories in terms of high and low involvement. We also pre-tested these four products with a group of 41 subjects who responded to the Personal Involvement Inventory (Zaichkowsky 1985) and classified these products into high and low involvement. The mean involvement scores for the car and watch were 4.2 and 4.4 (on a 5-point scale) respectively and 1.9 and 2.3 for soft drink and shampoo respectively. T-tests show that the mean involvement scores for the car and watch differ significantly at the 0.05 level from the mean involvement scores for the soft drink and shampoo.

Four advertising types were created and placed in a fictitious magazine which included articles, test ads and filler ads. Each subject was randomly assigned a magazine containing only two of the four advertising types: (1) African American character advertisement of high involvement product (car); (2) African American character advertisement of high involvement product (watch); (3) African American character advertisement of low involvement product (shampoo); and (4) African American character advertisement of low involvement product (soft drink).

Sample

We had a sample of 487 respondents; however, respondents who identified with more than one ethnic group or did not belong to the group of interest (i.e. African American) were not included in the analysis. Only respondents that identified themselves as African American were included in the analysis. We controlled for the possibility of carry-over effects by counterbalancing the order of presentation of the stimulus ads (Smith 2000). We checked for demand effects by asking study participants to write what they thought the experimental hypotheses might be following exposure to the ads. Approximately one percent of study participants suggested ideas approximating the experimental hypotheses; their responses were

eliminated from the analysis.

We had a final sample of 216 African American respondents. Fifty-six percent of the African American participants were men, and 44% were women. Their ages ranged from 18 to 62 years (M= 33.4 and SD = 15.88). Education level: 36.7% of participants had not obtained high school degrees, 11.5% had attended college, and 5.2 obtained college degrees. Seventy-three percent of the participants earned between $10,000 and $39,999 a year; 22.5% earned between $40,000 and $79,999 a year.

Procedure

We used a non-student community sample. This sample was recruited at a driver's license office in a large southwestern urban area. Approximately 30% of those approached agreed to participate; the vast majority of those who declined cited time constraints. One well-trained researcher intercepted study participants outside a driver's license office during two weeks in the spring of 2007. To encourage participation, volunteers received a coupon to participate in a drawing for one of several prizes. Respondents were informed that the purpose of the experiment was to obtain reactions to current advertising from consumers. Subjects were assigned randomly to one of two treatment groups. Condition 1: Car and watch. Condition 2: shampoo and soft drink—made up the experimental advertisements while four other advertisements were used to disguise the purpose of the study. Subjects were individually given the fictitious magazine along with a questionnaire packet. Respondents were instructed to look at each advertisement answer the questions when they were ready. Most participants took less than 15 minutes to answer the questionnaire.

Dependent Measures

Perceived similarity. Respondents rated their degree of similarity to the model in terms

of overall lifestyle, cultural background, dress and appearance, and basic values (Whittler 1989). Responses were averaged over the four scales. Coefficient alphas were computed for each product: Car (alpha = .87), watch (alpha = .91), shampoo (alpha = .90), and soft drink (alpha = .82).

Attitude toward the advertisement (Aad). Following each advertisement, respondents rated their attitude toward the advertisement on eight 7-point semantic differential scales: irritating/not irritating, offensive/not offensive, appealing/not appealing, likable/unlikable, insulting/not insulting, boring/interesting, bad/good, and negative/positive. Responses were averaged over the eight scales. Coefficient alphas were computed for each product: Car (alpha = .92), watch (alpha = .89), shampoo (alpha = .86), and soft drink (alpha = .85).

Independent Measures

Ethnicity of participants. Subjects were asked to select from a list of ethnic groups. Subjects who identified with more than one ethnic group were not included in the analysis. Only those respondents who identified themselves as African American were included in the study.

Ethnic identification. This construct was assessed with the Multigroup Measure of Ethnic Identification (Phinney 1992). This scale was used since it has been tested in several studies reporting strong reliabilities and because it is applicable to diverse samples. Five statements assessing ethnic attachment, feelings about ethnic background, happiness with ethnicity, ethnic pride, and sense of ethnic belonging were used to measure strength of ethnic identification. Each item was measured using a 5-point scale. Responses were averaged over the five scales (alpha =.91).

Manipulation checks. Although we conducted a pretest in selecting the high- and low-involvement products with respondents that did not participate in our main study and we used

categories identified by Ratchford (1987) as high and low involvement, we also included a manipulation check measuring perceived involvement for each product category in our experiment. Respondents perceived significant differences in product involvement (F= 5.87, p < .001) between high (car and watch) and low involvement products (shampoo and soft drink).

Results

For each dependent variable (i.e., perceived similarity and Aad) we averaged the responses from the two advertisements in each condition (i.e., car/watch and shampoo/soft drink) so we were able to compare responses for high and low involvement products.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that consumers with higher levels of ethnic identification will perceive themselves more similar to African American characters in advertisements than consumers with lower levels of ethnic identification. We tested hypothesis 1 by regressing perceived similarity on ethnic identification. The overall model was significant (F = 5.01, p < .001; R^2 = .36). Results show that respondents with higher levels of identification perceived themselves significantly more similar to African American characters in all experimental conditions. Thus, supporting H1. Age, income and education level of respondents were included as control variables, but neither had major significant effects. Parameter estimates and associated statistics for this full model are shown in Table 1.

Place Table 1 near here

H2 predicts that consumers with higher levels of ethnic identification will have more positive attitude toward African American character advertisements than consumers with lower levels of ethnic identification. To test H_2, ethnic identification was used as the predictor variable in a simple regression on attitude toward the ad (Aad). Results showed that the model was

significant (F = 4.08, p < .001; R^2 = .31), as was the coefficient for ethnic identification (2.056 p < .001). This result suggests that for both, low and high involvement products, consumers with higher levels of ethnic identification rated advertisements with African American characters significantly higher than consumers with lower levels of identification. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is supported. Age, income and education level of respondents were included as control variables, but neither had any significant effects. Parameter estimates and associated statistics for this full model are shown in Table 2. Intercorrelations among relevant constructs are reported in Table 3.

Place Table 2 and 3 near here

We performed a median split on the summed ethnic identification items to compare the differences between those of higher and lower ethnic identification. Strong and weak African American identifiers scored either above or below the median. A 2 X 2 ANOVA revealed that the preference for African American character advertisements was higher for low involvement products than for high involvement products. Table 4 shows mean comparisons for our four cell groups (High involvement products/high ethnic identification, high involvement products/low ethnic identification, low involvement products/ high ethnic identification, and low involvement products/low ethnic identification). Table 5 shows that as predicted product involvement will moderate Aad, since African American character advertisements of low involvement products were rated significantly higher than African American character ads of high involvement products.. Consistent with H3, the interaction between product involvement and ethnic identification was significant (F = 2.24, p < .0001). Therefore, H3 is supported

Place Table 4 and 5 near here

Table 6 shows the results from a 2 X 2 ANOVA. As noted in Table 6, the interaction between ethnic identification and involvement is significant for perceived similarity (F= 4.98, p < .0001) and these results along with the mean comparisons for perceived similarity found in Table 4 support H4. In short, compared to weakly identified African Americans, strongly identified African Americans perceive themselves more similar to ads with African American characters in general especially when advertising low involvement products.

Place Table 6 near here

As can be seen in Figure 1, a Product involvement X Strength of ethnic identification interaction (F= 4.98, p < .0001) revealed that the ethnicity of the model had a significant impact on perceived similarity only for low involvement products.

Place Figure 1 near here

Discussion

These findings support identification theory that individuals prefer models based on perceived similarities between themselves and the model. For African Americans, ethnicity is a significant similarity cue. Membership in a numeric minority group causes African Americans to be more conscious of African American models in advertisements.

The results contribute to our understanding of distinctiveness and ethnic identification effects on advertising. The observed interactions between ethnic identification and product involvement contribute to the sparse research on ethnic advertising. By varying only the product being advertised in each experimental advertisement we tried to make sure that any differences in participants' responses to advertisements with African American models for low and high involvement products are attributed to product involvement and ethnicity-related variables.

Our findings show that strong African American identifiers perceived themselves more similar to African American characters in advertisements of low and high involvement products than did African Americans with low ethnic identification. Previous literature (Appiah 2001a) has also shown comparable results. Appiah (2001a) found that relative to weak African American identifiers, strong African American identifiers see themselves as more similar to and identify more strongly with African American characters in ads.

Our findings also demonstrate that African American subjects with high ethnic identification respond more favorably to advertisements of high and low involvement products than African Americans with low ethnic identification. Given that liking still increased for the high-involvement product for strongly-identified African-Americans, shouldn't advertisers use African-American models to target this group all the time? Based on our findings, advertisers targeting African American subjects with high ethnic identification will better off targeting these individuals when advertising both high and low involvement products. The important question becomes, how can advertisers in the real world target only strongly-identified African-Americans? Green (1999) found that relative to weak ethnic identifiers, strong ethnic identifiers (1) evaluate ads that feature a matching minority model more positively, and (2) have stronger purchase intentions for brand with ads that feature a matching minority model and (3) tend to read, watch and listen to more focused media that caters specifically to their own ethnic group. This means that to target strongly-identified African Americans advertisers should use media vehicles targeted specifically to African Americans (i.e. Essence, BET, Vibe, etc.).

As predicted by our hypotheses ethnic identification influences how African American subjects responded to ads targeted to them. We found that strongly identified African Americans prefer African American models especially when advertising low involvement products.

Consistent with both theoretical frameworks, distinctiveness theory and ethnic identification theory, advertising effects were more favorable for African American participants who identify strongly with African American culture than for those with weaker identities. For strongly identified African Americans, ethnicity is an important cue and emerges as a more noticeable peripheral cue when advertising low involvement products. As expected, the relationship between ethnic identification and ad model's ethnicity was found to be stronger for low involvement products where fewer attributes are considered. This is exactly what we see as our contribution. We have identified when model's ethnicity plays a bigger role in ad evaluations.

Limitations and Future Research

The results should be interpreted in light of limitations of the methods used. In addition to the common external validity concerns of all experiments, there could have been other possible confounding variables since our study is a quasi-experiment. Respondents did not have the same likelihood to participate in all the conditions of our study. In our quasi-experiment, like in most experimental research on advertising effects, the conditions surrounding exposure to the stimuli were not completely naturalistic. Viewing ads in a magazine and responding to a questionnaire does not necessarily simulate naturalistic exposure conditions. Given that the subjects were informed that the study was about evaluation of advertising and the fact they were given a book of stimulus ads might have primed the respondents to be more sensitive to the differences in ads as presented. Even so, we worked hard to make the stimulus ads as realistic as possible by modifying actual ads in a manner consistent with the theoretical constructs and to simulate naturalistic exposure conditions as nearly as possible given the inevitable constraints.

In our discussion on the ELM model, we note that for the case of low involvement, ethnicity can emerge as a more noticeable peripheral cue. It should be kept in mind however that

a variable can act three ways: it could act as a peripheral variable; it could act as an "argument", or it could act to raise the level of elaboration. In essence, then, there is always the possibility that ethnicity and the degree of ethnic identification could act to raise the level of elaboration rather than simply act as a peripheral cue. This could be the area for further research. Future research may look at the process consumers go through to reach different reactions to targeted advertising. Identifying this process could give us further insight of the role of ethnicity in advertising.

The advertising literature will benefit from future research in ethnic advertising. Future research should look at the effects of ethnic identification on other minority audiences such as Hispanics and Asian-Americans and also examine several other product categories. An interesting question relates to the extent to which these positive effects will increase or decrease over time. While we cannot predict whether ethnic identification will increase or decrease in some or all U.S. minority populations as the ethnic composition of the population changes, it is reasonable to suggest that the trends of this construct should be monitored by those making advertising decisions concerning visible minority targeting, as it clearly influences advertising responses, at least for low involvement products.

Our study used very limited cues (product category and model), which may raise external validity issues. These cues were somewhat simplistic. In an effort to isolate the effects of ethnicity we might have oversimplified our experimental advertising stimuli. We also used ads that are very similar to each other to avoid confounding effects of different backgrounds, model positioning, dress, etc. Future research should look at the effects of ethnic identification using additional cues since most advertisements have significantly more content than the ads used in our quasi-experiment. Future research might explore other of viewer/advertising matches like

gender, age, lifestyle, etc. Researchers should also explore the effects of brand prestige, brand meaning, language used, media placement, and other product characteristics that could further support the value of measuring the impact of ethnic identification. The effects of brand meaning should be specifically addressed since different brands mean different things to different segments. Some brands are so laden with meaning that they can have an overpowering effect on the results of a study. Researchers should be careful to not only take into account but also measure the effects that brand meanings can have.

Further research might be profitably directed to explore whether and when saturation/diminishing marginal returns might affect the responses to African American-targeted advertising. These are all issues in what is likely to be not only a rich area for research, but also one with significant practical implications as ethnic minorities continue to increase their share of the total U.S. population.

Managerial Implications

Keeping these limitations in mind, the results are nevertheless important to firms that wish to allocate financial resources as efficiently as possible. The key question investigated in this paper is whether African American-targeted advertising is beneficial for high and low involvement products. Based on our results, it is reasonable to conclude that African American-targeted advertising of low involvement products seems to be more beneficial. The strong/weak ethnic identification scheme allows the advertiser a segmentation basis that is substantial, as indicated by the fact that African American spending power is expected to grow to more than a $1023 billion by the year 2010 (Humphreys, 2007) and actionable, as indicated by identifiable differences in advertising preferences. These criteria indicate that the dimension of ethnic

identification is both theoretically interesting and practically relevant in marketing products to the African American population.

Since African Americans have the highest buying power of all minority groups and are expected to grow to more than 15 percent of the U.S. population by the year 2050 (U. S. Census Bureau 2007) our research seems practically relevant for advertisers marketing products to the African American population. Advertisers cannot miss the opportunity of understanding African American culture and targeting African American consumers more efficiently by allocating their ethnic advertising dollars to the marketing of low involvement products more aggressively since it seems to be a better investment based on our results.

For advertisers, this study provides two important guidelines for the design of advertising strategies. First, products must be designed particularly to appeal to African Americans when targeting Strongly African American identifiers: This is especially true of low involvement products. For example, a soft drink manufacturer seeking to expand into the Strong African American market should probably redesign its advertising campaign to include African American characters. In contrast, for high involvement products, such as automobiles, such tailoring of the advertising campaign may not be crucial.

Table 1

Effects of Ethnic Identification on Perceived Similarity

	Estimates	S.E.	t-values
Intercept	2.146	.174	3.894**
Ethnic Identification	1.983	.463	2.678**
Age	.106	.084	.268
Income	.047	.034	.176
Education level	.018	.015	.048
R^2	.39		
Adjusted R^2	.36		

*p<.10
**p<.001

Table 2

Effects of Ethnic Identification on Attitude toward the Ad

	Estimates	S.E.	t-values
Intercept	2.198	.123	4.231[*]
Ethnic Identification	2.056	.659	2.981[*]
Age	.089	.064	.516
Income	.032	.027	.389
Education level	.023	.019	.187
R^2	.35		
Adjusted R^2	.31		

[*] $p < .001$

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4
1. Identification	2.66	1.30	1.000	.024	.038	.297**
2. Income	.41	.48		1.000	.076	.019
3. Education level	.49	.49			1.000	.028
4. Mean Aad	3.71	1.56				1.000

**p < .001

Table 4

Mean responses for weak and strong African American identifiers

Dimension	Weak African American Identifiers		Strong African American Identifiers	
Involvement	Low	High	Low	High
Perceive similarity	3.27	2.84	4.91	3.28
Aad	3.46	2.98	4.88	3.50

Table 5

ANOVA of attitude toward the advertisement for strong and weak African American identifiers and for low and high involvement products

| Source	Mean	F	df
Strong vs.	3.01		
Weak African American identifiers	2.11	4.61*	1
High vs.	2.39		
Low involvement products	2.91	4.43*	1
Interaction: Ethnic Identification * Involvement		2.24*	1
SAAI – High involvement	3.50		
SAAI – Low involvement	4.88		
WAAI – High involvement	2.98		
WAAI – Low involvement	3.46		
Note: Significant effects (p<0.0001) have an asterisk (*)			

Table 6

ANOVA of perceived similarity for strong and weak African American identifiers and for low and high involvement products

Source	Mean	F	df
Strong vs.	3.25		
Weak African American identifiers	1.98.	4.81*	1
High vs.	2.10		
Low involvement products	3.12	4.72*	1
Interaction: Ethnic Identification * Involvement		4.98*	1
SAAI – High involvement	3.28		
SAAI – Low involvement	4.91		
WAAI – High involvement	2.84		
WAAI – Low involvement	3.27		
Note: Significant effects (p<0.0001) have an asterisk (*)			

Figure 1

Perceived similarity for High and Low Involvement Products
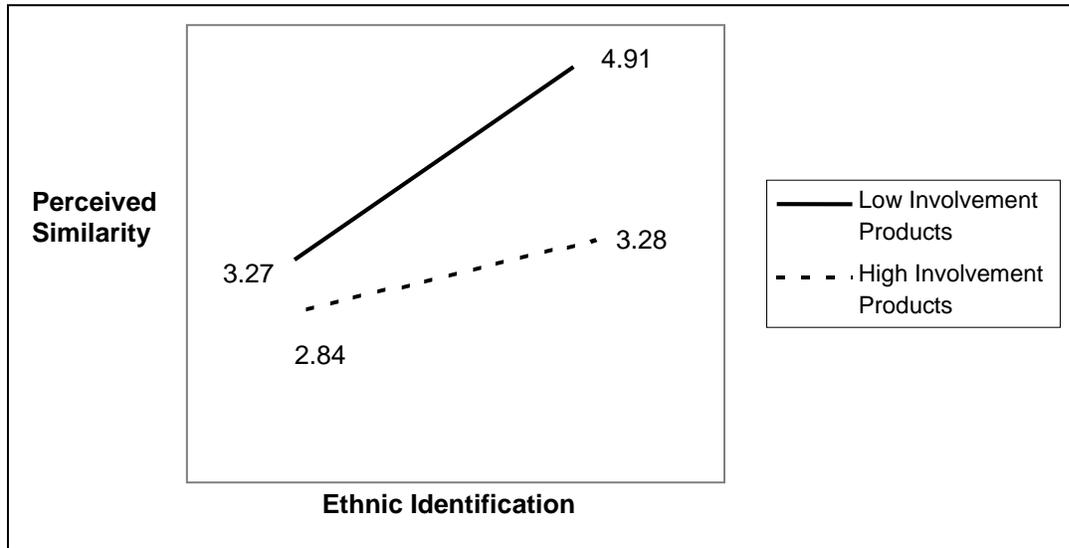
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