MULTICULTURALISM IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADS

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ABSTRACT

Evidence remains inconclusive on whether ethnic similarity between consumer and endorser leads to more positive ad evaluations. Studies have also found that an ethnicity match between endorser and consumer did not result in changes in ad evaluation and that some consumers prefer ads featuring endorsers from a different ethnicity. Extending previous research on Hispanic consumer perceptions of social media endorsers, this study investigates whether featuring multiple endorsers from different ethnic groups in an ad result in overall ethnic identification and follow the same patterns of brand and ad liking as when audiences are exposed to an ad with just one endorser of the same ethnic make-up.

Keywords: diversity, marketing, multiculturalism, ethnic identification, brand management

Models in ads signal who are the intended users of the product. Endorsers help consumers process information related to their own identity (Forehand & Deshpandé, 2001). That is, audiences evaluate ads depicting people that look like them more positively. An endorser's characteristics such as ethnicity (Sobh & Soltan, 2018), age (Alhabash et al., 2021), and body type (Pickett & Brison, 2019) have predicted attitude changes toward the brand, the ad, and purchase intentions. However, there is little diversity in ads (Chu, 2022).

The state of the industry is a sharp contrast from the makeup of the U.S. population. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that 44% of the U.S. population will be multicultural by 2030. Since consumers expect brands to align with their values, contribute to salient social issues (such as diversity), and are more likely to purchase from brands that take a stand for social issues, it is important to understand how to connect with consumers authentically while appealing to the population's diverse makeup. Failed attempts to connect with consumers via branded material results in perceptions of the brand being opportunistic, which contributes to consumers' overall advertising skepticism (Mundel & Yang, 2021; Yang & Mundel, 2021), and could lead to brand hate.

Individuals develop identification with social groups based on sharing similar values or experiences. At the most basic level, consumers are more likely to identify with—and accept recommendations from—other consumers because of perceived homophily (i.e., the extent to which individuals who participate in communication perceive they share common attitudes, values, aspirations, and beliefs with someone like themselves; Korzenny et al. 2017). In an initial study (Mundel &Yang, 2022), two antecedents to positive ad evaluation and subsequent

purchase intention among Hispanic consumers in the U.S. were identified: identification with endorsers in ads and perceived congruence or matchup between the endorser and the product. Manipulating perceived ethnicity of the endorser (i.e., Hispanic/White), results showed that identification with the endorser moderated Hispanics' responses to social media ads and purchase intentions. Furthermore, the study presented evidence for serial mediation indirect effects between exposure to Hispanic endorsers to purchase intentions through perceived product and endorser matchup to attitudes towards the ad.

However, evidence remains inconclusive on whether ethnic similarity between consumer and endorser leads to more positive ad evaluations. Studies have also found that an ethnicity match between endorser and consumer did not result in changes in ad evaluation (Antioco et al., 2012) and that some consumers prefer ads featuring endorsers from a different ethnicity (Brumbaugh, 2002).

Extending previous research (Mundel & Yang, 2022) this study will investigate whether featuring multiple endorsers from different ethnic groups in an ad result in overall ethnic identification and follow the same patterns of brand and ad liking as when audiences are exposed to an ad with just one endorser of the same ethnic make-up. Managerially, such findings would mean lower ad spend to reach different minority groups, maximizing return of investment. Theoretically, the study will help shed light into multicultural advertising, and extend the boundaries of the congruence framework.

Proposed method

The study would use a 3 (Endorsers Group: All white, multicultural, all Hispanic) x 2 (Audience: White vs. Hispanic consumers) factorial design. The study will be conducted via a Qualtrics survey, which will include demographic questions, measures related to ethnic identity, exposure to ads, and subsequent manipulation checks and rating of ad attitudes and purchase intention, as well as questions related to personality traits (e.g., uncertainty avoidance). Responses (N = 600) will be collected via Prolific, an online crowdsourcing platform with reliable data for consumer research like Amazon's Mechanical Turk.

To ensure the endorsers in ads used for the study are perceived to belong to their respective ethnic groups, a series of pretests will be conducted using independent samples. Endorsers will be selected for each condition based on similar ratings of attitude toward the endorser and significantly different ratings in perceived ethnicity. MANCOVAs and a serial mediation analysis will be used to analyze the data.

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