Consumer Response to Spokesperson’S Race: a Research Synthesis of Racial Similarity Effects in Advertising

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We conducted a meta-analysis of racial similarity effects in advertising. Our synthesis includes 84 statistically independent data sets, with responses from a total of 9,496 participants (3,232 African Americans and 6,264 Whites). Our results suggest that consumers exhibit more positive advertising evaluations when exposed to advertisements featuring similar-race models.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Following the civil rights movement, minorities were increasingly being portrayed in both television and print advertisements. Many researchers responded by investigating how White and African American consumers evaluate advertisements featuring models of different races. Some researchers examined how White consumers respond to advertisements featuring African American models (e.g., Bush, Gwinner, and Solomon 1974; Bush, Hair, Jr., and Solomon 1979; Hoon and Ramaprasad 2006; Whittler and DiMeco 1991).

Others assessed the advertising evaluations of African American consumers in response to ads featuring either White or African American models (e.g., Choudhury and Schmid 1974; Green 1999; Simpson et al. 2000; Whittler 1989; Whittler and Spira 2002). A third set of studies examined the advertising evaluations of both majority and minority consumers in response to integrated advertisements, featuring both White and African American models in the same ad (e.g., Barban 1969; Cagley and Cardozo 1970; Guest 1970; Perkins, Thomas, and Taylor 2000; Schmid 2000; Stafford, Birdwell, and Van Tassel 1970; Szybillo and Jacoby 1974).

The majority of extant findings suggest that consumers respond more favorably to ads that feature spokespersons of the same race as them (for a review, see Whittler 1991).

The Current Review

Using meta-analytic procedures we summarize extant advertising findings related to the effects of racial similarity (vs. dissimilarity) between source and participants. Furthermore, we investigate the conditions under which consumers may prefer racially similar (vs. dissimilar) endorsers, by examining various study characteristics (e.g., geographic region where data was collected), the demographic profile of participants, the methodological aspects of the studies (e.g., medium in which advertisements were presented), as well as additional variables of conceptual importance in this domain (e.g., the level of participants’ ingroup identification). We focus on the evaluations of African American and White consumers exposed to advertisements featuring either racially similar or dissimilar endorsers. Our synthesis includes 84 statistically independent data sets, each of which was treated as the meta-analysis unit. Collectively, these studies span forty years of research work in this domain, ranging from 1969 to 2009, and include data from a total of 9,496 participants (3,232 African Americans and 6,264 Whites).

Computation of Effect Sizes

The effect size metric selected for the analysis was the standardized mean difference (g), defined as the difference between the advertising evaluation means for participants exposed to majority spokespersons (i.e., White models) and those exposed to minority spokespersons (i.e., African American models), divided by their pooled standard deviation (see Hedges and Olkin 1985). As defined, an effect size with a positive (negative) sign implies that participants exposed to majority spokespersons exhibited more positive (negative) advertising evaluations than participants exposed to minority spokespersons.

Major Findings

We found that participants of both races evaluated ads featuring same-race spokespersons more favorably than ads featuring different-race models. Specifically, using fixed-effects assumptions, the weighted mean effect size for studies with African American participants was: $d = -0.53$ (CI = -0.60, -0.45, k = 36), and for studies with White participants the weighted mean effect size was: $d = 0.15$ (CI = 0.10, 0.20, k = 48).

Effect of Participant Characteristics. The gender composition of samples was significantly related to $d$s for African American studies ($\beta = 0.44, p < .001$), but not for studies with White participants ($\beta = 0.09, p = .24$). Specifically, the weighted mean effect size for studies with male African American participants, $d = -1.31$ (CI = -1.53, -1.09, k = 36) was almost seven times as large as that of studies with female African American participants, $d = -0.19$ (CI = -0.31, -0.08, k = 36). The mean age of participants was also significantly related to $d$s for African American studies ($\beta = 0.17, p < .01$), but not for studies with White participants ($\beta = 0.03, p = .73$). Specifically, younger African American participants were much more in favor of their ingroup ($d = -0.68$, CI = -0.81, -0.55, k = 36) than older African American participants ($d = -0.31$, CI = -0.48, -0.14, k = 36).

Effect of ingroup identification. The level of participants’ ingroup identification was significantly related to $d$s. This effect was larger for studies with White participants ($\beta = 0.57, p < .001$), than for studies with African American samples ($\beta = 0.40, p < .001$). Participants of both races reported a larger preference for ads featuring same-race spokespersons when they identified highly with their ingroup, than when they had a low level of ingroup identification. Specifically, the weighted mean effect size, $d = -0.95$ (CI = -1.12, -0.78, k = 8), for studies with African American participants that were high in ingroup identification is more than twice as large as that observed for participants with low levels of ingroup identification, $d = -0.41$ (CI = -0.58, -0.24, k = 8). Similarly, the weighted mean effect size, $d = 0.64$ (CI = 0.48, 0.81, k = 8), for studies with White participants who were high in ingroup identification is more than four times as large as that observed for participants with low levels of ingroup identification, $d = -0.15$ (CI = -0.01, 0.31, k = 8).

Effect of Major African American Events. We tested the effect of the valence of major events in Black history during the year of data collection on effect sizes. Major African American events were significantly related to $d$s for studies with African American participants ($\beta = 0.20, p < .001$), but not for studies with White participants ($\beta = 0.05, p = .52$). Major historical events during the year of data collection which had favorable outcomes for African Americans (e.g., the Voting Rights Act of 1965) were associated with a greater preference for ads featuring Black models ($d = -0.61$, CI = -0.69, -0.52, k = 7) than were negative events such as the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, which were associated with a lower preference for ads featuring Black models ($d = -0.34$, CI = -0.47, -0.20, k = 29) supporting our third hypothesis.
REFERENCES
(Articles Included In The Meta-Analysis Are Denoted With An Asterisk)


