TARGETING ETHNIC MINORITIES

INTERGENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMER RESPONSE TO TARGETED ADVERTISING

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Publication Date: September 2013
ESOMAR Publication Series Volume C13 CON
ISBN 92-831-0268-1
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Published by ESOMAR, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands
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INTRODUCTION
In recent decades, our societies have grown more diverse and multicultural. In response, reaching minority consumers has emerged as a priority for marketing, and specific targeting strategies have appeared. For instance, advertisers often attempt to approach minority consumers when their ethnic identity is most salient. Targeted ads typically feature spokespeople or models with the same ethnic background as the target, as well as other cultural cues. These strategies presuppose that ethnic groups are homogeneous. Yet, even within a single minority, not all consumers identify with their host and heritage cultures to the same degree. Generational status—whether a person was born in another country and relocated to the host country, or rather was born in the country their parents had relocated to—is one factor likely to affect the effectiveness of these targeting approaches.

Second-generation minority consumers constitute a growing demographic. They are more likely to identify as biculturals: meaning that their ethnic identity can change depending on the context they find themselves in. Because of this, the impact of attempts to activate ethnic identity should be stronger in these consumers than in first-generation minority consumers, whose ethnic identity is chronically accessible. In addition, because of the relative weakness of ethnic identity in second-generation consumers, spokespeople with the same heritage should have less of a positive impact on them than on first-generation consumers. In other words:

- Ethnic identity activation should have a more positive impact on responses to ethnic ads among second-generation than first-generation minority consumers
- Ethnic spokespersons should have a more positive impact among first-generation than among second-generation ethnic minority consumers

The goal of this research is twofold: first, investigate whether these two effects are found in the field, and second, determine how to best reach a particular target by taking into account its generational profile.

METHODOLOGY
In order to reach this goal, two studies were conducted in the field in two major ethnic communities present in the Netherlands. Both studies relied on a semi-experimental design.

Participants in the first study included 106 consumers of Chinese heritage living in a major Dutch city and were approached through professional and civic organizations, as well as through other participants. Fifty-two participants (42% male, mean age: 38.3 years old) were first-generation Chinese immigrants while 54 (57% male, mean age: 23.4 years old) were born in the Netherlands to Chinese parents. Participants were randomly assigned to either the ethnic prime or the control condition and presented with a paper booklet containing four print advertisements that they were asked to evaluate. One of these ads featured a female Chinese model acting as a spokesperson for a telephone service provider. In the ethnic identity prime condition, this stimulus was immediately preceded by an advertisement of the Hong Kong Tourism Board featuring Chinese cultural symbols (e.g., a dragon, young girls in traditional dress, etc.). In the control condition, no culturally specific images were shown. The other advertisements were fillers. Respondents’ attitudes towards, and identification with, the Chinese spokesperson were measured through 6- and 3-items scales respectively.

Participants in the second study were 270 consumers of Turkish heritage living in a major Dutch city. The mean age was 35.89 years old; 52% were female. One hundred forty-three participants (53%, mean age: 41.52 years old) were first-generation Turkish immigrants while 127 (47%, mean age: 29.51 years old) were born in the Netherlands to Turkish
parents. Participants were approached at their home and completed a paper or online questionnaire. Twenty-two percent of the participants filled in the questionnaire online; there was no significant effect of response medium on the dependent variables. Six respondents were deleted from the sample because of missing data. Respondents were asked to rate an advertisement for a charity, the charity itself, their willingness to support it and the spokesperson. The heritage of the spokesperson featured in the advertisement was manipulated: he was assigned either a Turkish (“Ali Oztürk”) or a Dutch name (“Frank de Jong”). The stimuli were otherwise completely identical. Identification with the host and the heritage culture was measured using the Vancouver Acculturation Index (VAI), a scale that takes into account the bi-dimensional nature of acculturation and can be adapted to different ethnic groups. The VAI considers identification with both the host and the heritage culture and does not assume that the two are negatively correlated.

RESULTS

First study
As expected, the analysis revealed a significant interaction effect between ethnic prime and generational status on attitude towards the spokesperson. First- and second-generation respondents were affected differently by the prime: when exposed to the ethnic identity prime, the attitude towards the ethnic spokesperson was similar in first and second-generation respondents. However, when not exposed to the prime, attitude was significantly lower for second than for first-generation individuals. Similarly, there was a significant interaction effect between ethnic prime and generational status on identification: identification with the spokesperson was similar in first and second-generation respondents when they were exposed to the ethnic prime, but significantly lower for second- than for first-generation individuals when they were not.

Second study
In the second study, the analysis revealed a significant interaction effect between generational status and spokesperson heritage on attitude towards the ad, indicating that the effect of spokesperson heritage varied significantly according to the person’s generational status. For first-generation participants, attitude towards the ad was more positive when the spokesperson had a Turkish name than a Dutch one - but the opposite was true of second-generation participants, who rated the ad with a Dutch spokesperson higher than the ad with a Turkish spokesperson. The analysis revealed very similar interaction effects on attitude towards the organization, attitude towards the spokesperson and willingness to support the charity.

As expected, first-generation participants identified more strongly with Turkish culture than second-generation participants, whereas second-generation participants identified more strongly with Dutch culture than first-generation participants. A mediation analysis was conducted 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. Strength of identification with the host culture, however, did not mediate the effect.

RECOMMENDATIONS
In today’s multicultural societies, targeted advertising constitutes an important tool for marketers. These two studies have shown that generational status constitutes an important boundary condition for two popular targeted advertising strategies, and that the strength of the target’s identification with his or her heritage culture should be taken into account when choosing an ethnic targeting strategy.

Reaching minority consumers when their ethnic identity is salient
In the first study, we saw that the responses of second-generation, bicultural consumers who can switch from one identity to the other tend to be more affected by attempts to activate their heritage identity than first-generation consumers. Advertisers should take this into account and consider the context in which the communication will appear. When looking to use ethnic appeals targeting the second-generation population, advertisers should benefit from doing so in a context in which the target’s ethnic identity is salient - say, when they are at home rather than at work or school. When targeting these consumers, it is important to choose the right cultural context given that they are likely to be less sensitive to ethnic appeals if their ethnic identity is not activated. In contrast, context is likely to make less of a difference for first-generation consumers.

Featuring spokespersons or models with the same heritage as the target
The results of the second study show that generational status significantly affects responses to targeted advertising featuring same-ethnicity spokesperson, and that this effect takes place through acculturation. Interestingly, the decisive mediating factor is not the strength of identification with the host culture, but rather the strength of identification with the heritage culture. Since second-generation minority consumers’ identification with their heritage culture was weaker on average, they reacted less positively to spokespersons who shared the same heritage as themselves. Because of this, the
strategy that consists in featuring same-ethnicity spokespeople in advertising was only beneficial among first-generation consumers. In fact, in our study we found a negative effect for second-generation consumers. We speculate that the negative effect among second-generation consumers in this particular case may be connected to negative stereotypes about the ethnic minority in the mainstream culture. Advertisers should keep these differences in mind when deciding on the most appropriate spokesperson or model for their campaign: when targeting the second-generation, particularly if it is well integrated, picking a person with the same heritage as the target may in fact backfire.

**Conclusion**

In addition to serving as a warning regarding the dangers of holding simplistic assumptions about the relative homogeneity of ethnic minorities, these results also have more specific implications. In a world of increasing ethnic diversity, they will hopefully help advertisers pick an effective ethnic targeting strategy and contribute to the development of targeted advertising practices that better take into account the complexity of today’s ethnic identities.

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