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Ethnic media advertising effectiveness, influences and implications

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity is the norm in today's society, and past research has shown that ethnic cues in advertisements are effective in targeting ethnic consumers. This study extends this research stream by examining how ethnic identity impacts ethnic consumers' perceptions of advertising in ethnic versus mainstream newspapers. The results show that ethnic consumers with higher ethnic identity have more positive responses towards advertisements with ethnic cues, particularly when the advertisements appear in ethnic newspapers. By contrast, for the same advertisements, mainstream media appears less effective in eliciting positive responses. Ethnic consumers with higher ethnic identity are also more likely to purchase and recommend products advertised in ethnic media. These findings offer insights to marketers and businesses who are targeting ethnic consumers. They shed light on when and how to use ethnic cues, particularly in ethnic media, in order to achieve desirable marketing and communication strategies that target ethnic consumers.

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1. Introduction

Immigration and cross-border movements of people have led to many countries possessing a culturally diverse population. In turn, this diversity presents opportunities and challenges to marketers who are targeting ethnic minority consumers (Jamal, 2003). Minority ethnic consumers refer to individuals who are affiliated with particular ethnic groups that are distinct from the mainstream population (Pires and Stanton, 2000; Pires et al., 2011). Ethnic consumer behaviour can be determined by its ethnic and cultural background, and the pursuit of effective marketing strategies to target ethnic consumers is increasingly challenging (Arnett, 2002; Cleveland et al., 2011; Moschis and Ong, 2011).

Take Australia for example, ethnic Chinese in Australia is a large ethnic minority group (ABS, 2016). On its own, Western mass media may be inadequately equipped to target and reach these consumers due to the diverse ethnic dimensions, such as race and background, languages, religion, customs and values (Cui, 1997; Cui and Choudhury, 2002; Elliot et al., 2013). Indeed, numerous studies have shown that, compared to the mainstream population, ethnic consumers have different consumption patterns, media usage and response patterns toward marketing activities (Dimofte et al., 2010). Consequently, ethnic media offer a powerful avenue for reaching ethnic individuals, especially with those who are less fluent with the mainstream language (Cleveland et al., 2012; Cui, 1997; Mokhlis, 2009; Webster, 2011).

Moreover, previous studies have indicated that consumers form behaviours from how they process information (Hasson et al., 2015; Heckler and Childers, 1992; Sasaki et al., 2011). Advertisements with a cultural context, such as ethnic cues and text, have a unique message delivery impact on ethnic consumers' buying behaviour (Khan et al., 2015; Torres and Luna-Nevarez, 2012; Williams et al., 2004). While ethnic consumers may not possess particular product preferences and features, they tend to respond to, or at least take notice of, advertisements in ethnic media that are congruent with their ethnic and cultural heritage.

However, studies into ethnic consumer behaviour invariably assume that all ethnic consumers possess the same degree of ethnic affiliation. In other words, they all self-identify with their ethnicity to similar degrees. By contrast, sociology research has affirmed that a person's *felt* ethnic identity does not necessarily relate to his or her ethnic or cultural background (Baljaev, 2012; Branch, 2001; Nagel, 1994; Phinney et al., 2001). Not considering the impact of how one identifies with his or her own ethnicity would make findings into ethnic consumer behaviour inconclusive, or even misleading. Therefore, this begets the following questions that this study seeks to answer:

1. How does ethnic identity influence ethnic consumers' perceptions of the characteristics of ethnic media?
2. How does the presence of ethnic cues in ethnic-media or mainstream-media advertisement influence ethnic consumers' perceptions of the advertisement and choice of media? How does this influence vary across consumers with different degrees of ethnic identity?

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3 How does ethnic identity influence ethnic consumers' purchase and recommendations of products advertised in ethnic media?

Besides melding research in ethnic marketing and sociology, this study provides an implementable guide for marketers and businesses to develop marketing communication strategies that appeal to ethnic consumers, particularly in countries with a large multicultural population. The findings also enable marketers to recognise the circumstances under which ethnic-media advertising may be effective, as well as when the use of ethnic cues in advertisements is appropriate.

2. Conceptual development

Ethnic media play an important role in a culturally diverse host country, including the political, cultural, social and economic and lifestyle of the ethnic community (Sun, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2015). For example, Chinese-language newspapers in Australia reflect, represent and advocate the overall interests of the ethnic Chinese communities. Ethnic newspapers perform several overlapping roles, including offering information and news in ethnic language, providing contacts and sustaining association with the ethnic community, and assisting adaptation to the host country (Sun and Sinclair, 2016). In the following sections, hypotheses are presented regarding how ethnic consumers may perceive advertisements in ethnic versus mainstream newspapers, and how these perceptions depend on the degree that ethnic individuals identify with their own ethnicity.

Ethnic individuals' self-distinctiveness and social identity are portrayed by their ethnic identity (Cleveland et al., 2011). Research has shown that self-distinctive ethnic consumers own not only physical characteristic distinctiveness, but also psychological feelings and attachment to their ethnic group. Extending this proposition to a marketing context implies that ethnic consumers would prefer an advertisement in ethnic media than in mainstream media, as they can identify more closely with the language and contents of the ethnic media (Aaker et al., 2000; Bartikowski and Walsh, 2015; Grier and Deshpande, 2001; McGuire et al., 1978). It also means that ethnic consumers who identify more highly with their ethnicity may respond more positively to such targeted appeals than ethnic consumers who relate less to their own ethnicity.

The conception of self-distinctiveness also relates to the social distinctiveness theory (McGuire and Padawer-Singer, 1976; Leonard et al., 2008; Rios and Wheeler, 2010), which asserts that an individual's self-distinctiveness characteristics are more prominent when the individuals are the numerical minority in the society. Thus, ethnic consumers who are minorities in a pluralistic environment tend to take more notice of people and things with the same minority ethnicity. Therefore, our first hypothesis is:

H1. The higher the ethnic identity of ethnic consumers, the more they prefer an advertisement in ethnic newspapers than the same advertisement in mainstream newspapers.

Studies have shown that ethnic consumers notice and have a positive response to ethnic cues in advertisements (Dimofte et al., 2003; Khan et al., 2015; Torres and Luna-Nevarez, 2012). By raising the salience of ethnic consumers, cultural cues such as ethnic language, symbol or model are effective in influencing ethnic consumers (Appiah and Liu, 2009; Chang, 2014; Cui et al., 2012; Sameti and Khalili, 2017). For example, Green (1999) shows that the presence of an ethnic spokesperson in an advertisement raised ethnic consumers' liking for the advertisement as well as the advertised product. Cui et al. (2012) further show that Chinese consumers are intrigued by the images of Chinese ethnic models rather than Caucasian models in advertisements. Even the mere presence of a spokesperson of the same ethnic background in an

advertisement can heighten the trustworthiness and interest in the advertised product (Deshpande and Stayman, 1994). Drawing from the above findings, we therefore hypothesise that:

H2. The higher the ethnic identity of ethnic consumers, the more they prefer an advertisement with an ethnic cue in ethnic newspapers than the same advertisement in mainstream newspapers.

Because ethnic consumers who can self-identify with the cultural values in information and communication sources are more likely to respond favourably to the sources, advertisements with ethnic cues may persuade ethnic consumers to increase their behavioural consumption (Butt and de Run, 2011; Lin and Lu, 2010; Teng and Laroche, 2007). Ethnic consumers' buying decision and perceived value of products may be affirmed by cultural familiarity, symbolic attributes and situational usage (Aaker et al., 2001; Chattaraman et al., 2009; Segev et al., 2014). In other words, their positive perceptions extend from liking the ethnic advertising to liking the ethnic media containing the advertising as well as the advertised products. Hence corollary to hypothesis H2, we contend that:

H3. The higher the ethnic identity, the more likely that ethnic consumers will (a) purchase products advertised in ethnic newspapers and (b) recommend products advertised in ethnic newspapers.

H4. The higher the ethnic identity, the more favourable the perceptions of ethnic media.

3. Method and analysis

Intercept surveys were conducted in Adelaide Chinatown precinct, where the Chinese community often congregate. An author of this study approached people with ethnic Chinese appearance as they exited Chinese supermarkets. The conversation took place in Mandarin to ensure that the participants were of Chinese ethnicity. Only participants who confirmed that they had read ethnic Chinese newspapers at least once within the last month qualified for the survey. The final sample comprised of 122 ethnic Chinese participants, with 52 males and 70 females.

All participants completed a two-part questionnaire with the interviewer on a one-by-one basis to improve the accuracy of the responses. The first part captured the degree of ethnic identity, ethnic media perceptions, and consumption and advertising responses. The conceptualisation of ethnic identity was based on Phinney et al. (2007) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R), a 6-item scale that captured the degree of attachment, belonging and understanding of an ethnic group. Perceptions of ethnic media were captured via six characteristics (honest, trustworthy, informative, relevant, up-to-date, and entertaining) on a 7-point scale. Consumption and advertising responses were assessed using single items by participants self-reporting their past purchase and recommendation behaviour after viewing advertisements in ethnic media.

The second part of the questionnaire showed four pairs of advertisements, one pair at a time, and participants were asked to select the preferred advertisement within each pair. In developing the second part, actual advertisements of two brands were used: BMW car as a high-involvement product and L'Oréal shampoo as a low-involvement consumer good product. The advertisements were digitally manipulated into digital versions of two newspapers: (1) The Advertiser (<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au>) a mainstream South Australian daily newspapers and (2) The I Age News (www.iage.com.au), a popular Chinese ethnic newspapers that is widely and freely available in all Chinese supermarkets in the China town precinct. The pages containing the inserted advertisements were then printed out and shown to participants as they

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