Ethnic advertising: adolescents’ attitudes towards target and non-target advertisements

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Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to explore attitudinal and behavioural differences between target and non-target groups of ethnic advertisements. It seeks to expand the existing body of knowledge by investigating these differences from the perspective of young consumers in an Eastern context. This helps in testing the established theories of distinctiveness and cultural schemas in an Eastern society.

Design/methodology/approach – The study sample consists of 1,600 randomly selected adolescents from different states of Malaysia. Data were analysed using MANOVA, ANOVA and t-test to explore the group differences between adolescents based on their ethnicity and advertisement type.

Findings – The results indicate a significant group difference between target and non-target respondents to the advertisement. It also shows that ethnicity is a viable target variable for both majority and minority ethnic groups in Malaysia.

Research limitations/implications – Although there are many ethnic groups in Malaysia this research only investigated two ethnic groups. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to other ethnic minority groups in Malaysia.

Originality/value – The study explores the possibility of using ethnicity as a target variable for adolescents in an Eastern context. It investigates the issue in a holistic manner by incorporating views from target as well as non-target groups.

Keywords Ethnic groups, Target markets, Adolescents, Malaysia, Attitudes, Behaviour

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Ethnic marketing research is driven by the assumption that ethnicity can affect a wide range of consumer behaviour, such as eating habits, music, dressing preferences and choices in leisure activities (Bocock, 1993; Burton, 2000). Past research also suggests that these behaviours can be stimulated, enhanced and further reinforced by communicating on ethnic lines (de Run, 2007; Deshpande and Stayman, 1994; Koslow et al., 1994). One common way to achieve this objective is by incorporating cultural and ethnic cues such as language, using an ad model of similar ethnic background, symbols or any combination of these in their communication strategy (Appiah, 2001).

Despite its practical relevance and contemporary application in Eastern multi-ethnic societies, ethnic targeting remains on the fringes of academic research. Most Eastern societies would be suitable for multi-ethnic marketing. However, theoretical development in this vital area of market and academic research is limited. Two important gaps in past research justify this argument. First, research on ethnic marketing was mostly conducted in Western societies. Their findings need not be applicable to Eastern societies unless they possess proper theoretical and conceptual validation (SteenKamp and Baumgartner, 1998).

Second, research on ethnic advertising was generally focused on adult groups. Therefore, it is not appropriate to generalize these findings to other demographic groups, based on gender, income, education, age, or socio-economic status. Past research suggests that age
is an important moderating factor affecting consumer response to marketing initiatives (Wakefield and Baker, 1998). On the other hand, from a purely marketing perspective, age is one of the most viable segmentation variables that can help in easily identifying, measuring and approaching a target segment.

Globally one out of six humans living on this earth belongs to the age group between 15 and 19 years (Ellssa, 2000). This demographic segment represents the stage of adolescence in human life. Adolescence is commonly referred to as an age group, between the onset of puberty until adulthood (Pechmann and Knight, 2002; Pechmann et al., 2005). Research indicates that weak impulse control and lack of maturity in adolescents contribute towards their risky behaviour (Cauffman and Steinberg, 1995). Adolescents exhibit higher self-consciousness, feel more embarrassment, and are subject to the highest peer influence compared to other age groups (Larson et al., 2002; Pechmann et al., 2005; Steinberg and Scott, 2003). These psychological weaknesses generally make them vulnerable to marketing stimuli and a principal target for advertisers (Gwynne, 1995; Karpatkin and Holmes, 1995). Advertising can to “fill up” these personality gaps in adolescents, who are desperate to look better, more sexually attractive and more impressive (Masten, 2004; Pechmann et al., 2005). Past research also suggest that teenagers selectively incorporate some views from advertising that fits with their perception of reality (Winham and Haml, 2008). These findings support the argument that advertising does have a substantial impact on their attitudes and behaviours.

It is because of these reasons that much advertising research on adolescents was focused on its role in promoting anti-social behaviour, particularly cigarette and alcohol consumption (Jackson, 1997; Pechmann and Knight, 2002; Worden et al., 1998). Others focused on the unintended impact of models’ beauty on adolescent self-esteem and their ability to process socially and physically threatening communication (Martin and Bush, 2000; Schoenbachler and Whittler, 1996). However advertisements can be a important and valuable source that facilitates learning of rational consumer behaviour in adolescents.

The exact economic value of this global teen segment is not known, but some estimates indicate an annual market size of more than a hundred billion dollars in the USA (Boush et al., 1994; Ellssa, 2000). Adolescents are indispensable for the firms seeking a healthy present and a secure future in the contemporary consumption world. However, reaching this teen segment is not a straightforward issue. It requires a profound understanding of a multi-mode teenage culture that is truly inspired from global, as well as local values of a society (Ellssa, 2000). These findings suggest adolescents’ significance as a separate but commercially viable demographic group, supplemented by their unique psychological structure that could not be confused with adults or children. Thus it will be highly inappropriate to assume that the research findings for adults will be applicable to this group as well. However, to investigate the effectiveness of an ethnic targeting strategy one needs to explore the issue from multiple contextual dimensions such as the impact of the status of an ethnic group and the reaction of the target as well as non-target groups. This research will explore the effects of ethnic advertising on target and non-target adolescents from majority and minority groups. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: first there is an examination of the relevant literature; then methodology and findings; followed by discussion of the findings and conclusion of the research.

**Literature review**

**Targeting young consumers**

Marketers’ interest in the younger consumers has a twofold objective. First, the young consumers are increasingly proving themselves as a lucrative target market. Their commercial value is partially based on beliefs that their behaviour and attitudes predict future changes in social and cultural values of a society (Boush et al., 1994; Sellers, 1989; Widdicombe and Woffitt, 1995). Second, it is believed that their existing consumption patterns have a profound effect on their future behaviour (Guest, 1955). Finally research also suggests that they perceive themselves as exerting a greater level of influence on family
purchasing decisions and it is increasingly becoming difficult for marketers to ignore their influence (Bleach et al., 1985; Chavda et al., 2005; Ellssa, 2000; Robertson and Rossiter, 1974).

To exploit the benefits of targeting the adolescent group, a marketer needs to understand the relevance and applicability of possible targeting variables. One of the possible targeting strategies for younger consumers in a multi-ethnic society could be communicating with them on ethnic lines. This is possible due to the fact that ethnicity emerges as an important and salient variable during the adolescence stage of human life (Phinney, 1990). Past research also suggests that ethnicity can be used as an effective targeting strategy for African American adolescents (Appiah, 2001). However, it was never empirically demonstrated within an Eastern context that ethnicity can be a useful target variable to persuade young consumers from different ethnic backgrounds. This study explores this possibility by investigating the relevance of ethnicity as a targeting variable for young consumers in multi-ethnic Malaysia society. However, much of the past research in the West suggests that ethnicity is more relevant for targeting minority ethnic groups (Burton, 2000). Nevertheless, few have demonstrated that the social status of an ethnic group could also generate a heightened sense of ethnic identity in an ethnic group with a numerical majority (Grier and Deshpande, 2001). Therefore it is important to explore the relevance of ethnic targeting for both majority and minority group adolescents.

Ethnic marketing is also considered as a mine field for advertisers, where the advertiser’s are less aware of the cultural sensitivity of their intended target and non-target groups. A history of marketing blunders in the past suggests that an in-depth understanding of target as well as non-target groups is vital for any successful targeting strategy. Previous research indicates that viewers, who believe that they are not the intended target of an advertisement feel irritated, distracted, ignored and even offended (Aaker et al., 2000; Greco, 1989; Lipman, 1991; Star, 1989). These feelings of dissimilarity, being ignored and irritated can generate negative effects towards the advertisement, advertiser, product, and could subsequently effects purchasing intentions (Brumbaugh and Grier, 1999; de Run, 2006; de Run and Fah, 2006). The significance of managing the non-target group reaction is critical when the company has the intention to target multiple ethnic groups with the same brand of product or services.

The possibility of generating unintended negative effects increases when cues in an advertisement are incongruent with the viewers’ needs, beliefs, or values (Aaker et al., 2000). It is also important to understand that the intensity of positive or negative reactions is subject to the capacity of a particular advertisement in generating clear perceptions of targeting and not targeting a particular group. The strength of this feeling of being targeted or not is dependent on the meaningfulness of the variable used to persuade a specific ethnic group (Brumbaugh, 1997). Ethnic advertising usually presents ethnic cues based on exiting cultural models or schemas of its intended target groups. Cultural schemas work as fundamental elements to formulate a cultural model shared by group members and are less likely to be understood by outsiders (D’Andrade, 1987). They act as a proxy for understanding the real world and can be activated on the prevalence of relevant cues (Casson, 1983; Singh, 2004).

The theory of cultural schemas suggest that the majority of ethnic group members only possess the cultural model of their own ethnic group and therefore are expected to generate more negative feelings towards an advertisement targeting other ethnic groups (Brumbaugh, 2002; de Run, 2007).

On the other hand the theory also suggests that minority group members have their own model, as well as the cultural model of the majority ethnic group and thus can possibly relate with the advertisement targeting a majority ethnic group. This should lead to similar reaction by the minority ethnic group towards an advertisement targeting the majority ethnic groups (de Run, 2007). However these theoretical constructs were never empirically established in an Eastern society for young consumers and the results in the West are also not conclusive.
Ethnic advertising

Long before incorporating the broader concept of ethnicity in advertising research, the area was somewhat rigorously studied in USA through the narrow lens of race. Past research has studied the effects of race on subject's attitude towards the advertisement by investigating the impact of using black models, celebrities and endorser in the advertisements (Barban, 1969; Block, 1972; Jackson et al., 1987; Bush et al., 1979; Whittler, 1989). However, it is an established fact that race can be the part of ethnic identity formation process but could not be used interchangeably with the much broader concept of ethnicity (Phinney, 2007).

The term ethnicity and its role in advertisement effectiveness first appeared in the seminal work of Deshpande et al. (1986). They found that Hispanic consumers with strong ethnic identity favour companies that use Hispanic media and language to advertise their products (Deshpande et al., 1986). Others who investigated on media preferences reported that Hispanics are more willing to search their ethnic media with which they can identify themselves (Webster, 1992; Torres and Briggs, 2007).

Some have investigated the effectiveness of using minority group language in advertisement and suggested a positive relation between use of language in print advertisement and its admiration by a target ethnic group (de Run, 2004; Fitch and Kauchak, 1990; Koslow et al., 1994). Others have investigated the correlation between ethnic advertisements and their placement in ethnic group television programs. Research found that the Spanish minority group could be persuaded more effectively if the Spanish language advertisement is embedded within a Spanish television program (Koslow et al., 1994; Roslow and Nicholls, 1996; Torres and Briggs, 2007).

Others have explored the impact of situational factors on the respondent's attitude towards ethnic advertisements. The term ‘situational ethnicity’ was coined to reflect how someone feels about his or her ethnicity in a particular context and its impact on attitudinal and behavioural intentions (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989; Torres and Briggs, 2007). Previous research has found that consumer responses to ethnic advertisement are influenced by the context in which the advertisement is placed (Wooten and Galvin, 1993). It was suggested that the context bound effect of ethnic advertising was due to its relevance to majority and minority status of an ethnic group. Past research indicated that subjects exposed to an ethnic advertisement reported an increase in their ethnic self-awareness when their ethnicity is distinctive in that context (Deshpande and Stayman, 1994).

The possibility of generating unintended effects has raised concerns regarding the overall effectiveness of the use of an ethnically targeting advertising strategy (Star, 1989). This led to a number of researchers attempting to measure the effect of target advertisements on target as well as non-target groups (Aaker et al., 2000; Brumbaugh, 1997; de Run, 2004; Grier and Brumbaugh, 2006). Their results suggest favourable responses towards target advertisement by distinct groups compared with non-distinct groups, and negative responses by both distinct and non-distinct groups towards non-target advertisement (Grier and Brumbaugh, 2006). Similar research in an Eastern context examining Malays and Chinese ethnic groups also supported the findings that non-target groups generally have a less favourable attitude towards ethnic advertisements (de Run, 2007).

Others explored the interaction of ethnic primes targeting Asians and Americans, and found that ethnic primes for distinct groups resulted in more favourable responses than majority groups. However, they also concluded that ethnic primes targeting minority groups generated negative responses from majority groups (Forehand and Reed, 2002; Torres and Briggs, 2007). Brett et al. (2004), while examining the effect of self-reference on Asians and White Americans found that advertisements consistent with the person salient dimension generated spontaneous self-reference, and a more positive attitude towards the advertisement and the model in that advertisement.

The issue of felt similarity and targeting was further examined in a complex experiment where the responses of different ethnic groups were measured towards advertisements targeting white, Asian and multi-ethnic groups. The results suggest that whites prefer and feel targeted towards advertisement depicting white culture whereas Asian and other ethnic
groups prefer multi-ethnic advertisements (Grier and Brumbaugh, 2006). Torres and Briggs (2007) in a rare attempt examined the interaction effect of ethnicity and participant’s level of product involvement. They found that ethnicity is a more useful variable for targeting low involvement products compared with high involvement products.

The review of literature on ethnic advertising justifies the need to explore this issue from an Eastern perspective. More importantly the review also suggests that the area was rarely investigated for younger consumers. Therefore this study will provide useful insight by investigating the younger consumer’s response towards ethnic advertisements in an Eastern context.

Theories of distinctiveness and cultural schemas

One measure of the effectiveness of any persuasion appeal is its ability of leading someone to similarity judgement between the source and his/her self (Aaker et al., 2000; Aaker and Williams, 1998; Williams and Qualls, 1989; Wooten, 1995). Similarity judgement is dependent on the meaningfulness of a variable used to generate such feelings (Aaker et al., 2000; Tajfel, 1981). A variable that is salient to oneself generates more similarity feelings as the individual’s distinct traits play a central role in his/her self-concept (McGuire, 1984; McGuire and Fujioka, 1978). Numerous past researchers in social psychology have advocated the role of distinctive characteristics in an individual’s self-concept (Cota and Dion, 1986; McGuire and Fujioka, 1978; McGuire and McGuire, 1979). Ethnicity is one such distinct characteristic for minority groups in a multi-ethnic society and it acts as a better targeting variable compared with majority ethnic groups (Deshpande and Stayman, 1994; Forehand and Deshpande, 2001; McGuire and Fujioka, 1978).

Nevertheless the study of ethnicity in a multi-ethnic society requires the understanding of issues beyond the numeric status of a group. Ethnic groups, being a social construct, can also feel salient about their ethnicity other than their prevalence in terms of the percentage of them in a society (Grier and Deshpande, 2001). Many have raised the question that ethnic groups are distinctive due to this numeric status or whether there are other sociocultural differences that are important (Abrams et al., 1990; Moscovici, 1975; Tajfel, 1981). Past research affirmed that a heightened sense of ethnic identity was possible in a numerical majority group, if they perceived themselves having a low social status or threatened by the progress of minority groups (Che-Beng, 2000; Grier and Deshpande, 2001).

In the Malaysian context, ethnicity could possibly serve as a salient and distinct characteristic for the majority group. Malays, being the dominant ethnic group, remain economically poor compared to other minority groups – particularly the Chinese who have been the backbone of the Malaysian private sector (Che-Beng, 2000). This has resulted in the doctrine of the New Economic Policy, an affirmative action that retains the economic balance in a multi-ethnic Malaysian society (Che-Beng, 2000). In Malaysia these realities create possibilities that the question of ethnicity as a salient variable might be answered somewhere outside the Western construct of dominant and non-dominant groups.

On the other hand, the theory of cultural schemas explores the issue from a cultural perspective. Culture is the knowledge regarding a set of beliefs, values and norms, shared and propagated by a particular group (Resnick, 1991). This conceptualization of culture allows the group members to act and think in a cohesive manner (Sharifian, 2003). Cultural conceptualizations can be grouped into two major categories, one being cultural schemas and the other can be called cultural categorization (Rumelhart, 1980; Sharifian, 2003). These schemas work as fundamental elements to formulate a cultural model shared by group members and are less likely to be understood by outsiders (D’Andrade, 1987). They act as a proxy for understanding the real world and can be activated on the prevalence of relevant cues (Casson, 1983; Singh, 2004).

In a multi-cultural society, members of a dominant group socialize in a single cultural model and the non-dominant groups socialize in both cultures due to both the mass media and their social interaction with the dominant group (Brumbaugh, 2002; de Run, 2007). This has serious implications on the impact of advertising, targeting majority or minority groups.
Research suggests that advertisements reflecting the dominant cultural models can activate similar cultural models in both the dominant and the non-dominant groups (de Run, 2007). Therefore, an advertisement targeting a majority group will have fewer chances of generating negative reactions from non-target groups. This means that Chinese adolescents have bi-cultural models and will respond favourably to advertisements that are targeting the majority ethnic group.

On the other hand, non-dominant group advertising could generate negative responses from the majority group as they do not have an understanding of the minority group’s culture. Nevertheless, results from previous research have failed to establish conclusive evidence regarding the negative attitude of dominant groups towards non-target advertisements (Brumbaugh, 1997; de Run, 2004; Grier and Brumbaugh, 2006). In the context of the existing study, Malays being the members of the dominant culture have only one cultural model and thus might respond negatively towards advertisement targeting Chinese adolescents.

This discussion now leads us to three hypotheses. The first hypothesis was established to investigate the positive effect of target advertisement for both majority and minority ethnic group adolescents. This will help in understanding the practical relevance of ethnicity as a targeting variable for young consumers.

**H1.** The target ethnic group of the advertisements will have a more positive attitude towards the ad, the brand in the advertisement and a higher purchase intention compared with the non-target ethnic group.

Based on the cultural schemas described above majority groups having a single cultural model should prefer target advertisements compared with the non-target advertisements. This was tested in the following hypothesis:

**H2** The majority ethnic group will have a more positive attitude towards the ad, the brand in the advertisement and a higher purchase intention for target advertisements compared with non-target advertisements.

On the other hand there should be no difference in minority group reaction towards target and non-target ethnic advertisements as they are supposed to have dual cultural model, leading to the following hypothesis which was tested for the minority group.

**H3.** Minority ethnic groups will not differ in their attitude towards the ad, the brand in the advertisement and purchase intention for target advertisements compared with non-target advertisements.

**Research design and methodology**

The study employed a 2 (advertisement type: target; non-target) × 2 (ethnic group: Malays; Chinese) between subject factorial design to note the impact of target and non-target advertisement on majority and minority group adolescents. Factorial designs are commonly used in advertising research of this nature (Aaker et al., 2000; de Run, 2007; Grier and Deshpande, 2001). The three dependent variables are:

1. attitude towards the ad;
2. attitude towards the brand;
3. purchase intentions.

A number of pre-tests were required to develop suitable stimuli for the experiment. These include selection of a suitable product, ad models that subject could be easily identified by their ethnicity, and lastly to test if the intended advertisements are perceived as target and non-target by the subjects. Based on these pre-test results, two advertisements were selected as a proxy of target/non-target advertisement (see Figure 1).
The stimuli consisted of full-color 8.5 × 11 inches photographic advertisement for a fictitious toothbrush brand “CLEAN A’. In line with the past research specific cultural cues were embedded in the advertisements while holding the rest of the features constant (Appiah and Yung-I, 2008; Appiah, 2001). The advertisement for the Chinese group used a red colour backdrop with firecrackers to indicate the Chinese New Year celebration, and a Chinese female model. The advertisement for the Malay ethnic group used a green backdrop colour, embossed with Muslim architectural decor commonly displayed on the walls and roofs of Malay buildings. The target advertisement for Malay also depicts the Halal logo and a model wearing a headscarf, common cultural symbols of the Malay ethnic group (see Figure 1). An effort was made so that both advertisements would represent an equal number of cultural cues, in order that any attitudinal difference in the subject's response to the advertisements can be attributed to these cues (Appiah and Yung-I, 2008).

A questionnaire was developed based on established scales adopted from past research with slight modification. The first draft of the questionnaire was developed in English. However, to reduce any bias resulting from the use of foreign language, it was back-translated into the national language of Malaysia (Bahasa Malaysia). This was important because Bahasa Malaysia is the common language for communication among all ethnic groups in Malaysia (Asma, 1982). The established three-step method of back-translation was followed to achieve this goal (Green and White, 1976).

An expert from a local university in Sarawak Malaysia translated the questionnaire into Bahasa Malaysia. The translated version was separately submitted to two professors of another local university in the region to translate it back into English. Discrepancies were addressed and rectified in the final translated version (Churchill, 1987). In the third step, the Bahasa Malaysia version of the questionnaire was pre-tested on a group of 20 Malay and Chinese adolescents from a local high school. The respondents reported no serious problem in understanding the questions or the scale used.

Detail of scales used in this research is presented in Table I. The first section of the questionnaire contains the demographic variables, like age, self reported ethnicity, gender, and other personal information. The second section contains questions regarding dependent variables used in this research. All the dependent variables were measured with the help of multiple items.

A total of 1,600 Malaysian adolescents were recruited for this study through convenience sampling with a prior approval of Ministry of Education in Malaysia. The data were collected from the Malaysian school-going population that ethnically self-identify themselves as
Malays or Chinese and were between the ages of 14 and 19 years. The respondents were told that they were participating in the advertisement survey to test the likeability for a new brand of toothbrush in Malaysia. The analysis of the demographic profile for the overall sample indicates a slightly higher number of female participants. This pattern was consistently present for both Malay and Chinese ethnic groups. In term of the age group of the overall sample, the majority of the respondents belong to the age group between 16 and 17 years. The respondents aged between 18 and 19 years represented more than 33 per cent of the overall sample. Only 14 per cent of the respondents were between the age group of 14 and 15 years. This age pattern was also quite similar for the Malay and Chinese ethnic group. Data were tested for reliability and normality. Reliability was established using Cronbach alpha, confirmatory factor analysis and measuring construct reliability for dependent variable scales for each group (Table II). Normality of the data was measured with the help of skewness and kurtosis, as well as by examining Q-Q plots.

### Results

Aggregate score of the items for each dependent variable scale was computed. A two group between subject multivariate analysis of variance was conducted on three dependent variables; attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention. A statistically significant Box M test \( (p < 0.001) \) result indicates unequal variance across groups thus necessitating the use of Pillai’s trace test in estimating the multivariate effect. The main effect for ethnicity (Pillai = 0.101, \( F = 61.35, p < 0.0001 \)) and advertisement type (Pillai = 0.058, \( F = 30.80, p < 0.0001 \)) were significant. The two-way MANOVA interaction effect was also significant (Pillai = 0.175, \( F = 105.47, p < 0.0001 \)). These results indicate the presence of significant effect for ethnicity and ad type on dependent variables. The partial eta square indicates that around 5 per cent of variance in the dependent variables can be attributed toward the ad type, whereas ethnicity can predict 10 per cent of the variation in dependent variables. Univariate ANOVA was conducted separately for each dependent variable to determine the locus of these statistically significant multivariate results.

The results of univariate ANOVA for each dependent variable by advertisement type also indicate that there was a significant difference between attitude towards the advertisement

### Table I Scales used in this research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Scale rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchase intention (PI)</td>
<td>Yi (1990)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards the brand (Ab)</td>
<td>Gardner et al. (1985), de Run (2004)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards the ad (Aad)</td>
<td>de Run (2004)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table II Measurement model evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Cronbach alpha</th>
<th>C.R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards the ad</td>
<td>MGT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MGTNT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CGT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CGNT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards the brand</td>
<td>MGT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MGTNT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CGT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CGNT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>MGT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MGTNT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CGT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CGNT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, the difference was not significant for purchase intention \((F = 1.26, \text{df} = 1, p < 0.313)\). Further the univariate ANOVA for each dependent variable by ethnicity were also found to be significant for all three dependent variables, attitude towards the advertisement \((F = 71.79, \text{df} = 1, p < 0.001)\), attitude towards the brand \((F = 146.82, \text{df} = 1, p < 0.001)\) and purchase intention \((F = 130.90, \text{df} = 1, p < 0.001)\). The univariate ANOVA for the interaction effect was also significant for all three dependent variables, attitude towards the advertisement \((F = 132.11, \text{df} = 1, p < 0.0001)\), attitude towards the brand \((F = 299.43, \text{df} = 1, p < 0.0001)\) and purchase intention \((F = 147.58, \text{df} = 1, p < 0.0001)\).

These results suggest that there is an overall significant interaction between advertisement type and ethnicity for the dependent variables. The next logical step in the data analysis process was to test the individual hypotheses. Independent sample \(t\)-test was carried out to test the proposed hypotheses. To test the first hypothesis for target/non-target ethnic group reactions, the independent sample \(t\)-test by ethnic group was conducted. Results revealed that for both ethnic groups target advertisement has generated more positive attitude towards the advertisement and the brand in the advertisement (see Table III). However, for Chinese advertisement there was no significant difference between target and non-target ethnic groups in their purchase intention.

The independent sample \(t\)-test by advertisement type was conducted to investigate the issue of majority and minority group status on their attitude towards target and non-target ethnic advertisement. The results revealed that both Malay and Chinese group adolescents have a more positive attitude towards the target advertisement, the brand in the advertisement, and purchase intention for the product in the target advertisement compared with non-target advertisement (see Table IV).

Discussion

These results can be analysed in a Malaysian context taking into account the way the Malaysian government manages relationships among different ethnic groups. It is important to realise that each major ethnic group lays great emphasis on teaching their children in their native language, one consequence being the segregation of schools for Malay, Chinese and Indian students. Most ethnic group members prefer to send their children to the schools offering teaching in their native language. One of the major disadvantages of this strategy is that the process of acculturation of minority group members stalled. It is precisely due to this reason that the multiethnic culture of Malaysia can be considered more as a salad bowl than a melting pot.

Independent sample \(t\)-test results by ethnicity indicated that target ethnic groups have a more positive attitude towards advertisements and brands compared with non-target groups. These results support findings by most of previous investigations in the area of ethnic targeting. Positive relations between targeting and its intended effects have been found in many previous empirical findings. These include role congruence, racial similarity, use of ethnic group language; all of these have shown positive effects on the target groups (Aaker et al., 2000; Brumbaugh, 1997; Meyers-Levy, 1989; Tepper, 1994; Whittler, 1989; Williams and Qualls, 1989). However, in an Eastern context, (and the results are the first of its kind), it has been shown that the presence of ethnic cues in an advertisement do help younger target groups to positively associate with it and lead to a less favourable attitude towards non-target advertisements. Previous research has also indicated that non-target groups usually have a less favourable attitude towards advertisements compared with target groups (De-Run, 2007; Koslow et al., 1994), although a few have suggested that this might not be relevant for the younger members of a majority ethnic group (Appiah, 2001).

The only anomaly in these results was that no significant difference was found between the purchase intentions of Chinese and Malay group adolescents for the Chinese advertisement. Although they were the target group, Chinese adolescents had higher purchase intentions but the difference was not statistically significant. We can attribute this result then to random error.
As proposed in the second hypothesis results of independent sample t-test by advertisement type suggested that the majority ethnic group scored significantly higher for the target advertisement compared with the non-target advertisement for attitude towards advertisements, brand attitude and purchase intention. This would appear to contradict previous results conducted in Western societies in general and the USA in particular. More importantly these results indicated that ethnicity is salient in younger consumers of the majority ethnic group of Malaysia. These results also validate the idea that theoretical developments in the West do not have a straightforward application in Eastern societies (SteenKamp and Baumgartner, 1998). The third hypothesis was put forward to test the possibility of a dual cultural model operating in minority group adolescents. However the results suggested that in a Malaysian context, minority groups adolescents failed to demonstrate the presence of such models. This was due to the reason that they significantly preferred the target advertisement, the brand in that advertisement and higher purchase intentions for the product in the target advertisement.

In summary this research has shown that ethnicity is a viable variable for targeting majority and minority group adolescents in a multi-ethnic Eastern society. It appears that both majority and minority ethnic group members were able to identify and connect with the salient ethnic cues in the target advertisement. This opens a window of opportunity for marketers who are constantly searching for the most viable targeting variable for attracting young consumers. Multinational and local firms both can attract this lucrative segment by targeting younger consumers on ethnic lines. However, the less favourable reactions from

### Table III
Results of independent sample t-tests for Aad, Ab, and PI by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ad type</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Dep. variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std dev.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (two-tailed)</th>
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Notes: *Significant at P < 0.05; Aad = Attitude towards the ad; Ab = Attitude towards the brand; PI = Purchase intention

### Table IV
Results of independent sample t-test for Aad, Ab, and PI by ad type

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<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<th>Dep. variable</th>
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<th>df</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * Significance at P < 0.05; Aad = Attitude towards the ad; Ab = Attitude towards the brand; PI = Purchase intention
non-target groups highlight the importance of carefully crafting a targeting strategy, so that its impact on the advertiser and the brand it promotes can be minimized. One possible way of avoiding this dilemma is to use the minimum but most effective ethnic cues, supplemented by reasonable amount of information. This might help in distracting non-target groups from emotionally processing the advertisement.

The results also provide a warning sign for the Malaysian government, which has recently started to invest heavily in the “one Malaysia” concept. Our study shows that there is no sign of such integration among different ethnic groups as reflected by the lack of understanding and appreciation of others’ ethnic culture.

Limitations

There are a few important limitations that need to be acknowledged in this study. First, from a contextual perspective, there is a renewed surge in the Malaysian government’s effort to integrate different ethnic groups. These efforts although not measured directly in this study might have affected the adolescent response towards target and non-target advertisements. However, the results of this research indicate that these efforts are still in their initial process. Second, the research accounts for a single minority ethnic group, ignoring the importance of other indigenous groups and Indian immigrants. Therefore, the results cannot be applicable to other minority ethnic groups in Malaysian society.

From the methodological perspective, this research has several limitations. First, the use of print advertisements might have limited application in this age of digital communications. Most of the teenagers are technologically oriented and therefore using TV or web-based commercials could have been more relevant for this age segment. The choice of product was also an important limitation. These results are based on a moderating level of product involvement. However, the results could be different depending on whether the product was high or low on involvement.

Future research

These methodological and contextual limitations can provide helpful ways of identifying future research directions. Future research could consider adding other ethnic groups into experimental designs. The research can also be expanded by replicating it in other Eastern societies to draw more valid conclusions. One of the important methodological shortfalls was that the respondents were only exposed to target or non-target advertisement and thus not allowed to build their attitudes by comparing target and non-target advertisement. Future research can incorporate repeated measures to investigate if these methodological differences have a significant impact on the outcome of target/non-target advertisement. The research had used only one type of product. Therefore, it will be a natural extension to investigate adolescent reaction towards products with different levels of involvement.

References


Brumbaugh, A. (1997), “Targeting two worlds: the impacts of source and other cues on cultural-bound responses to targeted advertising”, working paper, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH.


Further reading


About the authors

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