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Brand Evaluation across Age Cohorts and Ethnic Groups: Convergence in the Youth Segment?

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Abstract - Research indicates a general consensus that ethnicity does influence consumption behavior, consumer experience, marketing response and media selection. It is, however, unclear as to the extent of that influence and the nature of the difference from segmenting consumers on some other criteria such as needs. Businesses have approached ethnic marketing in different ways ranging from a targeted effort at distinct ethnic markets to a more multi-cultural theme that is shared across many different groups. Today's youth are often considered to view the world from a diverse perspective such that youth and diversity are often considered synonymous. An assessment of brand evaluation measures is used to explore the nature of the ethnic youth market in contrast to other ethnic and age segments.

Keywords - Age cohort marketing, Ethnic marketing, Youth marketing

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners - The results enhance the understanding of brand evaluations across age and ethnic groups. Marketers are making very significant assumptions about the ethnic, youth, and mainstream markets and subsequently investing heavily in marketing communication based on those assumptions. Preliminary results point to some unique alignments among certain ethnic and age cohorts.

Introduction

Because of the important role that ethnicity contributes to values, and therefore consumer attitudes and behaviors, this research will begin a first step to consider whether there is a unique perspective on brands among ethnic youth. This research will also consider whether brand evaluations are different within and between age cohorts and ethnic groups. The literature section will explore the concepts of ethnicity and diversity, ethnic groups, ethnic marketing strategies, the youth market and the ethnic youth market. The research questions are examined through an aggregation of four years of purchase funnel measures for two large automotive product brands.

Ethnicity and Diversity

The terms ethnicity and diversity are sometimes used interchangeably in marketing practice. These terms are not necessarily equivalent and should be defined. Ethnicity incorporates several dimensions including common language, customs, values, morality, religion and etiquette

(Deshpande, Hoyer and Donthu, 1986). Ethnic marketing is considered to treat ethnic consumers as distinctive markets separate from the mainstream market and to communicate to them using differentiated marketing mix strategies (Pires and Stanton, 2002). Research has identified that ethnic group identification exists in different levels and those levels can be difficult to measure as ethnicity is highly contextual (Hirschman, 1981; Whitley, Calantone and Young, 1991). This contextual nature is often expressed through symbolism and consumption behavior based more on what products and services mean as opposed to what they actually do (Belk, 1988).

Ethnic Groups

By 2050 it is estimated that ethnic minorities will comprise about 50% of the U.S. population, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, in contrast to today's approximately 25% (Passel and Cohn, 2008). Ethnic minorities account for more than 50% of the population in 48 of the 100 largest U.S. cities (Cui and Choudhury, 2002). Given the purchasing power of African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics at well over \$1 trillion, it is important to examine the segment dynamics within this growing part of the population (Roberts, 2003; Cui and Choudhury, 2002).

Although the growth is partially attributed to birthrates within ethnic minority groups, immigration is still a significant contributor. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the nation's population is expected to grow to almost 440 million by 2050 up from the current 300 million with 82% of the growth coming from immigrants arriving after 2005 (Fauna, 1999). The foreign-born share of the U.S. population should exceed historic levels between 2020 and 2025 when it reaches 15% according to Pew. The number of foreign-born residents of the U.S. increased 57% between 1990-2000 with 52% from Latin America, 27% from Asia, and 16% from Europe (Fitzgerald, 2002).

According to census data the Hispanic population of the U.S. exceeds 50 million and is the nation's largest ethnic minority. Marketing expenditures to Hispanics are increasing not only because the segment is growing but also because they can generally be reached through a single language. Hispanics come from at least 25 different countries and generally share the same language although idioms are common (Cui and Choudhury, 2002). Asian Americans came from at least 16 different countries and do not generally share the either the same language or even the same dialect if the same language is shared. Further, within the Asian population in the U.S. only Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Japanese, Asian Indians, and Vietnamese have populations of about one million.

African-Americans have been supplanted as the largest minority group by Hispanics and the African-American segment is growing at a much slower rate than Hispanics (Passel and Cohn, 2008). The African-American segment is actually experiencing an additional dynamic

that is influencing their identity as a minority group. Over one-quarter of growth in the African-American culture from 1990 – 2000 came from newcomers from Africa and the Caribbean (Campbell-Ewald, 2003). The newcomers often wish to be considered black as opposed to African-Americans for fear of inferior treatment (Campbell-Ewald, 2003).

Ethnic Marketing Strategies

Applying market segmentation at an ethnic level as opposed to needs, beliefs, or values level has been a common practice of Fortune 500 companies for many decades (Cho, Holcombe and Murphy, n.d.). One of the reasons this has occurred is the various ethnic minorities do not necessarily follow general market consumption patterns. Hispanics index well above the national average in beauty care and baby care products (Information Resources Incorporated, 2006). Ethnic segmentation has resulted in the creation of independent ethnic marketing teams and companies have sought to connect with these diversity markets through specialized product lines, targeted marketing strategies, unique advertising, and tailored promotions. MetLife, Inc., a leading global provider of insurance, annuities and employee benefit programs, operates a multicultural marketing team that concentrates on the requirements of the Chinese, Korean, African-American, Hispanic, Russian, South Asian and Vietnamese markets in the U.S. and produces marketing materials in Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese (MetLife, n.d.). This allows flexibility in the various markets but comes at a much higher cost than standardized marketing.

The ethnic-based marketing mix strategy has come under question from an organizational efficiency perspective. Some marketers are considering this type of strategy not cost-effective. While not negating the tremendous market potential of ethnic segments, companies are questioning whether targeted programs are being effective in generating greater brand equity and that the benefits are outweighing the risks of misunderstanding ethnic segments (Cui and Choudhury, 2002). The question is if a better way exists to combine fulfillment of a national marketing campaign without alienating ethnic segments.

Businesses have taken a mixed approach to ethnic marketing. Coors expanded its ethnic marketing efforts and Anheuser-Busch increased Spanish-language marketing (Tharp, 2001). Alternatively, Avon found that members of ethnic groups actually preferred product lines that addressed women in general (Cui and Choudhury, 2002). Coca-Cola and Miller Brewing Co. closed their ethnic marketing departments in 1997 to focus on cross-cultural themes (Melcher, 1997). Sears Roebuck & Co. closed its ethnic marketing unit in 2004 and merged its operations with its general marketing department. Mattel began creating cross-cultural “Barbie” dolls in 2002 that possessed features that could be attached to a variety of different ethnic groups (Walker, 2003). Yankelovich, a large research company that explores various market segments, produced an inaugural Multicultural Marketing Study in 2003 that focused on viewing the marketplace from a multicultural, or cross-cultural, viewpoint instead of a collection of individual ethnic markets.

The general consensus among research on ethnic groups is that ethnicity does influence consumption behavior, consumer experiences, media selection and marketing response (Cui and Choudhury, 2002). It is not clear as to the extent of that influence and the nature of the difference from segmenting consumers on some other criteria such as needs. Ethnic segments can share common threads that can lead to marketing efficiencies. Acculturation and social

class can form a link between segments (Cui and Choudhury, 2002). This can be modeled in terms of age and life stages that are values based. PepsiCo worked with Cheskin Research to develop a life stage model that considers how a consumer first adopts a brand and then remains loyal throughout a lifetime (Faura, 1999). The various influences that contributed to brand trial and adoption and ultimately leading to an emotional bond were evaluated.

The Youth Market

There are 50 million 13-23 year old consumers who spend over \$150 billion annually (Khermouch, 2002). However, youth influence a far greater number of expenditures by others. Kids and young adults ages 13-21 exert varying degrees of influence on the decision making of different product or service categories by families (YouthPulse, 2003). In the clothing sector, 89% decide or influence the purchase decision. 77% of 13-21 year olds influence software decisions and 61% influence vehicle purchase decisions (YouthPulse, 2003).

The youth market can be segmented by age as well as other factors including behavior, wealth, interests, social maturity, ethnic identity, location, urban versus rural, gender, online communities, school and sexuality. These criteria are all elements of social factors (Stone et al, 2001). Each of the previous factors can influence individual attitudes, values and behaviors. Even with all the differences, there are still some common themes:

- (a) Their peer group is important
- (b) They have a tight group of friends
- (c) Their friends understand them
- (d) They desire more money
- (e) They judge material possessions
- (f) They want to be seen as cool
- (g) They aspire to be seen as older than they are

The question is how do these factors contribute to youth marketing opportunities? One potential area to study is the importance of branded products.

The tween market is seen as critical to the formation of brand relationships. While very young children demonstrate little brand bonding, the tween years begin a process of brand bonding that continues through the age of around 25 (Millward Brown, 2003). Research conducted by Millward Brown reveals that kids are 40% less brand loyal than adults but that gap changes over a two-year period (Millward Brown, 2003).

The Ethnic Youth Market

Today's youth are often considered to view the world from a diverse perspective and do not segment into African-American, Hispanic, or Asian groups (Schneider, 2002; Orgel, 2003). Youth and diversity are often considered synonymous in America. This worldview demonstrates the generational element to understanding consumer requirements (Orgel, 2003). Since each generation is faced with challenges it can be argued that each new

generation is not a linear extension of the previous one (Orgel, 2003). America's youth have generally been exposed to more of a variety of cultures than older generations (Treguier and Segati, 2005). These diverse cultures are often integrated into the lives of the youth market and diverse messages are welcome and actually expected. In this way, age could potentially supplant ethnicity as a viable segmentation base. Is it these youth that are defining diversity as opposed to marketers?

Over 40% of the under 20-age group are of diverse descent and that number is expected to increase to 55% by 2025 (Brewster, 2003). Over 40% of the Hispanic population is under 21 compared to 30% of the entire population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Hispanics are the youngest consumer segment and the Hispanic share of the youth market under 21 is 17%, which is 61% higher than the 1990 total (Faura, 1999). Hispanics are not alone with a large youth segment. Half of all African-Americans are between 18-34 years of age (McDowell, 2003).

An application of multicultural marketing is through the use of urban culture to cross diversity groups and even to expand across global cultures (Orgel, 2003). Companies consider urban youth to be the customers of the future for their brands and see urban marketing as the means to target that segment as well as the mainstream market (Walkup, 2002). Urban marketing is an evolving concept. The new definition expands beyond appealing to urban youth to transcend geography and ethnicity and move into the mainstream. Urban marketing may not replace ethnic marketing but it can create a common theme that appeals across segments to allow for marketing efficiencies.

Method

The research questions are:

- Are brand evaluations within the ethnic youth segment different from other ethnic age cohorts?
- Are brand evaluations within the youth segment more homogeneous than within other age cohorts?

Ethnic segments to be considered include African American, Asian, Hispanic and Caucasian. Youth segments are considered either 18-24 or 21-24 while other age cohorts include 25-54 and 55+. Additional details on these categories are discussed later in the methodology section. This analysis is based on research collected over four years by major independent research companies hired by the respective automotive brands featured in this study.

The methodology selected acts as a preliminary exploration of the research questions. Considerable subsequent work is required to explore the questions to sufficiency. However, there is value in taking a first step. The methodology involves an analysis of specific purchase funnel consumer brand evaluations of two major automotive product brands. The purchase funnel is a sequential consumer decision-making model ranging from awareness to loyalty and all steps in between (Levens, 2012). The purchase funnel is built on the concepts of hierarchy of personal selling, AIDA (awareness-interest-desire-action) and other hierarchy of effects models and Frey's work on the mental steps that consumers move through during purchase decisions (Lavridge and Steiner, 1961; Frey, 1947). The purchase funnel measures

are extracted from brand health surveys conducted on a continuous basis throughout the U.S. using random digit dial phone and mail data collection methodology.

The specific measures include total aided brand awareness and purchase consideration as measured by only one or one of two or three brands. The combination of single choice brand specification and one of up to three choices represents normal convention in automotive brand tracking to determine an evoked set given the large number of brand choices available in this sector. Consumers are asked would they only consider Brand A or would they only consider Brand A among two or three others or if they would not consider Brand A. These measures represent an upper funnel measure and the lowest funnel measure possible given the design of the study and the lack of linkage to ultimate purchase transactions. The brands are essentially ubiquitous given total aided brand awareness ratings of 98% or higher. Each brand has engaged in substantial and sustained broad market consumer advertising for decades. Each brand has also engaged in substantial ethnic-specific marketing initiatives in both national and regional marketing communications. One condition of gaining access to the purchase funnel data is non-disclosure of the specific brand names. The brands in this study will be referred to as Product Brand A and Product Brand B.

The research design involves an aggregation of four years of brand evaluations to attempt to create an adequate sample base for analysis by age cohort and diversity group. Even with samples of almost 10,000 and 8,500 respectively there were still major limitations in cell analysis. Age distribution according to the 2010 U.S. census, among 18 and over population, was 18-24 (11%), 25-54 (60%), and 55+ (29%). The brand tracking study samples were distributed 18-24 (16%), 25-54 (62%), and 55+ (22%) although there were some quota requirements placed on the sample to help recruit 18-24. It has been estimated that less than 5% refuse to provide age information based on data from the brand tracking studies. Age cohorts were created as 21-24 to reflect the youth segment, 25-54 to reflect the traditional media buying target for most brands, and 55+ to reflect older consumers. Analysis is coded to allow for columns to be compared between different tables. Data are tested at 0.05 alpha level and statistical differences are indicated by a column letter code. Note that Product Brand A only collected data for 21 and over while Product Brand B collected data for 18 and older.

Based on the 2010 U.S. Census, the ethnic mix is calculated to be 16% Hispanic, 13% African-American, 5% Asian, and 66% White and other. Each of the data sources for this analysis under-represent ethnic groups based on U.S. census data. The brand tracking study samples average 3% Hispanic, 6% African-American, 2 % Asian, and 89% White and other races. Statistics collected from the brand tracking studies indicate about 5% refused to provide ethnicity information.

The data requirements were excessively large and still presented cell analysis problems and only automotive data was made available for analysis. There could also be brand effects due to the limited number of brands considered within the brand-tracking category. Further research would need to be made on a broad range of brands in other consumer segments such as heavy durables as well as financial services and consumer packaged goods to formulate stronger broad-based conclusions.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the overall brand measure ratings by each diversity group as well as the total for Product Brand A. The data show that Asians had generally lower brand evaluations over the 4-year time period than other ethnic segments. In addition, African-Americans, while generally rating the brand higher than Asians, rated the brand lower than Hispanics and Caucasians. Note that the letter designations listed after select percentage numbers indicates a difference at a .05 criterion for statistical significance.

Table 1: Product Brand A Brand Measures by Ethnic Group

	Total	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White
	A	B	C	D	E
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
<u>Brand awareness</u>					
Total aided awareness	98	97	93	96	99 BCD
<u>Purchase consideration</u>					
Only one/ one of two or three	40	34	26	41 C	41 BC

Table 2 illustrates brand measures by diversity group for the ages of 21-24. The results were not readable due to small cell size for Asians and African-Americans, however it was clear that Hispanic and Caucasian groups had similar brand ratings. It was also clear that Caucasian youth ratings were generally higher than the Caucasian 55+ segment when compared to Table 4. In fact, Caucasian purchase consideration ratings steadily declined from the 21-24, 25-54 and 55+ groups.

Table 2: Product Brand A Brand Measures by Ethnic Group for Ages 21-24

	Age 21 - 24				
	Total	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White
	F	G	H	I	J
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
<u>Brand awareness</u>					
Total aided awareness	99			97	99
<u>Purchase consideration</u>					
Only one/ one of two or three	45 P			40	46 T

Table 3 represents the typical media target of the 25-54 age group. This group showed consistency to the overall data but this makes sense since this also makes up the bulk of the sample. In this segment it was clear that there were additional differences between the Caucasian segment and other segments in total aided awareness and between the Caucasian and the African American and Asian segments in purchase consideration.

Table 3: Product Brand A Brand Measures by Ethnic Group for Ages 25-54

	Age 25 - 54				
	Total	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White
	K	L	M	N	O
	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Brand awareness</u>					
Total aided awareness	98	97	92	96	99 LMNT
<u>Purchase consideration</u>					
Only one/ one of two or three	41 P	33	26	40 M	42 LMT

Table 4 represents brand rating among diversity group members over 55 year of age. Table 4 was not readable due to small base sizes for Asians and Hispanics.

Table 4: Product Brand A Brand Measures by Ethnic Group for Ages 55+

	Age 55+				
	Total	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White
	P	Q	R	S	T
	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Brand awareness</u>					
Total aided awareness	98	100			98
<u>Purchase consideration</u>					
Only one/ one of two or three	36	44			36

Table 5 illustrates the overall brand measure ratings by each diversity group as well as the total for Product Brand B. The data show that Asians had generally lower purchase consideration over the 4-year time period than other ethnic segments. In addition, African-Americans, while claiming greater purchase consideration than Asians, claimed similar purchase consideration to Hispanics but lower than Caucasians.

Table 5: Product Brand B Brand Measures by Ethnic Group

	Total Sample				
	Total	African	Asian	Hispanic	White
	A	B	C	D	E
	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Brand awareness</u>					
Total aided awareness	98	96	93	97	98 BC
<u>Purchase consideration</u>					
Only one/ one of two or three	25	22 C	14	23 C	25 C

Table 6 illustrates diversity group brand measures for 18-24 year olds. The data indicate essentially higher ratings for purchase consideration for each ethnic group with the exception of Asians. The highest ratings in comparing across age groups are recorded for Caucasians and African-Americans. Table 7 illustrates diversity group brand ratings for 25-54 year olds. This data essentially follows the overall data due to the large sample base. Table 8 represents the ethnic group brand measures for ages 55 and over. The base sizes do not allow for statistical testing for the Asian and Hispanic cells. Looking across the three tables it is clear that, unlike Product Brand A, Product Brand B demonstrated a more consistent set of higher purchase consideration across the diverse youth segments except for Asians.

Table 6: Product Brand B Brand Measures by Ethnic Group for Ages 18-24

	Age 18 - 24				
	Total	African	Asian	Hispanic	White
	K	L	M	N	O
	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Brand awareness</u>					
Total aided awareness	97	97	90	94	97 M
<u>Purchase consideration</u>					
Only one/ one of two or three	28 PU	26 M	7	28 M	30 MTY

Table 7: Product Brand B Brand Measures by Ethnic Group for Ages 25-54

	Age 25 - 54				
	Total	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White
	P	Q	R	S	T
	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Brand awareness</u>					
Total aided awareness	98 FK	96	94	97	98 QR
<u>Purchase consideration</u>					
Only one/ one of two or three	25	21	14	22	26 QR

Table 8: Product Brand B Brand Measures by Ethnic Group for Ages 55+

	Age 55+				
	Total	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White
	U	V	W	X	Y
	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Brand awareness</u>					
Total aided awareness	98 F	98			98
<u>Purchase consideration</u>					
Only one/ one of two or three	24	31			24

Considering the brand measures for both Product Brands A and B together, overall age cohort purchase consideration was higher for each group than the next older group but this was mainly influenced by the Caucasian segment. The Asian segment consistently claimed lower aided brand awareness and lower purchase consideration relative to other age cohorts and ethnic groups. The data, accepting the limitations discussed throughout this paper, point to some alignment of brand evaluation among age cohort with the highest level of positive evaluations generally attributed to the youth segment. There is, however, another alignment occurring by ethnic group, particularly where Asians reported the lowest level of positive evaluations. The intersections of these data indicate an opportunity to consider enhancing the efficiency of marketing investment by prioritizing age cohort or ethnic group or some combination of the two.

Discussion and Future Research

The objective of this paper was to explore whether, through assessing brand measures, ethnic youth group brand evaluations are different from other ethnic age cohorts. Demographic trends revealed significant growth in size and stature of both the ethnic and youth segments. Where the two groups converge, it is clear that the youth segment is comprised of more diverse people than any other age cohort. Business strategy trends revealed a mix of ethnic segment targeting and integrated mass marketing strategies using diversity cues. The latter is becoming more popular for a variety of reasons including costs and efficiency. These various trends could indicate that while diverse in membership, that youth might behave more homogeneously than other age cohorts.

The research questions (1) Are brand evaluations within the ethnic youth segment different from other ethnic age cohorts? and (2) Are brand evaluations within the youth segment more homogeneous than within other age cohorts? provided inconclusive results with higher overall purchase consideration among the youth segment but that result was influenced mainly by Caucasian youth ratings. It was clear that Asian segments consistently claimed lower aided brand awareness and lower purchase consideration relative to other age cohorts and ethnic groups. While the brands examined held significant market share in the automotive product segment there is limited opportunity to project on the overall automotive segment let alone any other segment. The brands studied were clearly encumbered by their legacy marketing efforts and while each brand had a broad portfolio to appeal to all age and income levels it is difficult to measure the specific changes the combination of mass marketing and targeted marketing has had on each segment. Much more research is necessary in this area as marketers are making very significant assumptions about the ethnic, youth, and mainstream markets.

Opportunities for future research include expanding this research to a broad mix of brands and business sectors with a full purchase funnel question battery. Attitudes toward specific brands and advertising could be identified to more completely interpret purchase funnel measures. In addition, it would be beneficial to conduct a national study with sufficient sample to allow for readable ethnic and age cells that focus on specific attitudinal statements such as “Brands are important to me” to measure the aggregate intensity of feelings toward brands in general. Specifically, in the expanded context suggested in this section on future research, youth and Asian segments should be studied relative to other age cohorts and ethnic groups to further explore the preliminary findings of this study.

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