



Ethnically targeted advertising: views of those not targeted

Ethnically
targeted
advertising

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper sets out to extend current knowledge on advertising effects on those not targeted by noting unintended consequences on attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral reactions.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper tests these effects based on relevant theories in the communication and advertising literature on two distinct ethnic groups (Malay and Chinese) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia utilizing questionnaires based on a fictitious advertisement for the dominant and non-dominant ethnic group in Malaysia. The advertisement used was for a fictitious can of drink and its design was common in Malaysia. Data collected were analyzed using Manova, General Linear Model, and Bonferoni.

Findings – There were negative attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral reactions by those not targeted who saw these advertisements.

Research limitations/implications – One limitation is that the study used two different advertisements, but each respondent saw only one. The advertisement was also for a fictitious product. Future research will benefit from further improvements (impact of product type or advertisement format) and replication of other ethnic groups or targeted groups.

Practical implications – A practical implication is the importance of predetermining the appropriate use of language and dominance of the targeted group. Targeted communications strategy may not be the most effective method of communicating with a specific ethnic group in a plural society.

Originality/value – The major contribution of this paper consists of the determination of negative effects of advertising on those not targeted, and the finding that the level of dominance plays a role in consumers' reactions towards targeted advertising. The paper is of value to advertisers, researchers in advertising, and social science scientists.

Keywords Advertising, Target markets, Ethnic groups, Chinese people, Malaysia

Paper type Research paper

Received April 2006
Revised August 2006
Accepted September 2006

Introduction

The issue of standardization or adaptation of advertisements has long been discussed in the marketing field (Agrawal, 1995; Laroche *et al.*, 2001; Pae *et al.*, 2002; Papavassiliou *et al.*, 1997; Solberg, 2002). On the face of it, the major strategic choice that a marketer makes across transnational segments is well discussed. However, it is also clear that previous cross-national cultural standard/measurement by authors such as Trompenaars, Maznevski, Schwartz, and Hofstede, has its own weaknesses. These weaknesses include the possibility of differences within a nation, such as between ethnic groups. In Malaysia, various studies have highlighted the fact that language, religion, and time are particular to Malaysia and significantly different to Western held beliefs (Fontaine and Richardson, 2003).

This debate is gaining popularity in the international advertising literature (Agrawal, 1995; Laroche *et al.*, 2001; Pae *et al.*, 2002; Papavassiliou *et al.*, 1997; Solberg, 2002). This may be because advertising often accounts for the greatest share of the

This research was funded by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Fundamental Research Grant 03(52)/478/2004(215).

