CULTURAL CUES IN ADVERTISING: CONTEXT EFFECTS ON PERCEIVED MODEL SIMILARITY, IDENTIFICATION PROCESSES, AND ADVERTISING OUTCOMES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Gregory J. Hoplamazian, M.A.

Graduate Program in Communication

The Ohio State University

2011

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Osei Appiah, Advisor

Professor John Dimmick

Professor Dave Ewoldsen

Professor Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick
ABSTRACT

Using Kelman’s (1961) identification model of social influence as a theoretical framework, this dissertation consists of two studies designed to test the impact of cultural cues in advertising on perceived similarity with advertising characters, and determine whether these cues impact advertising responses (e.g. attitude toward the ad, purchase intentions). In Study 1 subjects viewed an advertisement where the advertising character’s race (Black, White, ambiguous) and racial cultural cues (White mainstream cues, Black cues) were experimentally controlled so that each participant viewed one of six versions of the advertisement. Results supported the identification framework, as subjects reported more positive responses to ads featuring White cultural cues compared to Black cultural cues. Interestingly, character race had little effect on how participants responded to the ads, which indicates context cues played a larger role in inferring identification with a source, compared to the racial background of the model.

Study 2 replicated the design of Study 1, employing political cultural cues instead of racial cultural cues. Researchers suggest that in order for context cues (such as racial or political cues in an advertisement) to influence perceptions of a source (advertising character), the source must be ambiguous along the context dimension (racial background, political affiliation). The use of political cultural cues ensured all character were ambiguous on this context dimension.
Study 2 results also supported the identification framework, as participants responded more positively to the character and advertisement when the political cues present were congruent with their own political affiliation. For example, Democrats exposed to ads with Democratic party cues reported greater similarity and identification with the ad model, and more positive ad evaluations compared to Democrats exposed to Republican party cues. As in Study 1, character race had little effect on how viewers responded to the ads. Taken together these studies indicate that for White consumers, background cues which allow one to identify with ad characters play a much larger role in influencing ad processing and effectiveness than the race of the ad models.
Dedication

Dedicated to my amazing wife Debbie. Thank you for your patience, love, and understanding through this entire process.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to take the time to thank and recognize many people who have made the completion of this dissertation possible. Thank you to my fellow graduate students, cohort members, and “extended” cohort members for keeping me encouraged through the dissertation process. This road would be much more difficult if not for the presence of encouraging friends.

To my wife Debbie, thank you for your help and dedication over these past five years. Regardless of whether I was having a good or bad day, you were always there to support me and keep me going. Thank you! To Rob Griffiths, you were one of the first good friends I made both in the department and in Columbus. Your example and friendship have helped me each year I have been in the department, and have been especially comforting as I have worked on my dissertation.

Finally, it is difficult to adequately thank my committee members for everything I have learned from you during my time at Ohio State. Dr. Ewoldsen, thank you for both your constant joking around in the hallways, and the serious discussions of media psychology and measurement issues we have had. I am grateful to have had your input on this project, and know that your voice will continue to be in my head as I move forward with my research. Dr. Knobloch-Westerwick, I am grateful for everything I learned from working alongside you. Thank you for being an excellent example of what
a good researcher should be, and for instilling in me the confidence necessary to be successful. Dr. Dimmick, you were the first person with whom I conducted research, and you continue to provide me with valuable advice both in my research and my life. I learned from you how to communicate precisely and effectively, and to only accept the best work that I could do. Osei, you have been my adviser for five years now, and I want to thank you for the gentle guidance you have provided me. Always suggesting and never forcing, you let me make my own decisions while giving me a road map to follow based on your experience. Thank you for getting me this far.
VITA

July 19, 1981........................................Born – Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania

2004......................................................B.A. Speech Communication, Penn State University

2006-present.................................Graduate Teaching and Research Associate
The Ohio State University

2008......................................................M.A. Communication, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Communication
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract........................................................................................................................ii
Dedication.........................................................................................................................iv
Acknowledgments...........................................................................................................v
Vita.....................................................................................................................................vii
List of Tables...................................................................................................................xi
List of Figures..................................................................................................................xii

Chapters:

1. Literature Review........................................................................................................1

   Introduction......................................................................................................................1
   Race in Advertising: Representation and Response..................................................4
   
   Content Analysis Research – Frequency and Context..............................................5
   Viewer Responses to Race in Advertising – Experimental Research......................7
   
   Impact of Race on Outcomes......................................................................................7
   Cultural Cues and Cultural Embeddedness...............................................................9
   Polysemy and Ambiguity in Advertising..................................................................11
   Racial Ambiguity and Advertising Research.........................................................11
   Polysemy.......................................................................................................................14
   Polysemy in Advertising.............................................................................................14
   Synchronic Polysemy....................................................................................................15
   Diachronic Polysemy.....................................................................................................15
   Racial Ambiguity...........................................................................................................16
   Identification Model of Social Influence: Similarity and Persuasion......................18
   Role of Similarity in Persuasion.................................................................................20
   Alternative Theoretical Perspectives.......................................................................21
   Social Identity Theory and Media Research............................................................22
   Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Categorization.................................................24
   Models of Assimilation and Contrast Effects............................................................25
   Interpretation-Comparison Model (ICM).................................................................25
   Selective-Accessibility Model (SAM).......................................................................26
   Theories of Source Categorization............................................................................27
   Prototype Theory...........................................................................................................28
   Exemplar Theory..........................................................................................................28
   Decision Bound Theory..............................................................................................29
2. Study 1

Overview ................................................................. 31
Hypotheses ............................................................... 32
Method ................................................................. 35
  Design ................................................................ 35
  Procedure and Implementation .............................. 35
  Stimulus Materials .................................................. 36
Stimuli Development ................................................. 36
  Pretest 1 ............................................................. 36
  Pretest 2 ............................................................. 39
  Final Stimuli ......................................................... 40
Subjects ................................................................. 42
Dependent Measures .................................................. 43
  Similarity .......................................................... 43
  Identification ....................................................... 43
  Attitude Toward the Ad .......................................... 43
  Attitude Toward the Brand ...................................... 44
  Purchase Intentions .............................................. 44
Manipulation Check ............................................... 44
  Cue Recall .......................................................... 44
Demographic Items ................................................. 45

3. Study 1 Results ....................................................... 46

Manipulation Check ............................................... 46
Main Analyses ......................................................... 46
  Influence of Ad Features on Similarity ..................... 47
  Influence of Ad Features on Identification ................. 47
  Influence of Ad Features on Attitude Toward the Ad .... 49
  Influence of Ad Features on Attitude Toward the Brand  50
  Influence of Ad Features on Purchase Intentions ....... 51

4. Study 1 Discussion .................................................. 52

Summary of Findings ............................................... 52
Research Questions–The Significance of Non-Significant Findings .... 55
Effect of Racial Ambiguity ......................................... 56

5. Study 2 ................................................................. 60

Overview ............................................................... 60
Hypotheses ............................................................. 62
Method ................................................................. 63
  Design ................................................................ 63
  Procedure and Implementation .............................. 64
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Character Race and Cultural Cues by Experimental Condition – Study 1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Means and SDs for Study 1 Dependent Variables as a Function of Character Race and Racial Cultural Cues</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Character Race and Cultural Cues by Experimental Condition – Study 2</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Means and SDs for Study 2 Dependent Variables as a Function of Character Race and Political Cultural Cues</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Study 1 Stimulus Advertisements – Ambiguous Character with: A White Mainstream Cultural Cues, B Black Cultural Cues</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Character Race by Cultural Cue Interaction for Attitude Toward the Ad</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Study 2 Stimulus Advertisements – Ambiguous Character with: A Democratic Cultural Cues, B Republican Cultural Cues</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Character Race by Political Cue Interaction for Perceived Similarity</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Unlike face-to-face interactions, advertising media—which are the focus of this dissertation—do not allow for complex interaction between viewers and media characters where specific similarities and differences can be revealed. Instead, viewers must rely on what little visual, textual, or aural cues are present in the advertisement to establish perceptions about ad characters. As a result, cultural features within media advertisements that provide background information about the characters are likely to play a significant role in similarity perceptions.

For advertising researchers and practitioners, consumer perceptions of similarity with ad models is of specific interest because of the central role similarity plays in identification processes and attitude change (Kelman, 1961). Kelman’s identification model of social influence posits that similarity with a message source (e.g. advertising character), and the desire for a positive relationship with the source can shape one’s attitudes to be in line with those of the source. In advertising contexts identification occurs when a viewer perceives similarity to an advertising character and adopts behaviors and attitudes (i.e. product and advertisement liking, purchase intentions) as a means of affiliating with the model’s social reference group (Jones, 2010; Kelman & Eagley, 1965).
While there have been several advertising studies employing Kelman’s identification framework (Appiah, 2001b; Hoy & Wang, 2000; Jones, 2010; Whittler, 1989; Whittler & DiMeo, 1991), there has been little research specifically examining the role played by context cues on perceptions of similarity with ad models (Appiah & Liu, 2009). Although the effects of certain model features such as race (Appiah, 2007; Whittler, 1991), occupation status (Grewal, Gotlieb, & Marmorstein, 1994; Hoplamazian & Appiah, forthcoming), and age (Chang, 2009) on advertising responses have been empirically examined, studies have yet to investigate the role of background cultural cues in identification processes. For example, some work has examined the use of ethnic primes (Forehand & Deshpande, 2001) and religious symbols (Taylor, Halstead, & Haynes, 2010) in advertising messages, but not as visual cultural cues in the presence of an advertising model.

This dissertation investigates the degree to which source information, in the form of cultural cues in advertising, influences viewers’ perceived similarity with the source (advertising character) and subsequent responses to media advertisements (e.g. brand attitudes, purchase intentions). Cultural cues refer to the “values, symbols, ethics, rituals, traditions, material objects, and services” produced by a given cultural group (Appiah, 2001b, p. 8). Images strongly associated with ethnic, gender, age, economic, political, and religious group represent just a few types of cultural cues which might be used to facilitate viewer-character similarity, thus influencing the effectiveness of an advertising creative. For example, an image of Martin Luther King may serve as an African American cultural cue due to the association of Dr. King with African Americans, while a bumper sticker advocating Democratic Party values may serve as a political cultural cue
due to the association between Democrats and specific social or political goals.

Understanding the role of cultural cues in perceived model similarity, identification, and advertising responses is vital for understanding how viewers are likely to respond to advertising messages.

The use of cultural cues in advertising is increasingly relevant for both consumers and researchers as marketers continue to seek out more segmented audiences with specific interests (Sheehan, 2004). As the media environment has changed, marketers have shifted from a “quantity goal” in which they seek to appeal to the largest number of consumers, to a “niche goal” in which they target consumers with similar interests and provide targeted messages which resonate with these individuals (Sheehan, 2004). The result is that a wider range of interests and lifestyles are likely to appear in advertising as marketers design messages to appeal to specific consumers.

This dissertation consists of two studies in which the cultural cues surrounding a media character are experimentally manipulated. The goal of this investigation is to examine how viewers use context cues to infer similarity and identification with media characters, and identify the subsequent influence source perceptions have on advertisement evaluations. In Study 1 racial cultural cues (Black cultural cues, White cultural cues) were used in print advertisements to determine their impact on perceived similarity to White, Black, and racially ambiguous models, and investigate whether racial cultural cues can influence advertising outcomes. Study 2 replicated the theoretical framework of Study 1, but used political party cues instead (Democratic cues, Republican cues). The inclusion of different sets of cultural cues is helpful for demonstrating applications of this dissertation’s framework for a variety of advertising and media
identification contexts. Further, Study 2 utilizes cultural cues which are in opposition to one another to determine whether group conflict leads to a different pattern of results than Study 1.

The following sections lay out the theoretical and empirical groundwork for this investigation. First, because character race and racial ambiguity are manipulated in both studies, past work examining race in advertising is reviewed. The following section outlines the concepts of polysemy and racial ambiguity at they relate to the current study. Next, Kelman’s model of social influence (1961) is reviewed to describe the role of source similarity in persuasion and provide a theoretical framework for the study. Context effects are defined to establish how cultural cues can influence perceptions of a source. The role of source ambiguity in context effects is then covered, establishing the role served by racial ambiguity in this dissertation. Theories of source categorization are reviewed in the following section to help form predictions about how context cues can influence similarity perceptions. These sections conclude with a description of the current investigation.

RACE IN ADVERTISING: REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSE

While this dissertation takes a novel approach to the study of race in advertising by focusing on cultural cues and racial ambiguity, the extant literature examining race representation and viewer responses still provides relevant information informing the study goals. Below, content analysis and empirical research investigating race in advertising are reviewed to; 1) demonstrate how race has been linked with certain advertising contexts and cues over time; and 2) provide evidence about the factors found to influence race-based responses to advertising media. The reviews below allow the
contributions of the current study to be placed within the greater context of advertising research. First, content analysis literature is reviewed to describe the frequency and context of minority representation in advertising. Second, research investigating the effects of character race on viewer responses is covered, highlighting important constructs for consideration in the current study.

Content Analysis Research – Frequency and Context

The appearance of racial minorities in media advertising has been a source of research interest for well over sixty years (Mastro & Stern, 2003; Peterson, 2007). Content analysis research in particular has provided a glimpse into the frequency and context of race portrayal. Early research can be traced back as far as the 1940s and 1950s and was marked by a focus on identifying the frequency of minority group appearances in advertising—particularly Blacks—relative to their percentage of the population. Content analyses of magazine ads from these decades found Blacks to appear in less than one percent of the ads investigated (see Kern-Foxworth, 1994; Zinkhan, Qualls, & Biswas, 1990). These early findings indicated the disproportionate representation of Blacks in media advertising.

However, the frequency of Black character portrayals began to increase in the 1960s. Cox (1970) found that Blacks were increasing in their frequency of appearances in magazine advertising, though still not to a level equal to their percentage of the population. Zinkhan et al. (1990) reported findings from a secondary analysis of content analyses of televised ads from 1967-1986, and a new content analysis of four mass-circulated magazines in 1986. Their data indicated there had been a significant increase in Blacks’ representation in advertising, and that this was more pronounced for television
ads relative to magazine ads. However, other evidence suggested that while Blacks were increasing in number, the nature of their portrayals still perpetuated racial stereotypes (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972; Mastro & Stern, 2003; Wilkes & Valencia, 1989). The increased appearance but stereotypical portrayal of Blacks continued through the 1970s and 1980s (Larson, 2002; Faber et al., 1987), where they were “cast predominantly as lower-class and lower occupation members, buyers of inexpensive products, objects of philanthropy and social concern or in token roles, such as members of a crowd, and not in mixed-race settings” (Peterson, 2007, p. 200). In particular, the increasing representation and positive portrayal of Black models in advertising was not found in introductory ads (ads at the beginning of a product’s lifecycle), potentially due to marketer fears of associating a new product with this racial group (Reid & Bergh, 1980).

In their study of Black females in advertising, Jackson and Ervin (1991) analyzed Cosmopolitan, Glamour, and Vogue from 1986-1988, finding that only 2.4% of ads in these magazines contained a Black female, while 5% contained an Asian female. Black women were more likely to appear alone rather than in groups, were presented at a distance from the viewer, and were more likely to appear in clothing and full-body ads, relative to makeup and face-only ads. The issue of gender within race also arises in the criticism that advertisers have a bias toward light-skinned Blacks, rather than portray a fuller range of Black female beauty. Brown (1993) argues that the portrayal of a narrow “type” of Black female suggests a narrow view of beauty in Black women.

Evidence from the 1990s to the present day is more mixed. Some findings indicate Blacks’ occupational status has increased— but not their frequency of appearance— while other evidence indicates appearances have increased while occupational status
remained the same (Zinkhan et al., 1990). Generally, content analyses from the 1990s found minorities were still disproportionately absent from ads or portrayed in relatively subordinate positions (Bowen & Schmid, 1997). More recent work indicates Blacks are not only increasing in frequency and occupational status in media advertising, but in many cases have reached or surpassed their percentage of the population, and appear in higher social status portrayals (Bailey, 2006; Ball, Liang, & Lee, 2009; La Ferle & Lee, 2005; Taylor, Landreth, & Bang, 2005). For example, Peterson (2007) found Blacks were depicted most favorably in his sample of consumer magazine ads from 1994-2000 relative to Latinos, Asians, and Whites, and were rated second only to Asians for apparent hierarchy and social authority.

**Viewer Responses to Race in Advertising – Experimental Research**

The 1960s were a period of significant change in race relations in the United States. Stemming from the civil rights movement that characterized the latter part of this decade, there was growing social and political pressure to present a more appropriate portrayal of minorities in the mass media (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972). Initially, advertisers were anxious about engaging in “integrated advertising”—advertising containing both White and Black characters designed to target both racial groups—for fear of alienating the White majority. However, research investigating race-based advertising responses has yielded mixed results (see below).

**Impact of Race on Advertising Outcomes**

One of the earliest attempts at addressing White viewer responses to integrated advertising was a study by Barban and Cundiff (1964) examining how Black and White students responded to print ads containing either two Black characters, two White
characters, or one Black and one White character (integrated ads). Their results indicated that Blacks responded more favorably than Whites toward “integrated advertising”, but about the same when only one racial group was present. The authors interpreted this finding as evidence that Black participants simply responded more favorably than Whites, rather than suggesting Whites respond “negatively” to integrated advertising.

While Barban and Cundiff’s study was an unofficial kickoff for the study of race effects in advertising, another soon followed which stirred some controversy. Cagley and Cardozo (1970) investigated whether Whites’ level of racial prejudice (high, low) served as a moderator of advertising responses to all-Black, all-White, and integrated ads. They found that high prejudice Whites consistently reported the lowest ad, product, and company ratings when exposed to integrated ads, while low prejudice Whites reported no difference between experimental conditions. Their results indicated low prejudice Whites were more favorable toward integrated ads and Black model ads than high prejudice Whites. Cagley and Cardozo took their results as an indication that integrated advertising, and any advertising employing Black models, was a risky venture which should be avoided due to what they termed “White backlash”.

The findings of their study and their warning about White backlash were called into question by Stafford, Birdwell, and Van Tassel (1970), who replicated their study design to determine if Whites’ emotional response to integrated ads was lower than for non-integrated ads. Their findings were inconsistent, and largely unsupportive of any differences in evaluation between integrated and non-integrated advertising. In another replication, Bush, Hair, and Solomon (1979) examined the effects of Whites’ level of prejudice on responses to ads with different racial make-ups. They found little to no
difference between high and low prejudice Whites in their response to ads with Black, White, or integrated models. Other research also indicated that White respondents do not differ in their evaluation of ads featuring White or Black ad models, providing more evidence against the arguments made by Cagley and Cardozo (Bush, Gwinner, & Solomon, 1974; Muse, 1971). Schlinger and Plummer (1972) found further support that Whites (White females in particular) respond no differently to advertisements with Black or White characters. Additionally they extended earlier research designs by replicating this finding for television ads (rather than print ads) and by also including Black participants, finding Blacks responded more favorably to the ad, brand, and model when Black characters were present relative to White characters.

After experiencing a lull in the literature, research investigating viewer responses to model race in advertising was updated by Whittler and colleagues (Whittler, 1989; 1991; Whittler & DiMeo, 1991; Whittler, Calantone, & Young, 1991). Citing methodological limitations of past work and sociopolitical change in the U.S., Whittler gathered new evidence regarding how consumers process and respond to race in advertising. In contrast to earlier studies, Whittler found that Whites, and high prejudice Whites in particular, responded more (less) favorably to ads featuring White (Black) actors (Whittler, 1989; Whittler & Dimeo, 1991).

Cultural Cues and Cultural Embeddedness in Advertising

One aspect of the media environment affecting advertising outcomes is the presence of cultural cues within the ads. While early studies suggested a model’s race was sufficient to elicit positive target market effects (Barban & Cundiff, 1964; Barban, 1969; Schlinger & Plummer, 1972), recent research efforts suggest more tailored cultural
cues may be necessary (Appiah, 2003; Appiah & Liu, 2009; Forehand & Deshpande, 2001). Cultural cues refer to the “values, symbols, ethics, rituals, traditions, material objects, and services” produced by a given cultural group (Appiah, 2001b, p. 8). Advertisements containing many cultural cues are said to be high in cultural embeddedness, while ads with few cultural cues are low in cultural embeddedness (Appiah, 2001b).

Culturally embedded advertisements are likely to be more effective at reaching audience members who identify with the represented culture. Pitts et al. (1989) found that not only do Black viewers respond more positively to ads containing Black models, but Black viewers are also keenly aware of cultural cues present in ads that Whites may not notice. A crucial issue with much of the existing research on race in advertising is that few ads containing Black characters also contain Black cultural cues (Appiah, 2001a). For instance, most Black character ads lack specific cultural cues such as dress, images, and symbols consistent with Black culture (Fost, 1993). In fact, other researchers have found that even when Black models are utilized in advertising, most of the cultural cues reflect White cultural values (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). The presence of White mainstream culture cues surrounding Black characters may explain why many early studies found White viewers responded no differently to ads featuring White or Black characters (Bush, Gwinner, & Solomon, 1974; Bush, Hair, & Solomon, 1979; Muse, 1971; Schlinger & Plummer, 1972; Stafford, Birdwell, & & Van Tassel, 1970).

Research studies examining viewer responses to race in advertising have a tendency of experimentally manipulating the race of ad models, but not the cultural context in which these models appeared (Appiah, 2001a; Bush, Hair, & Solomon, 1979;
Whittler, 1989; 1991). The manipulation of character race but not the cultural cues surrounding the character may help explain why Whites respond no differently to advertisements featuring White or non-White models. White viewers may be just as likely to infer similarity with Black models as White models, assuming these Black models are surrounded by cultural cues with which Whites can identify (e.g. American culture, pop culture dress, social or economic success). However, much less is known regarding how Whites respond to Black models surrounded by African American cultural cues. Advertising context cues that are related to specific ethnic groups (African Americans) may be more likely to lead Whites to perceive dissimilarity with advertising characters.

**POLYSEMY AND AMBIGUITY IN ADVERTISING**

Because source ambiguity is argued to play a role in the occurrence of context effects, this dissertation uses both racially ambiguous and unambiguous characters as part of experimental stimuli to study context effects on perceptions of advertising characters and advertising outcomes. As a result, it is necessary to define the concepts of racial ambiguity and advertising polysemy to describe how they relate to context effects in the present study.

*Racial Ambiguity and Advertising Research*

The appearance and effects of racial minorities (racially unambiguous characters) in advertising has been a source of critical concern and research interest for decades. Scholarly research has focused on the frequency, context, and implications of minority characters in advertising, providing great insight into both the history of racial representation in advertising (Cox, 1970; Mastro & Stern, 2003; Peterson, 2007), and the
implications of race on advertising outcomes (Appiah, 2001a; Whittler, 1989; Whittler & DiMeo, 1991). Research efforts have also uncovered a number of factors found to influence how viewers respond to race in advertising including viewer ethnic identity (Appiah, 2001b), identity salience (Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed, 2002), and social status portrayal (Coleman, Jussim, & Kelley, 1995).

While much is known concerning how individuals respond to unambiguous race portrayals in advertising, a novel concern for advertisers is understanding consumer responses to racially ambiguous models (Appiah & Elias, 2010). In an effort to both represent a growing segment of the population as well as target both White and non-White consumers, marketers are turning to biracial and multiracial models to reach diverse audiences (Arlidge, 2004). Multiracial models and those with ambiguous racial features are thought to appeal both to the White majority as well as minority group members who may perceive the model to possess ingroup characteristics. The result is an advertising model with the potential for both mass and targeted appeal (Sengupta, 2002).

However, relatively little is known regarding how consumers respond to ads featuring characters whose racial background is ambiguous and subject to viewer interpretation. The natural result of utilizing racially ambiguous models is that viewers will vary in their categorization of the model’s race, which has significant implications for how a marketing message may be interpreted and how viewers identify with the model. Variation in the racial categorization of ad models raises several relevant questions for practitioners and researchers interested in understanding how consumers are likely to respond to racially ambiguous models in advertising. Does different categorization lead to different advertising responses? What is the underlying process
guiding race categorization? What role do context cues play in categorization? Are racially ambiguous characters more or less effective than unambiguous (e.g. Black, White) characters in targeted or untargeted ads?

Racial ambiguity is an important component of the current research because scholars argue that perceptions of a source may be less susceptible to context cues if the source is unambiguous on the relevant cue dimension (Lee & Suk, 2010). For example, the racial categorization of an ad model may not be influenced by racial cultural cues present in the ad if the character’s race is unambiguous (i.e. easily perceived to be Black, White). Instead, assimilation and contrast effects are much more likely to occur when the character’s race is ambiguous.

Because this dissertation examines the effects of racial cultural cues on character similarity and advertising outcomes, the inclusion of racially ambiguous advertising models is necessary for a fuller understanding of how cultural cues in advertising influence identification processes and ad responses by consumers. How individuals categorize ad models has particular relevance for researchers trying to understand how consumers perceive and respond to racially ambiguous characters in advertising. In the following section ambiguity is defined within the framework of advertising polysemy, which refers to “the occurrence of multiple meanings for the same advertising message” (Puntoni, Schroeder, & Ritson, 2010, p. 51). One means by which polysemy can be achieved is through utilizing ambiguous advertising models to allow consumers to infer the model race that they feel is most appropriate given the advertising context. Below, the concepts of advertising polysemy and racial ambiguity are reviewed to describe how
consumer and context differences may influence source categorization and advertising outcomes.

Polysemy

The term “polysemy” refers to “the different meanings conveyed by the same word” (Laviosa, 2005, p. 26). For example, the word “model” can refer to a miniaturized copy of an object (model airplane), an occupation (clothing model), or a specific type of machine (Ford Motor Company’s “Fusion” model). However, the multiplicity of meanings of words is generally not a hinderance to communication because individuals are adept at effortlessly and unconsciously using context cues to select the appropriate usage of a word (Ravin & Leacock, 2000). Individuals rely on other elements in a sentence and their knowledge of language to infer the appropriate definition of polysemic words. It is this aspect of polysemy—that context cues and individual knowledge aid in selecting appropriate definitions—which the current study investigates in an advertising context. Specifically, this study examines whether cultural cues can guide perceptions of ambiguous and unambiguous models, and investigates the subsequent impact of similarity perceptions on advertising outcomes.

Polysemy in Advertising

In advertising contexts, polysemy refers not only to multiple meanings of a given word, but rather the occurrence of different interpretations of the same advertising creative. Advertising polysemy can be defined as the “existence of at least two distinct interpretations for the same advertising message across audiences, or across time and situations” (Puntoni et al., 2010, p. 52). This conceptualization denotes that derived meaning can differ between two groups of viewers (or simply two viewers), as well as
differ for the same group (or individual) over time. Furthermore, Puntoni et al. (2010) note that advertising polysemy specifically describes a different understanding or interpretation of an ad, not simply different attitudes toward or liking of an ad. Advertising polysemy refers to both intended and unintended differences in the interpretation of a given media advertisement. The multiplicity of meaning may result from carefully designed advertising copy or imagery intended to result in different interpretations by different social groups. Alternatively, viewers may derive meaning from an advertisement not intended or conceived by the advertiser, potentially leading to unintended, negative effects. Below, two forms of advertising polysemy are defined to help establish the contexts under which polysemy can occur.

*Synchronic Polysemy.* Synchronic polysemy occurs when an advertisement results in different interpretations by different groups of viewers at a given point in time. Often this difference can occur between target and nontarget consumers when an advertisement includes visual and contextual cues which may not be perceived by nontarget consumers (Pitts, Whalen, O’Keefe, & Murray, 1989), or which result in different meanings between groups based on their level of cultural knowledge (Brumbaugh, 2002). Synchronic polysemy therefore refers to variance in meaning between viewers based on idiosyncratic or group-based differences.

*Diachronic Polysemy.* Another form of polysemy occurs when different interpretations of the same advertising creative occur for an individual at different exposures. While consumers may infer one interpretation of an ad the first time it is viewed, subsequent exposure may allow for additional advertising cues to be noticed and influence the meaning derived from the creative. Alternatively, the context under which
an advertisement is consumed may result in a different reading of the ad at two different
times. Diachronic polysemy denotes within-viewer differences between two or more
exposures, while synchronic polysemy denotes between-viewer differences for two or
more groups during a single exposure.

Racial Ambiguity

While the potential for a single advertising message to result in disparate
interpretations has traditionally been viewed as a barrier to effective communication,
marketers have more recently recognized advertising polysemy to be a strategic
marketing tool (Puntoni et al., 2010). One method for creating an advertisement likely to
result in different inferred meaning is the use of racially ambiguous advertising models.
In fact, marketers are increasingly using racially ambiguous character to reach consumers
(Arlidge, 2004). “Given that nearly seven million Americans identified themselves as
members of more than one race in the 2000 census, there appears to be an emerging call
in advertising and marketing for the use of ethnically neutral, diverse, or ambiguous
characters” (Appiah & Elias, 2010, p. 164). In fact, audiences twenty-five and under are
twice as likely to identify as multiracial compared to older adults (La Ferle, 2003).

Racially ambiguous models are those whose racial background is not easily
identified based on their physical appearance. There are two general ways one might
choose to define or operationalize racial ambiguity. In one case, a model may be
considered racially ambiguous if there is little consistency in viewer perceptions of the
model’s race (assuming a homogeneous viewer population, e.g. all White, all Black). For
example, a model that is perceived to be White by half of the viewers, and Black by the
other half of viewers (due to skin tone and facial features that are not clearly White or
Black), may be considered racially ambiguous. A potential problem with the above definition is although the character might be considered racially ambiguous, the operationalization denotes that individual viewers still perceive the model to belong to a specific racial group. While different racial group categorizations may result in different inferred meaning from the advertising creative (advertising polysemy) and be of interest to marketers, such an operationalization results in consumers who are going through the same psychological processes as previous studies investigating responses to model race (Whittler, 1991) and skin color (Watson, DeJong, & Slack, 2009).

Alternatively, racial ambiguity may be operationalized by the inability of viewers to categorize an advertising model into a specific racial or ethnic category, resulting in either an unspecified “biracial” or “uncertain” categorization. Moreover, models may be considered racially ambiguous if viewers have a high degree of uncertainty regarding the model’s race (i.e. model is perceived to be Black, but viewer is not very certain about this perception). Operationalizing racial ambiguity as “uncertainty” surrounding a model’s race is likely to result in different psychological processes when responding to advertising media because firm attitudes toward the model may not be held. To this point, little research has empirically examined how viewers respond to advertising messages containing models whose racial background is relatively ambiguous. Does the presence of “uncategorizable” models result in more positive advertising appraisals, negative appraisals, or have little effect on outcomes compared to models perceived as clearly Black or White? More specifically for the current investigation, is model ambiguity a necessary for condition for context effects to take place?
Ad models likely to be labeled as racially ambiguous may include biracial or multiracial models, or simply individuals who do not closely resemble their racial prototype based on features including skin tone, hair, nose, lips, or eye features. The result is a model or spokesperson that can not be easily categorized, leaving his or her perceived group membership open to viewer interpretation and perhaps more dependent on surrounding context cues. Some scholars argue that racially ambiguous models may be more effective in persuading consumers (Sengupta, 2002). The current study helps address this knowledge gap by considering factors guiding perceptions of ad models and examining whether racially ambiguous and unambiguous models differ in their subsequent impact on advertising messages.

IDENTIFICATION MODEL OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE: SIMILARITY AND PERSUASION

A theoretical framework that has been useful for understanding the persuasive influence of advertising characters is Kelman’s (1961) identification model, which has been utilized in several empirical studies of advertising character effects (Appiah, 2001b; Hoy & Wang, 2000; Jones, 2010; Whittler, 1989; Whittler & DiMeo, 1991). In his research describing the components of attitude change, Kelman posits that identification occurs “when an individual adopts behavior derived from another person or a group because this behavior is associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group” (Kelman, 1961, p. 63). Identification theory argues that individuals are more likely to be persuaded when they desire a positive relationship with the communicator. Thus, adopting the attitudes and behaviors of the communicator serves to
maintain one’s relationship with the communicator’s social group, affirming one’s self-definition (Hoy & Wang, 2000).

In an advertising context, identification occurs when audience members like an advertising model and adopt behaviors and attitudes (i.e. product and advertisement liking, purchase intentions) as a means of affiliating with the model’s social reference group (Jones, 2010; Kelman & Eagley, 1965). The identification framework posits that people automatically evaluate their level of similarity with a source during interactions, and use this information to make similarity judgments (Appiah, 2001a). Similarity judgments lead viewers to select or prefer media characters that share important personal characteristics. A rationale for this preference bias is that when individuals perceive a source shares certain characteristics, they assume the source will share other characteristics as well. Perceived similarity influences advertising outcomes by leading to greater identification with media characters (Feick & Higie, 1992), which has been shown to bolster the influence of media content (Huesman et al., 1983).

Source similarity plays a pivotal role in identification processes. Specifically, when individuals perceive themselves to be highly similar to an advertising character, identification effects are expected to occur (e.g. adopting character attitudes, beliefs), resulting in positive responses to advertising messages. Conversely when individuals perceive a low level of similarity between themselves and ad characters, identification with the source is not expected to occur, and marketing messages are expected to be less effective.

What is significant about Kelman’s identification model is that it points to similarity as the primary criterion in determining identification effects. Thus, the
identification framework supports empirical studies indicating perceived similarity, not group similarity (matching viewer and model race), is more predictive of identification with ad characters (Hoplamazian & Appiah, forthcoming).

Role of Similarity in Persuasion

Perceived similarity with media characters is an important aspect of persuasion, as individuals are more influenced by media containing models perceived to be similar to the self (Brock, 1965). Research indicates that viewer-character similarity increases perception that the viewer is in the target audience, leading to more positive product and advertisement ratings (Aaker, Brumbaugh, & Grier, 2000). When elements of an advertisement (such as the characters present) mirror the target consumer’s cultural environment, audience members better identify with the message resulting in greater ad effectiveness (Pitts et al., 1989).

One particularly salient cue of similarity is the race of media characters. However, there is much evidence suggesting White audiences do not use racial cues when evaluating source similarity (Hoplamazian & Appiah, forthcoming; Smedley & Bayton, 1978), or advertising effectiveness (Appiah, 2001a; 2007; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999). Whites are assumed to place much less importance on race as a source cue because they tend not to think of themselves as belonging to a specific racial or ethnic group, and do not consider their race to be a significant self-defining attribute (Phinney, 1992; Royce, 1982). Still, there are other types of cues White viewers may utilize when determining their level of similarity with a source including basic values, appearance, and lifestyle. In fact researchers argue White audiences may perceive similarity with Black
sources as long as their physical appearance and lifestyle match with that of the audience (Appiah, 2001b; Coleman, Jussim, & Kelley, 1995).

Alternative Theoretical Perspectives

While the identification framework provides a useful theoretical foundation for explaining how advertising character portrayals can influence advertising responses, Tajfel and Turner’s social identity theory (SIT; 1979; 1986) has recently been used by media scholars to predict and explain how media portrayals of ingroup or outgroup members function to influence viewer perceptions and attitudes (Fujioka, 2005; Mastro, 2003; Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Kopacz, 2008; Sierra, Hyman, & Torres, 2009). What SIT makes clear is that individuals have different social groups to which they belong (or feel a sense of belonging to) which help provide a definition of the self (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Individuals use these social group memberships to make ingroup-outgroup comparisons which promote self or group distinctiveness. Researchers argue that group comparison occurs because categorizing stimuli into “comprehensible, comparative dimensions is essential to the development and maintenance of self-concept and self-esteem” (Mastro, 2003, p. 99). Following this framework, individuals should be motivated to make positive ingroup-outgroup distinctions in order to maintain a positive social identity. The result is that group differences which reflect positively on the individual are highly valued (Hogg & McGarty, 1990). This can occur through both positive ingroup characteristics, or negative outgroup characteristics (Jackson et al., 1996).

21
Social identity theory has only recently been applied to media and advertising research (Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1999; Fujioka, 2005; Maldonado & Muelhing, 2006; Mastro, 2003; Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Kopacz, 2008; Sierra, Hyman, & Torres, 2009). However the theory holds much promise for explaining viewer responses to ad characters and cues, as SIT argues that the comparisons made between groups are not necessarily based in reality, but may be subjectively constructed to achieve positive social identity (Hogg et al., 1995). As a result, the potential for advertising model characteristics (e.g. race, age) to influence intergroup comparisons and social identity is highly conceivable, especially for individuals with a high group salience (Mastro, 2003).

However as with any theory, it is important not to apply the tenets of SIT to contexts outside the theory’s design. Social identity theory was conceived specifically to explain and predict behavior in conditions of intergroup conflict. The group conflict described by SIT is that which arises between two groups of people who are in competition with each other, such that one group gaining resources results in the other losing these resources (or perceiving loss). Outside this specific intergroup context, the tenets of SIT are not assumed to apply.

In media contexts SIT has been used to hypothesize that exposure to ingroup (or outgroup) members in the media will affect the social identity of viewers depending on whether the portrayal positively or negatively represents the group. In advertising contexts, individuals’ desire to maintain a positive social identity is hypothesized to lead to predictable advertising responses based on the nature of the ingroup or outgroup portrayal in the advertisement. For example, depictions of ingroup members in positive
roles should bolster the effectiveness of the advertisement, while positive depictions of outgroup members should weaken ad effectiveness.

However, considering that groups not in direct competition should not experience social identity effects due to group portrayals in the media (such as advertisements), SIT must be applied conservatively in research after considering the nature of the social groups being investigated. For example, Blacks and Whites have been found to differ widely in the importance of their racial background (Phinney, 1992). Additionally, the salience of race in social contexts differs based on the distinctiveness of that trait (McGuire, 1984; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). As a result, while Blacks (and other racial minorities) may respond to race portrayals in the media in accordance with the tenets of SIT, Whites are much less likely to do so because they do not perceive themselves to be in direct conflict with racial minorities. Such a perspective is reflected in advertising research findings indicating Whites respond no differently to advertisements featuring models of different races (see review below).

Because social group competition is a necessary criterion for applying social identity theory, it is considered less applicable to the current investigation. Many self-identities exist which have no relevant outgroup against which they compete for resources. For example an individual may identify strongly as a woodworker, a runner, or a medical doctor. While cultural cues specific to these group identities may be utilized in advertising to foster identification processes, these groups are not in direct competition with others.

As a result, identification theory is used as the theoretical framework in this dissertation due to its applicability to the wider spectrum of cultural cues which may be
of interest to media scholars. Identification theory accounts for how any cultural cue with which viewers may identify can lead viewers to adopt the attitudes of the source.

ASSIMILATION AND CONTRAST EFFECTS IN CATEGORIZATION

Two context-based effects that have been shown to play a role in source perceptions are assimilation and contrast effects. Generally speaking, assimilation occurs when the assessment of a target object is biased in the direction of the context in which the target appears. Conversely, contrast effects occur when assessment of a target is biased in the opposite direction of the context (Lee & Suk, 2010).

The specific way assimilation and contrast effects are examined in empirical studies can vary based on the source being assessed, and the context features influencing assessment. For example, assimilation and contrast effects can refer to how individuals converge their self-assessments (self as the source) with a target other (other as context). Here assimilation effects occur when self-assessments are biased toward assessments of the other, while contrast effects occur when self-assessments are biased away from the other. Such an approach considers the target other as the context influencing self-evaluations. For example, Häfner (2004) investigated whether consumers assimilated or contrasted their self-evaluations (feelings of similarity or dissimilarity) to a highly attractive ad model (defined in the study as a category standard). Results indicated that both assimilation and contrast effects can occur, based on consumers’ initial assessment of similarity with the target.

Alternatively, assimilation and contrast effects can refer to how individuals converge (or diverge) their assessment of an external source (e.g. advertising character) with the context features surrounding the character. In this case assimilation effects
occur when perceptions of the source match perceptions of the context features, while contrast effects occur when source perceptions are opposite those of the context features. In the above example the advertising model is the source being judged, and elements present in the advertisement are the context features influencing assessment of the source.

The current investigation adopts both approaches in examining assimilation and contrast effects due to cultural cues. Specifically, in media advertisements, do the presence of context features surrounding an advertising character (e.g. cultural cues, setting) bias the categorization of ad characters in the direction of the cultural cues present in an advertisement (assimilation effect), or in the opposite direction of cultural cues (contrast effect)? Further, do cultural cues present in an advertisement influence the viewer’s perceived similarity with the character? In the section below, assimilation and contrast effects are reviewed as they help describe how cultural cues in the advertising environment influence how characters are categorized by viewers, affecting perceived similarity.

Models of Assimilation and Contrast Effects

In their study of extreme exemplar effects on product perceptions, Lee and Suk (2010) point to two models of assimilation and contrast to highlight how each effect might occur. These models help inform when and why assimilation and contrast effects occur, and are briefly reviewed below.

Interpretation-comparison model (ICM). The ICM proposes that context information can influence the manner in which a source is interpreted by serving as an interpretive frame guiding source processing (Stapel, 2007). Context cues increase the accessibility of a given category, which guide viewers when assigning group membership
to a target (e.g. advertising character). This results in an assimilation effect when the target is perceived to be similar to the context. An important condition for this effect, as noted by Lee and Suk (2010), is that the target must be ambiguous in its category membership. Categorization of an unambiguous target would be less susceptible to context features, as strong beliefs about the target’s group membership already exist and are difficult to change.

For instance, assimilation effects may occur if religious cultural cues are present in an advertisement, as the religious background of media characters tends to be fairly ambiguous. Specifically, the model present in an ad containing religion-specific cultural cues may be categorized by viewers as a member of the associated religious group. Labeling the model in this way will increase viewers’ felt similarity with the model if viewers are members of the same religious group.

Selective Accessibility Model (SAM). Stapel (2007) notes that a shortcoming of the ICM is that it does not account for the possibility of contrast effects which have been found in recent empirical work (e.g. Häfner, 2004; Stapel & Blanton, 2004; Stapel, Koomen, & Ruys, 2002). The SAM (Mussweiler, 2003) accounts for both perceptual assimilation and contrast effects from context features. The SAM posits that “the encoding of a target is done with reference to some standard, and the context often provides an easily accessible standard” (Lee & Suk, 2010, p. 891). During the encoding (i.e. categorization) process, the target stimulus is compared to a “standard” stimulus to determine its similarity or dissimilarity from the standard. This is highly similar to the predictions of prototype theory (see below), where a source is compared to a category prototype when making categorization decisions. The SAM extends the ICM by
specifying that the occurrence of an assimilation or a contrast effect depends on the initial overall assessment of similarity between the target and the category standard, a process supported by evidence from Häfner (2004). Perceptions of similarity between the target and standard lead to assimilation effects, while an initial assessment of target-standard dissimilarity will lead to contrast effects. Target ambiguity is argued to facilitate assimilation effects (relative to contrast effects) because the unspecific features of the target are easier to construe as similar to the category standard (Lee & Suk, 2010).

Regardless, contrast effects can occur if the target is perceived to be dissimilar from a given category standard. For example, a contrast effect may occur if a racially ambiguous character appears in an ad with African American cultural cues, but is perceived to be very dissimilar from the African American prototype that exists in the viewer’s mind. The result would be a contrast effect, where the ambiguous character is categorized as clearly not African American, despite the presence of context cues making African American culture more salient.

THEORIES OF SOURCE CATEGORIZATION

Considerable research in social psychology has been devoted to understanding how individuals categorize stimuli. Category-learning theories are helpful for understanding the factors influencing the categorization of novel stimuli such as ambiguous media characters. Three prominent category-learning theories are briefly reviewed below to highlight the source and context factors likely to impact the process of source categorization.
Prototype Theory

One of the early theories of category-learning, prototype theory posits that individuals learn about a particular category (i.e. gender, race, religion) by learning the features of the category prototype (Posner & Keele, 1968; 1970; Rosch, 1973; 1975). As a result, when presented with an unfamiliar stimulus prototype theory argues it will be assigned to the category with the most similar prototype (Reed, 1972; Smith & Minda, 1998). Regarding racially ambiguous characters, the theory suggests viewers are faced with the task of comparing a source with various racial prototypes, and assigning membership into the group whose prototype is most similar to the source. The use of a category prototype in categorization processes suggests a role of group stereotypes and attitudes, which should influence individuals’ perceptions of prototypical group members. For instance, the group prototype for “African American” is likely to differ between two people based on the attitudes and beliefs these individuals hold regarding African Americans as a group. Whites who have many African American friends and have exposure to African Americans in a variety of workplace and social environments are likely to have a different group prototype in mind relative to Whites with little intergroup contact that hold to stereotypical views of African Americans. Consequently, intergroup attitudes may influence source categorization following the tenets of prototype theory.

Exemplar Theory

Another prominent theory of category-learning is exemplar theory. Exemplar theory takes the perspective that individuals learn about a category and make categorization decisions by first learning about the exemplars of a given category
(Brooks, 1978; Estes, 1986; Lamberts, 2000). When one encounters an unfamiliar stimulus, its similarity is compared to all known exemplars from each potentially relevant category, not just a category prototype. “The stimulus is then assigned to the category for which the sum of these similarities is greatest” (Ashby & Maddox, 2005, p. 152).

In the context of racially ambiguous characters, the theory suggests individuals will engage in similarity comparisons between the source and all exemplars stored in memory from relevant racial group categories. Ultimately the source will be categorized as a member of the group whose exemplars are cumulatively most similar to the source. The inclusion of all category exemplars in categorization points to the importance of breadth of group knowledge in influencing categorization decisions. Categorization according to prototype theory and exemplar theory will differ to the extent that individuals differ in their perceptions of group heterogeneity. Perception that a group is highly homogeneous is likely to result in similar categorization responses following the two theories. Rather, when one views a group to be highly heterogeneous, this is likely to result in different responses following prototype theory compared to exemplar theory. This is because prototype theory argues individuals consider a group prototype when making categorization decisions, even for highly heterogeneous groups. Exemplar theory suggests individuals consider the range of group members when making group categorization decisions.

**Decision Bound Theory**

A third theory discussed by Ashby and Maddox (2005) perhaps most relevant to the current study is decision bound theory. The theory posits “categorization can be described by the determination of the boundaries that best separate one category from
another on the basis of relative likelihood” (Queller & Mason, 2008, p. 70). Decision bound theory argues that individuals conceptualize different “response regions” into which a particular stimulus may fall. When presented with an unfamiliar stimulus, individuals assign it to the response region that is the best fit for the stimulus. The boundaries that separate one region from competing regions (e.g. distinguish racial, gender, political groups) are known as the decision bounds (Ashby & Gott 1988; Ashby & Townsend 1986). Following decision bound theory, category learning is the process of learning about the category regions or learning the decision bounds. When encountering models ambiguous along a given dimension (e.g. race, status, religion), decision bound theory posits that categorization takes place by considering one’s overall knowledge of relevant categories, and the decision bounds separating each category. The use of overall category knowledge in categorization processes places greater importance on category features, not just source features, which may facilitate categorization. In other words, context cues which are associated with certain category regions (e.g. cultural groups) may influence categorization decisions. This has particular relevance when categorizing racially ambiguous sources, as context features of the source (e.g. dress, appearance) and surrounding the source (e.g. setting, background features, activities) can facilitate categorization using the decision bound.
CHAPTER 2

STUDY 1

Overview

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the potential influence of cultural cues in advertising on viewer perceptions of the character (e.g. similarity, identification) and outcomes from the advertisement (e.g. attitude toward the brand, purchase intentions). In Study 1, racial cultural cues and character race are manipulated in novel print advertisements to determine their role in ad processing. Racial cues are utilized in this study for several reasons. First, as the review provided in the previous chapter demonstrates, there is considerable research investigating character race in advertising which would benefit from work directly examining how cultural cues influence White viewers’ responses to character race in advertising. The importance of understanding White viewer responses to race is underlined by the fact that the growth rate of the United State population was 9.7% from 2000-2010, while the number of people who reported their race as White alone grew by only 1% during this time period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The fact that racial minority groups are growing at a faster rate than Whites indicates an increasing presence of minority groups in U.S. life and culture. Moreover, the frequency and positive portrayals of minorities in advertising media continue to increase (Ball, Liang, & Lee, 2009; La Ferle & Lee, 2005; Taylor, Landreth, & Bang,
which suggests understanding White responses to race in advertising will become increasingly important in the future, as attitudes may shift over time. Study 1 fills a deep gap in the literature and addresses null findings from past research of White viewer responses to race by examining the interplay between character race and cultural cues in advertising.

Second, using characters of different race portrayals allows for a novel test of the role that character ambiguity plays in racial context cue effects. The ambiguity of a target is argued to influence whether context cues can in fact lead to assimilation or contrast effects (Lee & Suk, 2010), making both ambiguous and unambiguous character conditions desirable to address the role of target ambiguity. Specifically, unambiguous targets should be less susceptible to the effects of context cues because beliefs about the target may be firmly established. Utilizing race as a context allows for character (target) ambiguity to be manipulated independent of context cues through the use of different skin tones or facial features. Other cultural facets (e.g. religion, political affiliation) are ambiguous in nature—that is, any individual is ambiguous along this dimension outside of context cues. Conversely, other cultural cues such as gender cues are very unambiguous, thereby making an ambiguous condition difficult to create. As a result, employing racial cues allowed Study 1 to build off of previous advertising research, while offering the greatest flexibility for a first test of cultural cue effects in advertising.

Hypotheses

Following the tenets of Kelman’s (1961) identification model of social influence, perceived source similarity should have a positive influence on the persuasiveness of the source. To review, source similarity is hypothesized to increase one’s level of
identification with a source (ad character), which leads to adopting attitudes and behaviors that are consistent with the source. Following this framework, it is expected that advertisements containing context cues which suggest similarity between the viewer and the ad character should result in higher levels of similarity and identification with advertising models compared to ads featuring context cues which do not match the interests of the viewer. The following hypotheses address the predicted effect of context cues on perceptions of advertising characters:

H1: White viewers will report greater similarity with advertising characters when White mainstream cultural cues are present in the ad, compared to Black cultural cues.

H2: White viewers will report greater identification with advertising characters when White mainstream cultural cues are present in the ad, compared to Black cultural cues.

Because similarity and identification are posited to facilitate the persuasiveness of a communicator’s message, advertising outcomes (e.g. attitude toward brand, purchase intent) should be more positive for advertisements featuring source cues with which viewers identify. The following hypotheses address the predicted effect of context cues on viewer responses to advertisements:

H3: White viewers will report more positive attitudes toward the advertisement when White mainstream cultural cues are present in the advertisement, compared to Black cultural cues.

H4: White viewers will report more positive attitudes toward the brand when White mainstream cultural cues are present in the advertisement, compared to Black cultural cues.
H5: White viewers will report stronger purchase intentions when White mainstream cultural cues are present in the advertisement, compared to Black cultural cues.

While race is often a strong cue of similarity for racial minorities, Whites have generally placed significantly less importance on their racial background (Phinney, 1992; Royce, 1982). Advertising research reflects this finding, as past research has found White audiences report little difference in their identification with Black or White ad characters (Appiah, 2001a; 2007; Hoplamazian & Appiah, forthcoming). Conversely, there is some evidence that Whites use race as a secondary cue to differentiate between advertising characters (Hoplamazian & Appiah, forthcoming). Research by Whittler (1989; 1991) found that White viewers respond more favorably to ads featuring White characters compared to Black characters. Other work indicates White viewers respond less favorably to Black ad models with darker skin color compared to those with lighter skin color (Watson et al., 2009). In light of this evidence, it is possible that the character and advertisement ratings may differ for ads featuring Black, White, and racially ambiguous characters. Given conflicting research findings, the following research question is posed to address the potential impact of character race on White viewer responses:

RQ1: Does character race have a significant main effect on source similarity, identification, and advertising outcomes for White viewers?

Further, the assimilation/contrast literature posits that context effects are more likely to occur under conditions of source ambiguity (see Lee & Suk, 2010). For example, advertising characters whose race is unambiguous (easily identified as Black, White) may be less susceptible to context effects because attitudes toward these
characters may already be strongly held by viewers. In contrast, racially ambiguous characters may be perceived differently based on available context cues (Black, White cultural cues) because viewers may assimilate character race in the direction of the racial cues present in the ad. The following research question is posed to address the potential interaction between character race and context cues on White viewer responses:

RQ2: Is there an interaction between racial cultural cues and character race on source similarity, identification, and advertising outcomes for White viewers?

METHOD

Design

Study 1 used a 3 (Character Race: Black, White, Ambiguous) x 2 (Cultural Cues: Black, White) between-subjects factorial design with random assignment, resulting in six print advertisement conditions. The print ads featured a fictitious smartphone product which was assigned an unfamiliar brand name to prevent existing brand attitudes from influencing study results. Participants were randomly exposed to one of the six print advertisements and asked to respond to a number of items about the advertisement. Demographic items were also recorded after responding to the advertisement items.

Procedure and Implementation

Participants in this experiment were recruited from undergraduate communication courses, and received extra course credit for participation. Before beginning the study participants were instructed to view each ad for about thirty seconds, or as long as it takes to form an impression of the advertisement. Participants were asked to not refer back to the advertisements once they began the questionnaire because the researchers were interested in their honest, first impression reactions. Information regarding the voluntary
nature of the study was provided, and respondents were promised all study data was both confidential and anonymous. Finally, participants were instructed to sign a consent form if they agreed to participation, and then move on to view the print advertisement and respond to the questionnaire. Study participation took place either in a laboratory ($N = 85$) or a classroom ($N = 109$). No significant differences were found between study locations on the dependent measures used.

*Stimulus Materials*

Participants viewed one of six versions of the smartphone advertisement in which the character race and background cultural cues were manipulated. It was desirable to utilize a product relevant to college students, used equally by men and women, and not associated with a specific racial group. First, two versions of the smartphone ad were created, containing either several Black cultural cues or White mainstream cultural cues in the form of artwork images hanging on walls in the advertisement setting (office with desk and cabinet). Next, a Black, White, or racially ambiguous character was placed in each advertisement to create a total of six ad conditions.

*Stimuli Development*

*Pretest 1*

Although past studies have examined how any type of racial or ethnic cue (country reference, character race, cultural symbol) may make race-based responses more salient (Brader et al., 2008; Dimofte, Forehand, & Deshpande, 2003), the smartphone ads were designed to examine whether racial cultural cues have a direct influence on advertising outcomes. In order to create appropriate advertising stimuli, racially ambiguous and unambiguous advertising characters were first identified using a pretest.
Character race was manipulated in this study for several reasons. First, using race as a context allows for a more direct test of the role character ambiguity plays in context effects. Specifically, unambiguous targets may be less susceptible to the effects of context cues because beliefs about the target may be firmly established. Utilizing race as a context allows for character (target) ambiguity to be manipulated independent of context cues through the use of different skin tones or facial features.

Some cultural facets (e.g. religion, political affiliation) are ambiguous in nature—that is, any individual is ambiguous along this dimension outside of context cues. Conversely, cultural cues such as gender cues are very unambiguous, thereby making an ambiguous condition difficult to create. As a result, using both racially ambiguous and unambiguous characters in advertising stimuli allows for racial cultural cues to be investigated while determining if source ambiguity is a necessary condition for context effects to influence advertising responses.

Further, there is considerable research investigating character race in advertising which would benefit from work directly examining how cultural cues influence White viewers’ responses to character race in advertising. This dissertation fills a deep gap in the literature and addresses null findings from past research of White viewer responses to race by examining the interplay between character race and cultural cues in advertising.

A range of digital characters were first developed using Sitepal, an online software tool enabling one to create an animated spokesperson for company websites or advertisements. Digital characters were utilized in this study due to the ability to experimentally control their level of racial ambiguity. Evidence indicates viewers report highly similar patterns of response to both digital and human ad characters (Gong,
Appiah, & Elias, 2007; 2008), and Sitepal characters have been used successfully in previous advertising studies (Appiah & Elias, 2009; 2010) lending weight to their appropriateness as research stimuli.

Sitepal allows for specific character features (e.g. skin color, clothing, hair, facial features) to be independently manipulated, allowing the designer to create digital characters which differ only on selected attributes. Using this tool the skin tone of five different male characters was manipulated to create twenty-five characters for potential use in the main study (five versions of each character). Male characters were selected for use because both male and female viewers have been shown to identify equally well with male media characters, while males (relative to females) are less able to identify with female characters (see Sheehan, 2004, Chapter 7). The pretest was used to determine which characters were the most racially ambiguous, as well as confirm that Black and White characters were in fact racially unambiguous.

Subjects (N = 30) were undergraduate students enrolled in a communication course, and were not included in Study 1. Participants responded to two items after viewing each character’s face: 1) the perceived racial background of the character, and 2) how certain they are about their response to item 1. From this pretest a character was selected for use in the smartphone advertisements based on; 1) unanimous and high certainty of this character’s Black and White portrayals; and 2) high number of “not sure” responses for the character’s racially ambiguous portrayal, coupled with lowest certainty ratings about the ambiguous portrayal’s race.

For the selected character, the Black portrayal was perceived to be Black by 27 (90%) subjects, and the White character was perceived to be White by 27 (90%) subjects.
Respondents reported a high degree of certainty for both portrayals (Black $M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.49$; White $M = 5.33$, $SD = 2.02$; 7-point scale). The ambiguous portrayal received 4 (13%) “Not Sure” responses and received multiple responses in each of the six racial categories, indicating a lack of uniformity in racial categorization. Paired samples t-tests indicated that the mean certainty rating for the ambiguous character ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 2.10$) was significantly lower than the mean certainty ratings for both the Black ($p < .01$) and White ($p < .01$) characters. Similar selection criteria were used by Appiah and Elias (2010) and Knobloch-Westerwick, Appiah, and Alter (2008).

**Pretest 2**

In order to select appropriate and valid background cues which are reliably associated with specific cultural groups, a second pretest was conducted. Subjects ($N = 20$) were undergraduate students enrolled in a communication course, and were not used in Study 1. In this pretest individuals were shown a number of images and asked to associate these images with different social or cultural groups. Paintings were selected for use in the stimulus ads as opposed to photographs to better match the animated characters used in the study.

Subjects responded to twelve different pieces of artwork by indicating whether the image made salient Black culture, White mainstream culture, or another social or racial group. Four images unanimously associated with Black culture, and four images unanimously associated with White mainstream culture (not associated with a specific ethnic culture, or with “global” culture), were selected for use as context cues in Study 1. White mainstream cues are defined as those which are not readily associated with any racial, ethnic, or national culture. It was not necessary or desired that the White
mainstream cues be directly associated with White Americans. Rather these cues served the purpose of being distinct from Black cultural cues—which are readily associated with a specific social group—by not being associated with a specific, defined social group.

Final Stimuli

Based on pretest results, a total of six smartphone ads were created using selected characters and cultural cues from the pretests. Each advertisement was printed on 8.5” x 11” paper in full color. To prevent existing brand attitudes from impacting study results, identifiable information was removed from the phone, and an unfamiliar foreign brand name (Unitel) was used.

Each advertisement featured a character in the foreground of an office setting with a desk, computer, and cabinet behind the character. The character was shown from the chest up, and occupied the middle third of the advertisement. Behind the character were three cultural cues hanging on the walls, and one cue present on the computer sitting on the desk behind him. The copy below the character read “Capable of virtually anything, Just like me.” Below that line of text the product and brand were introduced to the viewer, reading “The new Z3 from Unitel.” The last line of copy, appearing at the bottom of the page read “Be limitless”.

Using the template described above, the six advertising conditions differed only in terms of the race of the character (Black, White, ambiguous) and the racial cues present (Black, White). Specifically, participants saw a print advertisement for a fictional Unitel smartphone (the Z3) containing one of the six sets of features described in Table 2.1. See Figure 2.1 for Study 1 advertisements.
Figure 2.1. Study 1 Stimulus Advertisements – Ambiguous Character with: A White Mainstream Cultural Cues, B Black Cultural Cues
Table 2.1  
*Character Race and Cultural Cues by Experimental Condition – Study 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Character Race</th>
<th>Racial Cultural Cues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Black character</td>
<td>White mainstream cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Black character</td>
<td>Black cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>White character</td>
<td>White mainstream cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>White character</td>
<td>Black cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Ambiguous character</td>
<td>White mainstream cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ambiguous character</td>
<td>Black cultural cues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subjects**

White undergraduate students (*N* = 194) from a large Midwestern university took part in this study on a voluntary and confidential basis. Because all hypotheses were premised upon context effects for White viewers, responses from non-White students were omitted from analyses. Students selecting more than one racial background (e.g. White *and* Black) were also removed from final analyses to prevent differences in racial makeup from influencing responses. The sample was 59% female (*N* = 114), and 41% male (*N* = 79), with two respondents not indicating gender. Mean age was about 21 years, with over 67% of students coming from junior or senior class ranks.
Dependent Measures

Perceived similarity with character (Similarity). Similarity was measured by having participants rate their degree of similarity to the ad model on five different dimensions: lifestyle, cultural background, dress, appearance, basic values. Ratings ranged from 1 (not at all similar) to 11 (very similar). A single Similarity index was created by computing the mean score of the five items. This five-item scale has been used in previous work (Torres & Briggs, 2007; Whittler, 1989) and was found to be reliable ($\alpha=.83$). Research by Nunnally (1978) holds that alphas of .70 or higher are sufficient to warrant use of a scale.

Identification with Character (Identification). Identification was measured by having subjects indicate their level of agreement with the following three items: 1) The character is a person whom I want to be like, 2) The character is my type of person, and 3) The character speaks for a group of which I am a member. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 11 (strongly agree). A single Identification index was created by computing the mean score of the three items. These items were adapted from previous research (Kelman & Eagly, 1965, Whittler & Spira, 2002) and were found to be reliable ($\alpha=.88$).

Attitude toward the ad (Aad). Subjects’ attitude toward the ad was measured using an 11-point semantic differential scale, including the following three sets of anchors: interesting-not interesting, likable-not likable, pleasant-unpleasant. A single Aad index was created by computing the mean score of the three items. These measures were adapted from Chang (2009) and were found to be reliable ($\alpha=.83$)
Attitude toward the brand (Ab). Attitude toward the brand was measured by having participants indicate their level of agreement with the following five items: 1) The decision to buy (brand) is foolish (reverse coded), 2) Buying (brand) is a good decision, 3) I think (brand) is a satisfactory brand, 4) I think (brand) has a lot of beneficial characteristics, 5) I have a favorable opinion of (brand). Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 11 (strongly agree). A single Ab index was created by computing the mean score of the five items. These items were adopted from previous research (Putrevu & Lord, 1994; Watson et al., 2009) and were found to be reliable (α=.92).

Purchase Intention (PI). Purchase intention was assessed with the following three items: 1) It is very likely I will buy (brand), 2) I will purchase (brand) next time I need a (product), and 3) I will definitely try (brand). Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 11 (strongly agree). A single purchase intention index was created by computing the mean score of the three items. These items were adapted from previous research (Putrevu & Lord, 1994) and were found to be reliable (α=.88).

Manipulation Check

Cue recall. Subjects were asked to recall up to three items that were “hanging on the walls” in the advertisement they saw. This open-ended item was used to determine whether participants noticed and remembered the cultural cues present in the advertisement. Subjects receive a score from 0-3, indicating the number of cultural cues correctly identified.
Demographic items

After recalling cultural cues, respondents were asked a number of demographic items including their age, class standing, gender, and race. Subjects were instructed to select as many racial groups as apply to them.
STUDY 1 RESULTS

Manipulation Check

It was first desirable to determine whether participants noticed and could recall the cultural cues manipulated in this study. Although it is possible that advertising stimuli may influence consumer attitudes even if they are not specifically remembered, context effects are less likely to be observed if participants did not pay attention to the cues. Results indicate that about 80% of subjects could accurately recall two or more cultural cues from the advertisement, indicating the manipulation of ethnic cultural cues was observed and processed by participants. No significant differences were found in cue recall based on the cultural cues or character present in the ads.

Main Analyses

The hypotheses presented in Study 1 predicted a main effect of cultural cues on the dependent measures, and the research questions inquired about the effects of character race on the dependent measures. To address the hypotheses and research questions, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with character race (Black, White, ambiguous) and cultural cue (Black, White) as between-factors was run for each dependent variable.
Influence of Advertisement Features on Perceived Similarity

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and racial cultural cues on viewer perceptions of similarity with advertising characters. Means and standard deviations for similarity as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 3.1. The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of cultural cues on character similarity, $F(1, 188) = 10.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .05$. Follow up analyses using pairwise comparison indicated that viewers exposed to ads featuring White mainstream cultural cues ($M = 6.42, SD = 2.16$) reported greater similarity to the ad character than viewers exposed to Black cultural cues ($M = 5.42, SD = 2.09, p < .001$), supporting H1. No main effect was observed for character race on perceptions of similarity, $F(2, 188) = 2.51, p = .08, \eta^2_p = .03$, addressing RQ1. The interaction between character race and cultural cues on similarity was also not significant, $F(2, 188) = 1.21, p = .300, \eta^2_p = .01$, informing RQ2.

Influence of Advertisement Features on Identification with the Character

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and racial cultural cues on viewers’ identification with the advertising characters. Means and standard deviations for identification as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 3.1. The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of cultural cues on identification, $F(1, 188) = 16.77, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .08$. Follow up analyses using pairwise comparison indicated that viewers exposed to ads featuring White mainstream cultural cues ($M = 5.98, SD = 2.17$) reported greater identification with the ad character than viewers exposed to Black cultural cues ($M = 4.63, SD = 2.42, p < .001$),
Table 3.1

Means and SDs for Study 1 Dependent Variables as a Function of Character Race and Cultural Cues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Character Race</th>
<th>Character Race</th>
<th>Character Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Cue</td>
<td>Cultural Cue</td>
<td>Cultural Cue</td>
<td>Cultural Cue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity x</td>
<td>5.65 (1.85)</td>
<td>5.32 (1.94)</td>
<td>6.65 (2.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification x</td>
<td>5.81 (2.16)</td>
<td>4.73 (2.30)</td>
<td>5.75 (2.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to Ad x,y</td>
<td>5.99 (2.26)</td>
<td>6.56 (2.47)</td>
<td>6.42 (2.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to Brand x</td>
<td>6.52 (1.58)</td>
<td>6.34 (1.63)</td>
<td>6.81 (2.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intent</td>
<td>4.35 (2.62)</td>
<td>4.09 (2.58)</td>
<td>4.65 (2.63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mean differences in same row greater than 0.9 are significant at p < .05
x subscript after dependent variable name denotes main effect of cultural cue
y subscript after dependent variable name denotes interaction between cue and race
supporting H2. No main effect was observed for character race on identification, $F(2, 188) = .07, p = .932, \eta^2_p = .001$, which addresses RQ1. The interaction between character race and cultural cues on similarity was also not significant, $F(2, 188) = .80, p = .452, \eta^2_p = .01$, informing RQ2.

*Influence of Advertisement Features on Attitude toward the Advertisement (Aad)*

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and racial cultural cues on attitude toward the ad. Means and standard deviations as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 3.1. The ANOVA model indicated a significant main effect of cultural cues on attitudes toward the ad, $F(1, 178) = 3.36, p = .068, \eta^2_p = .02$. Pairwise comparison indicated that subjects who viewed ads with White cultural cues ($M = 6.18, SD = 2.34$) reported significantly higher attitudes toward the ad compared to subjects who viewed ads with Black cultural cues ($M = 5.32, SD = 2.50, p < .05$), supporting H3. No significant main effects were found for character race, $F(2, 188) = 2.22, p = .111, \eta^2_p = .02$, addressing RQ1.

However, the effect of cultural cues on attitudes toward the ad is qualified by a significant cultural cue by character race interaction, $F(2, 188) = 3.82, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .04$. The interaction was probed by examining the effect of character race separately for advertisements featuring White and Black cultural cues (character race simple main effects). Results indicated there were no significant differences between character race conditions when White mainstream cultural cues were present, $F(2, 99) = .30, p = .743, \eta^2_p = .01$. However, significant differences appeared when Black cultural cues were present, $F(2, 89) = 5.37, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .11$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that for ads featuring Black cultural cues, subjects reported significantly higher attitudes toward the
ad when a Black character was present ($M = 6.56$, $SD = 2.47$) compared to a White character ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 2.54$, $p < .01$) or an ambiguous character ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 2.16$, $p < .05$). Taken together the above findings address RQ2. See Figure 3.1 for a graph of the interaction.

![Figure 3.1. Character Race by Cultural Cue Interaction for Attitude Toward the Ad](image)

Influence of Advertisement Features on Attitude toward the Brand (Abr)

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and racial cultural cues on Abr. Means and standard deviations for attitude toward the brand as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 3.1. A significant main effect of cultural cues on attitude toward the brand was found, $F(1, 187) = 6.07$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Pairwise comparison indicated that viewers exposed to ads featuring White mainstream cultural cues ($M = 6.59$, $SD = 1.93$) reported greater attitude toward the brand than viewers exposed to Black cultural cues ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.87$, $p < .05$),
supporting H2. No main effect was found for character race on Abr, $F(2, 187) = 1.07, p = .345, \eta^2_p = .01$, and no interaction between character race and cultural cue was found, $F(2, 187) = .83, p = .440, \eta^2_p = .01$, informing RQ1 and RQ2.

Influence of Advertisement Features on Purchase Intentions (PI)

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and racial cultural cues on purchase intentions. Means and standard deviations for PI as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 3.1. The ANOVA model indicated the main effect of cultural cues on viewers’ purchase intentions approached significance, $F(1, 188) = 3.28, p = .072, \eta^2_p = .02$. Subjects exposed to White cultural cues ($M = 4.62, SD = 2.58$) reporting higher purchase intentions compared to those exposed to Black cultural cues ($M = 3.98, SD = 2.30, p < .01$), providing weak support for H2.

No main effect was found for character race on purchase intentions, $F(2, 188) = .09, p = .911, \eta^2_p = .00$, and no interaction was found between cultural cues and character race, $F(2, 188) = .30, p = .738, \eta^2_p = .00$. 
STUDY 1 DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Study 1 was conducted as an initial test of whether cultural cues can influence viewer perceptions of advertising characters, as well as subsequent advertising responses. To review, stronger perceptions of similarity and identification with advertising characters are expected to lead to more positive responses to the advertisement (Brumbaugh, 2009; Kelman, 1961; Whittler, 1989). Following this prediction, it was hypothesized that for White viewers, White mainstream cultural cues would facilitate similarity and identification perceptions with advertising characters more so than Black cultural cues. Further, because identification with a source is expected to bolster the persuasiveness of the source’s message, ads featuring White cultural cues were hypothesized to result in more positive advertising outcomes (e.g., ad and brand attitudes).

To test the hypothesized relationships, print advertisements were designed containing either White or Black cultural cues. Versions of each advertisement containing White, Black, or racially ambiguous characters were created to determine whether character race played a role in how racial cultural cues impact advertisement responses.
Findings from this study provide important insight into the effects of cultural cues in advertising on consumer responses, and support Kelman’s identification model of social influence. The data indicate that respondents did in fact respond differently to advertisements depending on whether White or Black cultural cues appeared in the background. As predicted by H1, viewers perceived greater similarity with advertising characters when White mainstream cultural cues were present compared to Black cultural cues. Viewers also identified more strongly with advertising characters when White mainstream cultural cues were present, supporting H2. These results suggest viewers utilized background cues when making assessments of advertising characters.

It should be noted that the pattern of means for perceived similarity differs from that of character identification, where subjects reported stronger identification with all three characters when they appeared with White mainstream cultural cues compared to Black cultural cues—including the Black character conditions. The fact that White viewers perceived greater identification (but not similarity) with Black characters appearing with White mainstream cultural cues (compared to Black cues) demonstrates that similarity and identification are in fact distinct constructs. The difference between similarity and identification responses for Black characters is likely due to the fact that perceived similarity is based off of physical appearance more so than identification. As a result while perceived similarity to Black characters may be less susceptible to context effects (no difference between cultural cue conditions), these cues appear to play a larger role in assessing identification, as they provide information about personal attitudes, likes, and lifestyle.
The fact that the context cues did influence viewer attitudes toward the ad characters is an important finding, as it indicates viewers tend to be active (rather than passive) when viewing advertisements and do not rely solely on a character’s appearance to make judgments about the character. Thus it is crucial for marketers to be highly mindful of how background features might influence how viewers categorize and respond to ad characters. Seemingly benign imagery that appears in the background of advertisements may end up influencing the effectiveness of the ad in unintended ways.

Study 1 was also concerned with determining whether context cues not only influenced how viewers perceived and responded to ad characters, but also whether they could influence the three variables most often of concern for advertising researchers—specifically attitude toward the advertisement, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intentions. If the identification framework is accurate, then stronger levels of felt similarity and identification with ad characters should lead to more positive advertising outcomes. Results indicated that indeed, viewers responded differently to the ads based on the cultural cues that were present. Participants had more positive attitudes toward the advertisement, more positive attitudes toward the advertised brand, and marginally stronger purchase intentions when White mainstream cultural cues were present compared to Black cultural cues. The fact that cultural cues, not only the advertising message or character, can influence how viewers respond to an advertisement is of great importance for marketers and advertising researchers.

Study 1 findings point to the importance of understanding how context cues function to influence consumer reactions to advertising, and underline the need to examine the boundary conditions of context effects. In other words, what types of
context cues influence advertising outcomes, and must they be tied to the character or product in order to have an effect? Does the mere presence of certain context cues (e.g. a horse) make particular cognitions more accessible for consumers (e.g. farming lifestyle), or must the cues be directly tied to the character or product (e.g. character riding on the horse, caring for the horse)? In Study 1, the cues were indirectly tied to the character because they appeared to be the property of the character, and reflected his artistic choices. However, would similar context cues be effective if they were not tied to the character in some way? These questions point to the need for future work to uncover more of the dynamics of context effects.

Research Questions – The Significance of Non-Significant Findings

Two research questions were posed in Study 1 inquiring about the potential effect of character race on advertising outcomes. Because extant research had demonstrated both significant and non-significant effects of character race on White viewers’ attitudes toward advertising, there was some uncertainty about whether character race would play a role in the present work.

Overall, Study 1 data indicate White viewers responded the same way to ads featuring Black, White, and racially ambiguous characters. That the results from investigating the two research questions generally indicated no significant effect of character race on the dependent measures is actually a very significant finding. The non-significant effect of character race suggests marketers should continue to utilize a range of character races in advertising with the knowledge that White viewers will respond to them in similar ways. Study 1 data indicate character race was not a sufficient cue for White viewers to infer different levels of identification with characters, and did not lead
to significantly different advertising outcomes (e.g. attitude toward the brand, purchase intentions). Rather Study 1 indicates that background cultural cues played a greater role in identification processes and persuasion that character race, perhaps because background cues are capable of communicating character tastes and preferences more so than race alone.

**Effect of Racial Ambiguity**

Study 1 also offered a novel opportunity to examine how responses to racially ambiguous characters differ from Black and White characters, and whether source ambiguity is a necessary factor to observe context effects. Observing the effect of cultural cues separately for Black, White, and ambiguous characters suggests two things. First, at least when dealing within the context of race, source ambiguity does not appear to be a necessary factor for context effects to take place. Most notably, cultural cues had a significant effect on all five dependent variables for White characters. Viewers reported higher means for all five study variables when White cultural cues were present compared to Black cultural cues. In fact, cultural cues also had an effect on identification with Black characters, where subjects identified more with Black characters when they appeared amid White cultural cues compared to Black cultural cues. These findings suggest that even when character race in unambiguous, the cultural features surrounding the character influence perception of that character, and can influence ad effectiveness. This is a particularly important finding because it denotes that context effects are not something marketers should worry about only when biracial or racially ambiguous characters appear in ads. Rather, context effects can take place even when the character is unambiguous on the context dimension.
The second important finding is that the pattern of responses to racially ambiguous characters very closely resembles that of the White character conditions. In other words, viewers appear to go through similar psychological processes when viewing racially ambiguous characters as they do when viewing White characters. Despite the fact that most participants perceived the ambiguous character to be biracial, there were no significant differences between White and ambiguous characters on any of the five dependent variables, regardless of the cultural cues present. In contrast, viewers perceived the racially ambiguous character differently than the Black character, and these differences matched the White-Black character differences. Ads featuring White or ambiguous characters received higher attitude toward the advertisement (Aad) ratings when White cultural cues were present, compared to Black cultural cues. However, there was no significant difference between cue conditions for Black characters, and the pattern of means was in the opposite directions (higher Aad when Black cues present).

Additionally, both White and ambiguous characters received higher similarity ratings than Black characters when White cultural cues were present. While character race had no main effect on the dependent variables, the subtle differences that appear based on the cultural cues present indicate racially ambiguous characters are perceived differently than Black characters. The observed similarity of responses to White and ambiguous characters is a novel finding and has significant implications for advertising effectiveness. For instance, marketers who specifically want a minority character in their ad should be sure the character is not racially ambiguous, as this character may engender similar ad outcomes as a White model, as least for White participants.

Summary and Limitations
The results from Study 1 indicate that cultural cues have the ability to significantly impact how audience members respond to advertising media. Cues which facilitate similarity and identification with the characters were found to lead to more positive advertising outcomes. Study 1 data show that background cultural cues were used by participants to help categorize and form impressions about ad models. Further, these cues not only influenced how viewers perceived the ad models, but actually led to significantly different ratings of the ad content. The latter finding has significant implications for marketers, as brand attitudes may be influenced not only by the message presented in the advertising copy, but by the context cues present in the advertisement.

Study 1 also provided evidence that character race is not a primary factor influencing how White viewers respond to print advertisements. Rather, the degree to which background cultural cues allow viewers to personally identify with the character have a much stronger influence on advertising effectiveness. However, a limitation of Study 1 lies in the nature of the two cultural cue conditions, as well as how ambiguity was operationalized. In this dissertation it is argued that White viewers do not necessarily view Blacks as an outgroup against whom they compete for limited resources. As a result, the White and Black cultural cues used in Study 1 were not meant to represent ingroup-outgroup cues, but rather cues which differ in the degree to which White viewers could identify with them. This type of cue difference is distinct from the use of cues associated with specific ingroups or outgroups of which one is or is not a member. Future research should utilize cues from competing groups to determine whether they lead to a different pattern of responses by viewers.
Also, while Study 1 demonstrated that source ambiguity may not be a necessary factor for observing context effects in advertising, the ambiguousness of the source in Study 1 may be called into question because being perceived to be biracial may not be equivalent to being ambiguous. For example, viewers who are confident that a character is biracial (has one Black and one White parent) are likely to go through a different psychological process when evaluating the advertisement than viewers who are truly uncertain about racial background of the character. As a result, the ambiguous condition in Study 1 may not have been truly ambiguous. Research which utilizes cultural cues which allow for a truly ambiguous source condition may result in stronger context effects.
CHAPTER 5

STUDY 2

Overview

While the study of racial cues in advertising is not entirely new (Brader et al., 2008; Dimofte, Forehand, & Deshpande, 2003), Study 1 examined the interaction between racial cues, source similarity, and advertising outcomes. Although past studies have examined how any type of racial or ethnic cue (country reference, character race, cultural symbol) may make race-based responses more salient, Study 1 examined how racial cultural cues have a direct influence on advertising character perceptions and advertising responses.

Aside from race, there are a variety of other studies of cultural cues which have not assessed the role of similarity and identification processes on advertising responses. For example character age has been utilized as a cultural cue in advertising, finding that viewers higher in masculinity favor and respond more positively to ads featuring older-looking models (Chang, 2009), and report more favorable ad ratings when character age matches own age identity (Maldonado & Meuhling, 2006). Liu and Johnson (2005) found the country of origin associated with a product (personal computer) can influence ratings of the product. Gender cues (Bakir & Palan, 2010) and religious symbols (Henley et al., 2009) have also been examined in advertising contexts to establish how references
to these cultures can ultimately bias consumers’ advertising responses in desired directions.

Political cues—which served as the cultural context for Study 2–have also been investigated in the context of advertising and persuasion. Goren et al. (2009) and Malka and Lekes (2010) examined whether stating that Democrats or Republicans supported a given policy would influence partisans’ own support for these policies, finding subjects tended to bias their responses to be in line with their political party’s endorsement. These findings provide indirect support for the identification framework presented in this dissertation, as the desire for a positive relationship with a given social group (one’s political party) resulted in attitudes consistent with the group. Scholars have also used national identity as a cue in political persuasion, finding that exposure to one’s national flag can bias political attitudes and voting behavior in the direction of the national political identity (Hassin et al., 2007).

In order to demonstrate how cultural cues, other than racial cultural cues, can influence advertising outcomes, Study 2 investigated the influence of political cultural cues in advertising on character similarity and ad responses. Perhaps most importantly, Study 2 addresses some of the shortcomings or concerns with Study 1 by using competing ingroup-outgoup cues (Democrat, Republican) as well as a cultural dimension (politics) along which all characters are ambiguous. Demonstrating the influence of cultural cues in multiple cultural contexts and for different products and characters strengthens the generalizability of study findings. Further, while research concerning political communication and behavior is in no short supply, Taylor (2010) recently made a call for more research investigating political advertising as he pointed out knowledge
surrounding political messages in advertising is lacking compared to other advertising topics. The use of political cues in Study 2 will not only help address this need in the advertising literature, but will also provide a test of the identification framework using a distinct set of cues from Study 1.

Hypotheses

The predicted pattern of effects for political cues matches that of racial cues from Study 1. Recall that Kelman’s (1961) identification model posits perceived source similarity should have a positive influence on the persuasiveness of the source. In Study 2, political cultural cues are used to see if they too lead to differential levels of identification with advertising characters, and influence ad responses. It is expected that advertisements containing political cultural cues which are congruent with the political affiliation of the viewer will result in higher levels of similarity and identification with advertising models compared to ads featuring political cultural cues which are incongruent. The following hypotheses address the predicted effect of political cues on perceptions of advertising characters:

H1: White viewers will perceive greater (lesser) similarity with advertising characters appearing in ads featuring political cultural cues that are congruent (incongruent) with their political affiliation (e.g. Democrat, Republican).

H2: White viewers will perceive stronger (weaker) identification with advertising characters appearing in ads featuring political cultural cues that are congruent (incongruent) with their political affiliation.
Like in Study 1, higher levels of similarity and identification should be associated with more positive advertising responses by viewers. The following hypotheses address the predicted effect of political context cues on viewer responses to advertisements:

H3: White viewers will report more (less) positive attitudes toward the advertisement when advertising cues are congruent (incongruent) with their own political affiliation.

H4: White viewers will report more (less) positive attitudes toward the brand when advertising cues are congruent (incongruent) with their own political affiliation.

H5: White viewers will report stronger (weaker) purchase intentions when advertising cues are congruent (incongruent) with their own political affiliation.

As outlined in Study 1 hypotheses, the specific effect of character race on advertising outcomes is uncertain. Therefore, the following research questions are posed regarding the role of character race on advertising responses:

RQ1: Does character race have a significant main effect on source similarity, identification, and advertising outcomes for White viewers?

RQ2: Is there an interaction between political cultural cues and character race on source similarity, identification, and advertising outcomes for White viewers?

**METHOD**

**Design**

Study 2 used a 3 (Character Race: Black, White, Ambiguous) x 2 (Cultural Cues: Democratic, Republican) between-subjects factorial design with random assignment, resulting in six experimental conditions. The print ads featured a fictional luggage set which was assigned an novel brand name to prevent existing brand attitudes from
influencing study results. Participants were randomly exposed to one of the six print advertisements and asked to respond to a number of items about the advertisement, followed by demographic items.

Procedure and Implementation

Participants in this experiment were recruited from undergraduate communication courses, and received extra course credit for participation. The instructions and procedure for this study mirrored those of Study 1, and are omitted here for brevity.

Stimulus Materials

Participants received one of six versions of a novel luggage advertisement in which character race and background political cultural cues were manipulated to test Study 2 hypotheses and research questions. First, two versions of the luggage ad were created, containing either several Democratic cultural cues or Republican cultural cues in the form of bumper stickers, party symbols, and party-consistent media. The political cultural cues were appeared on the walls, desk, and computer in the advertisement setting (work cubicle). Next, a Black, White, or racially ambiguous character was placed in each advertisement to create a total of six ad conditions. It was desirable to utilize a product relevant to college students, used equally by men and women, and not associated with a specific racial group.

Stimuli Development

Pretest 1

In order to create appropriate advertising stimuli, racially ambiguous and unambiguous advertising characters were first identified using a pretest. Pretest 1 from Study 1 was used to select a different character for use in Study 2. For the three
portrayals selected for Character 2, the Black portrayal was perceived to be Black by 26 (87%) of the subjects and the White character was perceived to be White by 28 (93%) of the subjects. Respondents reported a high degree of certainty for both portrayals (Black $M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.37$; White $M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.51$; 7-point scale). The ambiguous portrayal received 3 (10%) “Not Sure” responses as well as multiple responses in each of the six racial categories. Paired samples t-tests indicated that the mean certainty rating for the ambiguous character ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 2.04$) was significantly lower than the mean certainty ratings for both the Black ($p < .01$) and White ($p < .01$) characters. Similar selection criteria were used by Appiah and Elias (2010) and Knobloch-Westerwick, Appiah, and Alter (2008).

Pretest 2

In order to select appropriate and valid background cues which are reliably associated with Democratic and Republican ideals, a second pretest was conducted. Subjects ($N = 20$) were undergraduate students enrolled in a communication course, and were not used in Study 2. In this pretest respondents were shown twenty-one bumper sticker images obtained from the “Democrat” or “Republican” sections of online bumper sticker sites. Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they felt each sticker suggested that its owner was a member of the Republican or Democratic party (very much, somewhat, neither). Responses were recoded as values on a 5-point scale, from 1 (Strongly Democratic) to 5 (Strongly Republican).

Four bumper stickers were selected based on subject responses; two stickers were selected as Democratic party cues, and two were selected as Republican party cues. For the two Democratic cues, 16 (84%) people perceived Cue 1 as Democratic ($M = 1.63$)
and 15 (79%) perceived Cue 2 as Democratic ($M = 1.95$). For the Republican cues 18 (95%) people perceived Cue 1 as Republican ($M = 4.74$) and 18 (95%) people perceived Cue 2 as Republican ($M = 4.47$). Further, the stickers were selected based on similar appearance (text color, size) and topic (war, immigration). Two stickers take opposing sides to war (pro-war, anti-war), use only black and white color, and use comedic appeals. The other two stickers take opposing sides to immigration, utilize red, white, and blue colors, and do not use comedy.

To aid in the selection of an appropriate product for Study 2, Pretest 2 participants indicated how much information they would need before purchasing a variety of consumer product. The ability of advertising content to influence advertising outcomes may be muted if consumers require very little or very much information about a product to make a purchase decision. If little information is required for purchase (such as for dental floss), there is little reason to place much value on the content of an advertisement. Conversely if much information is needed to make a purchase decision (such as for a new car), the content of a single advertisement may not be enough to influence brand or product attitudes (Sheehan, 2004). A section of Pretest 2 addressed this concern by asking individuals how much information they would need to make a purchase decision for a range of products. The mean for luggage fell near the scale midpoint, indicating a moderate amount of information was desired.

**Final Stimuli**

Based on pretest results, a total of six luggage ads were created using selected characters and cultural cues from the pretests. Each advertisement was printed on 8.5” x 11” paper in full color. To prevent existing brand attitudes from impacting study results,
identifiable information was removed from the luggage such as a brand name or logo, and a different brand name was used. A fictitious brand name–American Journey–was created for the luggage.

Each advertisement featured a character in the foreground of a work cubicle setting with a desk, computer, and folders behind him. The character was shown from the chest up, and occupied the middle third of the advertisement. Behind the character were two political party cues hanging on the walls, one cue present on the character’s computer screen, and one sitting on the desk behind him. The copy below the character read “Whether it’s for work or play, I know I can depend on American Journey Luggage.” Below that line of text the brand was repeated, followed by a final tagline at the bottom of the ad reading, “Virtually unstoppable.”

Using the template described above, the six advertising conditions differed only in terms of the race of the character (Black, White, ambiguous) and the political cues present (Democratic, Republican). Specifically, participants saw a print advertisement for a fictional luggage brand (American Journey) containing one of the six sets of features described in Table 5.1. See Figure 5.1 for Study 2 advertisements.

Subjects

White undergraduate students (N = 193) from a large Midwestern university took part in this study on a voluntary and confidential basis. Because all hypotheses were premised upon context effects for White viewers, responses from non-White students were omitted from analyses. Students selecting more than one racial background (e.g. White and Black) were also removed from final analyses to prevent differences in racial
Figure 5.1. Study 2 Stimulus Advertisements – Ambiguous Character with: A Democratic Cues, B Republican Cues
Table 5.1

Character Race and Cultural Cues by Experimental Condition – Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Character Race</th>
<th>Political Cultural Cues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Black character</td>
<td>Democratic cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Black character</td>
<td>Republican cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>White character</td>
<td>Democratic cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>White character</td>
<td>Republican cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ambiguous character</td>
<td>Democratic cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ambiguous character</td>
<td>Republican cultural cues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

makeup from influencing responses. The sample was 58% female ($N = 113$), and 41% male ($N = 79$), with two respondents not indicating gender. Mean age was 21 years, with over two-thirds of the students from junior or senior class ranks.

Dependent Measures

Perceived similarity with character (Similarity). Similarity was measured using the same items and procedure as in Study 1, and was found to be reliable ($\alpha=.84$).

Identification with Character (Identification). Identification was measured using the same items and procedure as in Study 1, and was found to be reliable ($\alpha=.91$).

Attitude toward the ad (Aad). Aad was measured using the same items and procedure as in Study 1, and was found to be reliable ($\alpha=.72$).

Attitude toward the brand (Ab). Ab was measured using the same items and procedure as in Study 1, and was found to be reliable ($\alpha=.84$).
Purchase Intention (PI). PI was assessed using the same items and procedure as in Study 1, and was found to be reliable (α=.91).

Independent Measures

Political Party Affiliation. Next, subjects were asked to indicate the political party with which they identify by responding to the question “Which political party do you feel best represents your values and interests? (specify):”. This item was left open-ended so that respondents felt free to indicate the political party or ideology that best described them. Results indicated that 49% of respondents affiliated with the Republican party, 31% with the Democratic party, and 21% reported affiliation with neither party.

Political Cue Congruency. Because participants were randomly assigned to each condition, each advertisement was viewed by subjects with a range of political beliefs. As a result, it was necessary to create a variable based off of subjects’ self-reported political party affiliation which signified whether the advertisement they viewed contained imagery which was congruent or incongruent with their party’s ideology. The variable Political Cue Congruency was used to signify either a match or mismatch between the political views of the subject and political views expressed in the advertisement. For example, participants who reported affiliation with the Democratic party but were exposed to Republican political cues were coded “incongruent” for this variable, while Democrats exposed to Democratic political cues were coded “congruent”.
CHAPTER 6

STUDY 2 RESULTS

Manipulation Check

It was first determined whether participants noticed and could recall the political cultural cues manipulated in this study. If participants did not pay attention to the cues, or did not read the political cues, context effects are unlikely to occur. Results indicate that about 75% of subjects could accurately recall two or more political cues from the advertisement, indicating the manipulation of context cues was observed and processed by participants. There were also no significant differences in cue recall based on the political cues or character that was present.

Main Analyses

The hypotheses presented in Study 2 predicted a main effect of cultural cues on the dependent measures, and the research questions inquired about the effects of character race as well as a race by political cue interaction on the dependent measures. To address the hypotheses and research questions, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with character race (Black, White, ambiguous) and political cultural cue (congruent, incongruent) as between-factors was run for each dependent variable.
A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and political cultural cues on viewer perceptions of similarity with advertising characters. Means and standard deviations for similarity as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 6.1. The ANOVA indicated that the main effects of character race, $F(2, 187) = 4.21, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$, and political cultural cue, $F(1, 187) = 21.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$ were both significant. Pairwise comparison revealed that participants reported higher similarity to White characters ($M = 5.68, SD = 2.61$) compared to Black characters ($M = 4.77, SD = 1.85, p < .01$) and racially ambiguous characters ($M = 4.89, SD = 2.29, p < .05$), providing evidence for RQ1. Further, advertising characters were judged to be more similar to the viewer when the political cues present matched the political ideology of the viewer ($M = 6.03, SD = 2.21$) compared to when the cues did not match ($M = 4.54, SD = 2.15, p < .001$), supporting H1.

However, these main effects were qualified by a significant character race by political cue interaction, $F(2, 187) = 3.33, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$. The interaction was probed using the simple main effects of character race–or the effect of character race separately for political cues that were congruent or incongruent with subjects’ political affiliation. When the political cues were incongruent, participants did not differ in perceived similarity with Black, White, or ambiguous characters, $F(2, 117) = .03, p = .969, \eta_p^2 = .00$. In contrast, significant differences in perceived similarity emerged between character race portrayals when the political cues present were congruent with the political affiliation of the viewers, $F(2, 70) = 6.70, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .16$. Pairwise comparisons
revealed that when congruent political cues were present in the ads, White characters \((M = 7.22, SD = 2.00)\) received higher similarity ratings than Black characters \((M = 5.19, SD = 1.48, p < .05)\) and ambiguous characters \((M = 5.64, SD = 2.59, p < .01)\). These data provide evidence for RQ2. See Figure 6.1 for a graph of the interaction.

![Figure 6.1. Character Race by Political Cue Interaction for Perceived Similarity](image)

**Figure 6.1.** Character Race by Political Cue Interaction for Perceived Similarity

**Influence of Advertisement Features on Identification with Characters**

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and political cultural cues on viewer identification with advertising characters. Means and standard deviations for identification as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 6.1. A significant main effect was found for political cue type on identification, \(F(1, 187) = 64.87, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .26\), indicating the presence of political cultural cues influenced the degree to which subjects identification with ad characters. Pairwise comparison revealed that viewers exposed to political cultural cues
which were congruent with their political affiliation ($M = 6.15, SD = 2.28$) reported significantly stronger identification with the ad character compared to viewers exposed to political cues which were incongruent with their political affiliation ($M = 3.41, SD = 2.30, p < .001$), supporting H2.

The main effect of character race on identification approached significance, $F(2, 187) = 2.82, p = .062, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that subjects reported higher levels of identification with White characters ($M = 5.01, SD = 2.91$) relative to Black characters ($M = 4.19, SD = 2.38, p < .05$) and ambiguous characters ($M = 4.18, SD = 2.60, p = .055$), which informs RQ1. No interaction was found between character race and political cues, $F(2, 187) = 2.01, p = .137, \eta_p^2 = .02$, providing evidence for RQ2.

**Influence of Advertisement Features on Attitude toward the Advertisement (Aad)**

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and political cultural cues on viewer attitude toward the ad (Aad). Means and standard deviations for Aad as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 6.1. Results indicated the main effect of political cue type on viewers’ reported attitude toward the ad approached significance, $F(1, 187) = 3.39, p = .067, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Pairwise comparison revealed that viewers exposed to political cultural cues which matched their political identity ($M = 5.11, SD = 2.44$) reporting stronger attitude toward the ad compared to viewers exposed to political cues which did not match their political identity ($M = 4.51, SD = 1.97, p < .067$), supporting H3. No main effect was found for character race on attitude toward the ad, $F(2, 187) = .88, p = .417, \eta_p^2 = .01$, informing RQ1.

The ANOVA model also indicated the interaction between character race and political cue type approached significance, $F(2, 187) = 2.58, p = .079, \eta_p^2 = .03$. 74
Exploring the simple main effect of political cultural cues revealed that participants exposed to Black or racially ambiguous characters reported similar attitudes toward the ad regardless of whether the political cues were congruent or incongruent with their political affiliation. However, political cues did influence viewers’ attitude toward the ad when White characters were used, $F(1, 59) = 6.43, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .10$. Pairwise comparison revealed that for ads featuring a White character, subjects reported significantly higher attitude toward the ad when political cues were congruent with subjects’ political affiliation ($M = 5.85, SD = 2.57$) compared to ads with incongruent political cues ($M = 4.31, SD = 2.15, p < .05$).

**Influence of Advertisement Features on Attitude toward the Brand (Abr)**

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and political cultural cues on viewer attitude toward the brand (Abr). Means and standard deviations for Abr as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 6.1. Results indicated a significant main effect of political cue type on viewers’ reported Abr, $F(1, 186) = 8.94, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .05$. Pairwise comparison revealed that viewers exposed to political cultural cues congruent with their political affiliation ($M = 6.51, SD = 1.67$) reported significantly stronger attitudes toward the brand compared to viewers exposed to incongruent political cues ($M = 5.70, SD = 1.83, p < .01$), supporting H4. No main effect was found for character race on attitude toward the brand, $F(2, 186) = .74, p = .478, \eta^2_p = .01$. No interaction was found between character race and political cue, $F(2, 176) = .53, p = .590, \eta^2_p = .01$. These null findings address RQ1 and RQ2.
Table 6.1

Means and SDs for all Study 2 dependent variables as a function of character race and cultural cue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Race</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Ambiguous</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Cue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congruent</td>
<td>Incongruent</td>
<td>Congruent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity x,y,z</td>
<td>5.19 (1.48)</td>
<td>4.50 (2.02)</td>
<td>5.64 (2.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification x</td>
<td>5.68 (1.81)</td>
<td>3.21 (2.20)</td>
<td>5.55 (2.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to Ad</td>
<td>4.95 (2.16)</td>
<td>4.49 (1.80)</td>
<td>4.46 (2.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to Brand x</td>
<td>6.45 (1.41)</td>
<td>5.97 (1.77)</td>
<td>6.27 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intent x</td>
<td>5.21 (1.92)</td>
<td>4.34 (2.34)</td>
<td>5.26 (2.73)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mean differences in same row greater than 1.0 are significant at $p < .05$

x subscript after dependent variable name denotes main effect of political cue

y subscript after dependent variable name denotes interaction between cue and race

z subscript after dependent variable name denotes main effect of character race
Influence of Advertisement Features on Purchase Intentions (PI)

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of advertising character race and political cultural cues on purchase intentions for the advertised products. Means and standard deviations for purchase intentions as a function of the two factors can be found in Table 6.1. Results indicated a significant main effect of political cue type on purchase intentions, $F(1, 188) = 7.98, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .04$. Pairwise comparison revealed that viewers exposed to political cultural cues which matched their political identity ($M = 5.40, SD = 2.31$) reporting significantly stronger purchase intentions compared to viewers exposed to political cues which did not match their political identity ($M = 4.42, SD = 2.32, p < .01$). No main effect was found for character race on purchase intentions, $F(2, 188) = .45, p = .636, \eta^2_p = .01$, and no interaction was found between character race and political cue type, $F(2, 188) = .08, p = .920, \eta^2_p = .00$. 

77
CHAPTER 7

STUDY 2 DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Study 2 findings provide important evidence regarding how political cultural cues can influence how consumers respond to advertisements. Overall, findings support the identification model of social influence, as advertising outcomes were more positive when the ads contained political cues that were congruent with viewers’ political ideology, resulting in stronger perceived similarity and identification with the characters. As predicted by H1 and H2, viewers perceived greater similarity with advertising characters, and identified more with the characters, when political cues congruent with viewers’ political affiliation were present in the advertisement compared to cues which were incongruent. The main effect of political cue type indicates viewers again utilized background cues when making assessments of advertising characters, as was found in Study 1.

The data also indicate that there was a main effect of character race on perceived similarity, such that respondents reported greater similarity with White characters compared to Black and racially ambiguous characters. However, the main effect of race on perceived similarity is further qualified by the significant interaction between character race and political cue type (congruent, incongruent). Specifically, subjects
reported stronger similarity with White characters (compared to Black and ambiguous characters) when the political cues were congruent with their own political affiliation, but not when political cues were incongruent. In other words, character race does not always influence viewers’ perceived similarity with advertising characters. When context cues suggested dissimilarity, viewers did not differentiate between characters based on race. However when the context cues did suggest character-viewer similarity, character race did play a role in the strength of perceived similarity.

Study 2 also investigated whether political cultural cues could lead consumers to respond differently to advertising messages. Findings revealed that the political cues present had a significant impact on two of the three advertising outcome variables. Subjects who were exposed to ads featuring political cues which were congruent with their political affiliation had more positive attitudes toward the brand (H4) and higher purchase intentions (H5) compared to those exposed to incongruent political cues. Political cue type did not have a significant effect on viewers’ attitude toward the advertisement (H3).

The fact that political cues had a significant influence on how participants responded to the advertisements provides more evidence that marketers must be cognizant of the background cues that appear in advertising media. Although the product and advertisement copy used in Study 2 did not make reference to political attitudes, background political cues were still able to influence perceptions of the ad characters and advertising outcomes. Notably, purchase intentions were significantly different depending on the political cues present in the advertisements. Advertising researchers are often interested in measuring purchase intentions because behavioral intentions are
strong indicators of behavior, and persuading consumers to make a purchase is the ultimate goal of most advertisements. As a result, the fact that cultural cues have the capacity not just to shift consumer attitudes but also behavioral intentions highlights the important role context features can play in the advertising process.

Research Questions – The Significance of Non-Significant Findings

The same two research questions were posed in Study 2 inquiring about the potential effect of character race on advertising outcomes. Again, the data indicated White viewers responded no differently to ads featuring Black, White, and racially ambiguous characters. As before, the fact that the results from investigating the two research questions generally indicated no significant effect of character race on most of the dependent measures is actually a very significant finding. The only exception was perceived similarity, such that participants perceived greater similarity with White characters compared to Black and ambiguous characters. As discussed previously, this finding is argued to be an artifact of the way similarity is operationalized, which focuses primarily on physical appearance (such as skin color). The non-significant effect of character race on the other dependent measures suggests marketers should continue to utilize a range of character races in advertising with the knowledge that White viewers will respond to them in similar ways. Study 2 data indicated character race was not a sufficient cue for White viewers to infer different levels of identification with characters, and did not lead to significantly different advertising outcomes (e.g. attitude toward the brand, purchase intentions). Rather Study 2 indicated that political cultural cues played a much stronger role in identification processes and persuasion than character race. It is
argued that cultural cues have a strong effect because they are capable of communicating character tastes, preferences, values, and beliefs more so than race alone.

The results from Study 2 suggest that it is much more dangerous for marketers to make a mistake with regard to the political cues present in an advertisement compared to race cues (in the form of character race). Often a concern for marketers is utilizing characters with whom audience members can connect. Results from Study 2 suggest that the race of the character may not matter as much to viewers as the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the character. If consumers perceive the ad character is different from them along personal dimensions such as political affiliation, they are likely to identify with this character significantly less, reducing the persuasiveness of the advertising message.

*Role of Racial Ambiguity*

Study 2 again provided the opportunity to examine how White viewers respond to racially ambiguous characters relative to Black and White characters. Interestingly, the pattern of means for racially ambiguous characters more closely matches that of Black characters rather than White characters. While no differences were observed between Black, White, and ambiguous characters when the political cues were incongruent with viewers’ political affiliation, participants perceived more similarity and identification with White characters compared to Black and ambiguous characters when the political cues were congruent. In contrast to Study 1, Study 2 data suggest ambiguous characters were judged as if they were a racial outgroup. It may be that use of congruent political cues in Study 2 lead participants to focus on other differences (race) between themselves and the ad characters.
Summary and Limitations

Study 2 provides more evidence that cultural cues in advertising have the ability to significantly influence consumer reactions to advertising media. Subjects who were exposed to political cues which were congruent with their own political party affiliation reported more positive evaluations of the ad character and advertising outcomes compared to those exposed to cues which were not congruent with their political affiliation. Further, character race had no influence on advertising outcomes, indicating that subjects report the similar attitudes toward the brand and purchase intentions regardless of the race of the character in the ad. Instead what is more important is that the political cultural cues, not the race of the character, match the viewer.

One limitation of Study 2 was that because data collection took place in one session, participants could not be randomly assigned to congruent/incongruent conditions based on their reported political affiliation. Future studies might collect demographic data including political affiliation during one session, and then evenly assign participants into congruent or incongruent conditions during a second session using session one data. Another limitation was that there was a larger number of Republican participants compared to Democratic participants. As a result, a larger number of subjects ended up seeing “incongruent” political cues, and a disproportionate number of these subjects were Republican. By using two sessions and assigning participants to congruent/incongruent conditions based on reported political affiliation, this problem can be avoided.
CHAPTER 8

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

This dissertation investigated the impact of cultural cues on identification processes and advertising outcomes. In two studies, different cultural cues were manipulated in order to determine whether viewer reactions to the characters and the advertisements varied based on similarity cues in the advertisement. Findings provide important information for both marketing executives and advertising researchers, and offers insight into how advertising media may influence social group perceptions. First, findings indicate consumer impressions of an advertisement and a brand can be moderated by cues present in the advertisement which allow consumers to infer greater or lesser similarity with the character. In fact, cultural cues were found not only to influence attitudes but also behavioral intentions (purchase intentions). The finding that behavioral intentions, not only attitudes and cognitions, can be influenced by background cues is a significant finding for marketers which warrants further investigation. While behavioral intentions are generally a strong predictor of eventual behavior, future research utilizing product choices (explicit behavior) as the dependent measure would add strength to the current findings by determining whether background cues can influence actual purchase decisions.
Another significant finding from this dissertation is that character race generally had little influence on how participants responded to the advertising stimuli. In the case of character race, null findings actually provide very useful data as they indicate that the race of an advertising character may not be the most important decision for marketers to make when trying to reach their desired target market. It seems that marketers have great flexibility with regard to the race of the character that is used in media advertisements. Black, White, and racially ambiguous characters can be used in advertisements and achieve similar responses from consumers. However, there appears to be much less room for error when constructing the background cues that will accompany the character, as the use of cultural cues which suggest dissimilarity between the viewer and ad character can have a profound impact on consumers’ attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions.

Study findings also indicate that character race alone may not be sufficient to target specific racial groups. Rather, cultural cues which provide specific information about the character’s personal likes or interests are necessary to influence how consumers respond to the advertisement. As a result, understanding the cultural cues with which target consumers identify appears significantly more important for advertising effectiveness than casting decisions. For example, there are circumstances under which marketers may desire minority characters to add cultural authenticity to an advertisement, such as when trying to market ethnic food products. Findings from Studies 1 and 2 indicate not only that racially ambiguous characters may not be as effective as racially unambiguous characters in achieving this goal, but that character race alone may not be sufficient to produce the desired positive effects. Rather, authentic cultural cues must
accompany minority characters in order for White viewers to perceive a cultural
difference between themselves and the character.

Although character race did not have a main effect on the dependent variables, this finding should not be interpreted to suggest that race “does not matter”, and that Whites viewers are completely colorblind. Rather, this dissertation simply provides evidence that the traditional methods of empirically testing and measuring race effects may not result in statistically significant findings. The fact that Whites did not report different ratings for ads featuring Black or White characters should instead be taken as a sign that novel methods, procedures, and measurements must be investigated which allow researchers to identify differences in the psychological processes engaged in by Whites when viewing characters of different races. Given that social psychologists investigating the “minimal group paradigm” have found groups categorizations as benign as having a shared birthday or liking the color red can lead to ingroup favoritism, it stands to reason that a group category as meaningful as race should still elicit some between-group differences, even for Whites. More research is needed to understand the dynamics of race-based responses by Whites rather than using non-significant data, such as was found in this dissertation, to argue race no longer plays a role in media effects.

One particular concern of media scholars is that social desirability may play a role in how White subjects report racial attitudes and ratings of minority media characters (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Oliver & Fonash, 2002). However, studies which unobtrusively measure White subject responses have also found Whites do not demonstrate race-based media preferences (Knobloch-Westerwick, Appiah, & Alter, 2008).
Racial Ambiguity in Advertising

The findings from this dissertation provide mixed evidence regarding how White viewers respond to racially ambiguous advertising characters. In Study 1, both White and racially ambiguous advertising characters had the same effect on advertising outcomes. Participants reported similar responses to both White and ambiguous characters, and both White and ambiguous characters differed from Black character in perceived similarity. The pattern of means for White and ambiguous characters (see Table 3.1) indicates that White viewers responded to these characters in similar ways. Conversely, Study 2 data indicated subjects responded to Black and ambiguous characters in similar ways (see Table 6.1). Both Black and ambiguous characters were lower in perceived similarity and identification compared to White characters when congruent political cues appeared in the advertisements.

One explanation for why responses to racially ambiguous characters match White characters in Study 1 and Black characters in Study 2 is that different characters were used in each study. It could be that the characters possessed facial features which more closely resembled one group prototype over another. While a pretest was conducted to account for this issue, character differences provide one explanation. Alternatively, Whites viewers may perceive racially ambiguous characters to be more similar to Whites than Blacks when racial cues are present, because specific Black cultural cues could make salient that racially ambiguous characters are different from Black characters.

In contrast political cultural cues, such as those used in Study 2, may lead White viewers to respond to ambiguous and Black characters in similar ways because political cues make salient political policies which reinforce racial group differences. Also, the
fact that one of the political cues used in Study 2 made direct reference to immigration may account for why ambiguous and White characters did not lead to matching patterns of response as in Study 1. The reference to immigration may have made race-based differences between Whites and non-Whites more salient, leading White viewers to perceive greater difference between White and ambiguous characters.

It is clear much more research is needed to more fully understand under what conditions ambiguous characters lead to similar advertising outcomes as Black or White characters, and the conditions under which ambiguous characters lead to unique outcomes. Furthermore, this dissertation only examined responses from White subjects. An important empirical question is how racial and ethnic minority viewers respond to racially ambiguous character in advertising. For example, do ambiguous characters lead to more or less positive outcomes for minority consumers compared to minority group characters?

Limitations and Future Directions

While Black cultural cues were utilized in Study 1, a number of other racial and ethnic cultural cues have yet to be investigated. Future studies should examine how consumers respond to cultural cues from other racial or ethnic groups such as Latinos and Asians. Because the physical distinctions between Whites and Latinos are already somewhat similar, ambiguous character conditions may be even more subject to effects from White or Latino cultural cues.

An important consideration from Study 1 is that the “White mainstream cultural cues” may have served more as a control group against which the Black cultural cues were compared, rather than a condition which specifically made salient White culture.
The White cues may not have been specific enough to make viewers associate them with White culture or White Americans, and instead may have served the purpose of making no social group salient. Future research could improve upon Study 1 by including a third condition with stronger White culture cues such as country music cues, rock music cues, or images of cowboys, hockey, or baseball.

Further, the cultural cues used in Studies 1 and 2 represent only two of a wide variety of cues which can influence the degree to which different target markets respond to advertising characters. Body size or ideal body cues also represent research opportunities. Identification with ad characters based on perceived self and target size offers a relatively uncharted area of advertising research. Examining body size as a cue for similarity has several important implications, as positive advertising effects from the use of larger body types would argue in favor of using a more representative range of body types in advertising. Currently, the “thin ideal”—or the association of thinness with beauty—continues to dominate advertising media. However, given that the average fashion model is significantly thinner than the average American, it is possible that consumers may respond more positively to ad models that share similar body types. Research demonstrating that larger-bodied models can be equally or more effective than smaller ones may help combat the negative body-esteem that can be caused by “ideal-body” models.

Another factor that could not be addressed in this dissertation, but is relevant to understanding ambiguity and context effects, is the potential for order effects when categorizing media sources. When considering the nature of how advertising messages are seen, it is an important research question for marketers to know what happens if an
ambiguous model is viewed shortly after viewing a White, Black, or Asian model. Do viewers assimilate the ambiguous model’s race with recently seen models, or contrast it? Because ads are generally not viewed in a vacuum, but rather are viewed among several other advertisements and within other media content (e.g. magazine articles, television shows), it is possible that models and cultural cues which precede a given advertisement can bias perceptions of advertising characters. As a result, future work should investigate whether source ambiguity in advertising can be influenced by preceding media content.

This dissertation did not include racial minorities as subjects to determine how they may be influenced by cultural cues and racial ambiguity in advertising. While this study focused on White viewers, racial and ethnic minorities are likely to exhibit very different responses to ads with minority or mainstream cultural cues. Understanding how different racial groups respond to ingroup and outgroup cultural cues is important, especially for marketers interested in avoiding negative second-hand advertising effects.

While this dissertation provided evidence that context effects can influence how viewers respond to advertising content, future research should test the boundary conditions of context effects. For example, do cultural cues need to be associated with the ad character in order to have an influence on ad outcomes? In the current study, the cultural cues were indirectly tied to the ad models because the context suggested they were the personal property of the ad characters. It may be possible that the observed effects of the cultural cues in this dissertation occur simply because the cues appear in the ads, and not because they are the property of the character. Future research should investigate whether the mere appearance of cues is sufficient to moderate advertising outcomes, or whether these cues must somehow be directly or indirectly associated with
the character in order to have an influence. For instance if ad characters appeared in a more public setting, and cultural cues appeared on the sides of buildings or other public property locations, would these cues still influence advertising outcomes? In the latter example the cultural cues are less likely to be associated with the character, because the public setting would not imply these cues are the property of the character.

The current study sought to test the identification framework outlined by Kelman (1961) by examining whether cultural cues in advertising led viewers to identify more with characters, and thus report more positive ratings of the advertisement as well as stronger purchase intentions. An important next step in testing the boundary conditions of identification theory would be to compare the effectiveness of ads featuring both characters and cultural cues, with ads featuring only cultural cues. Do cultural cues only influence advertising outcomes if there is a character present with whom viewers can identify? Are cultural cues just as effective when no characters are present? These questions are important avenues of research because of their implications for effectively reaching target markets. For example, if context cues are just as effective when no characters are present, marketers may choose to focus on ads without characters to prevent consumers from perceiving that they are not in the intended target market. It is possible that the absence of advertising characters may in fact allow for a greater number of viewers to identify with the cues (rather than the character), resulting in a broader appeal of the advertisements. However as mentioned earlier, mass appeal is not always the goal of advertisements, and thus characters may serve the important role of targeting designed consumer groups.
Finally, sociological perspectives argue that individuals derive their social class identity from seeing and understanding one’s place in the social class hierarchy (Surridge, 2007). As a result, social class cues in advertising have strong potential to make salient social class similarities between viewers and characters. This can result in greater perception of being targeted by the advertisement, and increase identification with the character. Research investigating social class cues would fill a gap in the marketing literature and while providing evidence regarding the role of advertising in reflecting and shaping social class norms and viewers’ self-perceptions.

**Conclusion**

With the exception of appearing with a plain white backdrop, advertising characters will always appear within a setting that allows consumers to infer greater or lesser similarity with the character. This dissertation provides evidence that features of the advertisement setting can play a significant role in the effectiveness of the advertisement. While subjects did not differ in their evaluation of advertisements based on the race of the character present in the ad, cultural cues which suggested greater or lesser similarity with the character did play a significant role in influencing advertising outcomes.

In Study 1 racial cultural cues were used, indicating that while White viewers do not respond to character race differently, they do respond to advertisements differently based on racial cultural cues. Findings suggest that racial cultural cues are necessary in order for White viewers to perceive differences between themselves and media characters. Study 2 examined political cultural cues, finding again that while the race of media characters had no effect on advertising responses (attitude toward the ad, brand;
purchase intentions), political cues which suggested greater similarity with the character also led to more positive advertising responses.

Results point to the need for more investigation into context effects in advertising, as they appear more likely to influence advertising effectiveness than character effects. Further, understanding the role of context cues in consumer reactions to advertising media will highlight how advertising media are used to reflect and shape social norms.
REFERENCES


to culturally targeted television commercials: A value-based approach. 


Sengupta, S. (2002). In the eyes of the beholder: The relevance of skin tone and facial features of African American Female models to advertising effectiveness. *Communication Reports*, 16(2), 210–220.


Appendix A: Correlation Matrix for Study 1 Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Similarity</th>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Aad</th>
<th>Abr</th>
<th>PI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aad</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>.655</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abr</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>.700</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>.574</td>
<td>.635</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All correlations significant at p < .001.
Appendix B: Correlation Matrix for Study 2 Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Similarity</th>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Aad</th>
<th>Abr</th>
<th>PI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>.712</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aad</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td>.572</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abr</td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>.443</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td>.726</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All correlations significant at p < .001.
Appendix C: Study Questionnaire Instructions and Items

Follow-up Questionnaire

A. We would like you to list the thoughts that came to your mind while viewing this advertisement. Next to the first number please write the first thought that comes to your mind about the ad, the second thought next to the second number, and so on.

1.__________________________________________________________________
2.__________________________________________________________________
3.__________________________________________________________________
4.__________________________________________________________________
5.__________________________________________________________________

The following items ask you to respond to a number of different aspects of the advertisement on the preceding page. Please respond by circling a number from -5 to 5. Again, please do not to flip back to the advertisement when responding.

B. Consider your overall impression of the advertisement you just saw. How would you rate this advertisement as a whole along the following dimensions?

(-5 to 5 scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likable</td>
<td>Not Likable (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Interesting</td>
<td>Interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Pleasant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Next, please think about the **brand** from the advertisement you just viewed. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about the **advertised brand**, from -5 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

1. The decision to buy Unitel products is foolish. (R)
2. Buying Unitel products is a good decision.
3. I think Unitel is a satisfactory brand.
4. I think Unitel has a lot of beneficial characteristics.
5. I have a favorable opinion of Unitel.

---

D. Next, consider the **character** in the advertisement you just saw. How would you rate your **similarity** to this character along the following dimensions from -5 (Not at all similar) to 5 (Very Similar)?

- Lifestyle
- Cultural Background
- Dress
- Appearance
- Basic Values

---

E. Again considering the **character** from the advertisement, please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements from -5 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

1. The character in this advertisement is a person whom I want to be like.
2. The character in this advertisement is a person who speaks for a group of which I am a member.
3. The character in this advertisement is my type of person.
4. The character and I relate to other people in similar ways.
5. The character and I share many of the same goals and aspirations.
6. The character and I share many of the same values.
F. Thinking about the specific **product** that was being advertised, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from -5 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

1. I will purchase a Z3 next time I need a phone.
2. I would definitely try a Z3 phone.
3. If I needed a new phone, it is very likely I would buy a Z3.
4. The Z3 appears to be high in quality.

______________________________________________________________________________

G. The following items assess your perceptions as a **consumer**. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from -5 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

1. This ad was intended for people like me.
2. I feel the advertisers had me in mind when creating this ad.
3. This advertisement appears to be intended for someone very different than me. (R)

______________________________________________________________________________

H. The next two items assess your perception of the **character** in the advertisement.

1. Of which of the following racial group(s) does the character in the advertisement appear to be a member? Note that you can check more than one category. If you do not feel you can make a determination, please select “Not Sure”.

   Not Sure  White  Black  Latino  Asian  Native American

   Other (specify):_________________

2. How **confident** are you about your perception of the character’s racial background? (If you selected “Not Sure”, you may leave this item blank).

   Not Very Confident  -5  -4  -3  -2  -1  0  1  2  3  4  5  Very Confident

______________________________________________________________________________

J. Thinking back to the advertisement you saw, can you recall/describe the three items hanging on the walls?

1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________
L. Finally, we would like to know a little bit about you.

1. Current age:_____

2. Class standing (check one):
   Freshman  ___
   Sophomore ___
   Junior    ___
   Senior    ___
   Other (specify):____________

3. Gender:
   Female ___
   Male    ___

4. Racial background: (you may check more than one if applicable)
   White    ___
   Black    ___
   Latino   ___
   Asian    ___
   Native American ___
   Other (specify): ____________

5. Political Affiliation:
   Which political party do you feel best represents your values and interests? (specify): ____________

6. How strongly do you identify with this political party?
   Very Weakly  -5 -4 -3 -2 -1  0  1  2  3  4  5  Very Strongly

Thank you for your participation. You have completed the survey packet. Please be sure to detach the consent form (first page) from the rest of the
packet, and you may turn the consent form and packet in to the researcher at the front of the room.