

South African Consumers' Ethnic Identification And Attitudes Towards Advertising Ethnic Appeals

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ABSTRACT

Existing literature on social media groups' identity in South Africa is both outdated and insufficient, notably lacking a comprehensive exploration of ethnic identity and demographic disparities. Previous research in South Africa has examined social group identity in advertising, however, it lacks focus on ethnic identity and demographic variations. The purpose of the study was to investigate demographic variations in ethnic identification and attitudes toward advertising ethnic appeals, guided by social identity theory (SIT) and cue evaluation theory (CET).

This research study followed a positivist paradigm and utilised a descriptive research design. In addition, the study employed purposeful sampling to select consumers from four ethnic groups in South Africa: Afrikaans, English, Nguni, and Sotho-Tswana. Only bilingual consumers were surveyed. An online structured questionnaire was distributed on social media platforms via a research company. The survey was completed by those who passed filter questions to ensure they were proficient in at least one African language and English, as an additional language, and self-identified to the major ethnic groups selected. This resulted in a sample size of 704 completed surveys.

The findings provide marketers with insights into how diverse demographic segments within major ethnic groups relate to their own and other ethnic groups. The overall results demonstrate that South African consumers are enthusiastically embracing their cultural heritage and actively supporting their ethnic communities' welfare and rights. It, furthermore, uncovers varying ethnic identification dimensions and attitudes toward advertising ethnic appeals between gender, age, and ethnic groups, presenting opportunities for targeted marketing strategies. Marketers should acknowledge the potential of leveraging native language advertising as a tool for ethnic targeting, while multicultural visual elements could be employed to effectively convey messages that transcend linguistic and cultural barriers.

Keywords Age; Advertising cues; Emerging markets; Gender; Multi-cultural; Native language.



1. INTRODUCTION

The interplay between ethnicity and advertising continues to be a topic of concern and interest amongst the academic community, marketing professionals, and the general public (Eisend *et al.* 2023; Sierra *et al.* 2010). Ongoing research in this area is imperative, given the increasing recognition of the need to authentically and respectfully represent different racial and ethnic groups (Thomas *et al.* 2023). Moreover, it is vital to understand the role of advertisers in either perpetuating stereotypes or promoting positive and inclusive portrayals of different ethnic groups (Eisend *et al.* 2023). In markets characterised by cultural and ethnic diversity, advertisers must craft campaigns that connect with their target audience, fostering ethnic identification (Donthu & Cherian 1992). Inclusive advertising could yield several positive brand and marketing outcomes (Eisend *et al.* 2023). Utilising ethnic identity in advertising can effectively counter advertising clutter and impact viewer responses. Ethnically resonant cues in advertising, such as ethnic characters and values, can foster a stronger connection between viewers and the advertised brand, resulting in a more positive response (Sierra *et al.* 2010). Therefore, comprehending the factors influencing ethnic identification and inclusion in advertisements is vital for marketers and brands.

The importance of ethnic cues in advertising and their relevance for marketers is evident in the increasing body of scholarly research that explores consumer behaviour across diverse ethnic groups in developed countries (Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, Torres *et al.* 2021: 46; James *et al.* 2017; Licsandru & Cui 2019; Strebinger *et al.* 2018). While there are substantial opportunities for advertisers and marketers in emerging countries with untapped markets and growing consumer bases (Paul 2017), there remains a dearth of research in this context that would shed light on the interpretation of ethnic identification and variations in consumer groups' attitudes towards multi-cultural advertising (Grier & Deshpandé 2001; Johnson 2013; Sierra *et al.* 2010).

Conducting an extensive online search of journal aggregator databases (JSTOR, EBSCO host, Emerald Insight and SAGE Journals) revealed only a small number of marketing studies that examined consumers' social group identity in a South African context. Some involved content analysis of gender and racial portrayals in advertising and media, and cautioned against the misrepresentation of racial diversity and reinforcement of negative perceptions via stereotyping (Madlela 2019; Maree & Jordaan 2016; Pilane & Iqani 2016). Others examined consumers' social group identity via experiments and surveys. For instance, a study by Slippers *et al.* (2013) investigated the attitudes, preferences, and assertiveness of Afrikaans-speaking consumers concerning textual cues (content in their native language) in marketing communication. The multitude of other ethnic groups and cultural dynamics regarding advertising visual cues between different ethnic and racial groups were, however, ignored in this study. Grier and Deshpandé (2001) and Johnson (2013) compared the responses of the numeric minority racial group (white South African consumers) with the numeric majority racial group (black consumers) to targeted visual cues (black vs. white models) in advertising. These studies suggest that consumers' responses are less influenced by the numerical representation of a racial group, but the social standing of the group plays a more significant role. This limited body of research does indeed offer some valuable evidence on the effect of social identity on consumer's responses to advertising. They were, however, conducted more than a decade ago and did not consider ethnic identity as a specific subset of social identity. They also did not consider demographic differences in consumers' ethnic identification attitudes regarding visual textual cues used in culturally targeted advertising. In light of prior research underlining the significance of diversity and inclusion in advertising and recognising the contextual gap identified in the background, this study aims to explore disparities among South African consumers in terms of their ethnic identification and their attitudes toward ethnic advertising appeals. In a country like South Africa with multiple official languages, the population is a rich tapestry of consumers, making it an ideal setting for investigating the effects of demographics and multi-ethnic advertising. By understanding the viewpoints of consumers from various gender, age, and ethnic groups, marketers can craft more impactful advertising strategies tailored to multicultural societies with abundant ethnic diversity.

The study proceeds as follows. First, the dependent variables and independent variables are reviewed as a theoretical basis for the study. Then the research methodology is presented, and the findings are discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion of the summary of findings, managerial implications, limitations, and directions for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the research focused on ethnic identification and attitudes toward advertising with ethnic appeals as the dependent variables. Whereas gender, age, and ethnicity were considered as the independent variables. The hypotheses examined the impact of these three independent demographic factors and the two dependent variables. The conceptual framework begins by elaborating on the development of the two dependent variables (ethnic identification and attitudes towards advertising ethnic appeal), followed by an exploration of the independent variables (gender, age, and ethnic groups) and the formulation of hypotheses.

2.1 ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION AND ETHNIC ADVERTISING AS DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Ethnic identification

Research into consumer ethnicity can be categorised into three primary streams: i) Unique consumption and media behaviours of ethnic minority groups (e.g. Desphande *et al.* 1986; Intharacks *et al.* 2023); ii) Transformation factors and adaptation strategies in ethnic marketplaces employed to assimilate into a new market culture within an ethnic marketplace (Demangeot *et al.* 2015; Peñaloza & Gilly 1999, Intharacks *et al.* 2023); and iii) The role of macro and market forces shaping the construction and deconstruction of ethnicity within consumer contexts (Peñaloza 2018; Visconti *et al.* 2014). The current study is part of the first stream, as it helps to understand how ethnic advertising strategies affect and are influenced by the cultural preferences of diverse ethnic communities.

To comprehend ethnic identity development and negotiation, it is most effectively approached through the lens of social identity theory (SIT). As per Tajfel (1982), social identity is the aspect of an individual's self-concept stemming from their awareness of belonging to a social group, encompassing the value and emotional importance of this membership. Ethnic identity, the sense of belonging to an ethnic group, plays a significant role in consumer behaviour, media consumption, and marketing practices (Bairwa 2015; Sierra *et al.* 2010). Phinney and Ong (2007) distinguish two dimensions of ethnic identification: i) Exploration, which involves actively engaging with one's heritage through cultural traditions and values to find social identity; and ii) Commitment, demonstrated through active involvement in one's ethnic group's welfare and rights. These dimensions interact and play a role in the development of a robust ethnic identity. Variations in ethnic identity are influenced by individual experiences, historical context, language, economics, and demographics (Verkuyten 2018). In South Africa, the legacies of apartheid and colonialism have had a profound impact on racial categorisations, tribal conflicts, linguistic diversity (with 11 official languages), and economic disparities, leading to distinct social identities and affecting access to resources and opportunities (Mariotti & Fourie 2014).

Attitudes towards advertising ethnic appeals

Marketing scholars are deeply engaged in unravelling the intricate relationships between marketing cues and their impact on consumers' evaluative judgments. This phenomenon is elucidated by the cue evaluation theory (CET), which provides valuable insights into how consumers use cues. Consumer cue utilisation is the cognitive process through which individuals make inferences about marketing-related factors based on available cues (Dodds 1995). This theory suggests that consumers assess brands and products by considering intrinsic elements such as quality and design as well as extrinsic factors such as advertising, brand name, price) (Bayraktar *et al.* 2015). This theory emphasizes the diverse cues influencing consumer judgments.

Cultural cues that resonate with a specific ethnicity can enhance ad effectiveness by creating a sense of connection and empathy (Khan *et al.* 2015). This study examines advertising ethnic appeals using textual cues (slogans, taglines, etc.) and visual cues (symbols, images, design) to connect with specific ethnic or cultural groups, aligning with their values and preferences (Forceville 2017). Understanding language's dual role as textual and symbolic cues in South Africa, a multicultural developing country, requires an appreciation of its diverse linguistic landscape.

South Africa, with a population of 60.14 million, showcases this complexity with isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Afrikaans as the primary languages (STATS SA 2021). English persists in business, government, and education, coexisting with African languages. English, commonly spoken outside the home, transcends racial boundaries. White, coloured, and Indian South Africans tend to be bilingual, while black Africans often speak three languages (STATS SA 2021). The rich tapestry of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in South Africa underscores the need for marketers to deeply comprehend the nuances of ethnic appeals. Effective advertising relies on resonant ethnic cues that resonate with consumers and align with their ethnic identity, leading to positive responses. Grier and Deshpandé (2001) and Johnson (2013) compared the responses of the numeric minority racial group (white South African consumers) with the numeric majority racial group (black consumers) to targeted visual cues (black vs. white models) in advertising. These studies suggest that social status should be integrated into advertising for numeric majority groups and emphasise that social identities, beyond racial composition, can significantly impact advertising effectiveness in South Africa. This implies that even consumers who share the same mother tongue should not be treated as a homogeneous group by advertisers. In today's competitive multimedia landscape, marketers can leverage cultural cues to engage and retain viewers.

2.2 DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES: FORMULATION OF THE HYPOTHESES

2.2.1 Gender

Ethnic identification: Early international studies indicate significant gender disparities in ethnic self-identification, the specific nature fluctuates in terms of whether males and females have stronger ethnic identification (Kinket & Verkuyten 1997; Khanlou 2005; Lee 2009). The study by Zimmermann *et al.* (2007) suggests that the intricacies of ethnic identity appear to be more pronounced for women compared to men, potentially influenced by distinct cultural expectations placed on women.

Ethnically resonant advertising cues: Within the broader domain of marketing communication, which extends beyond attitudes solely related to ethnic appeals, previous research consistently indicates that women tend to display higher receptivity and a more favourable attitude toward these marketing efforts, while males appear to be less influenced by them (Fam *et al.* 2019; Roux 2023). Advertisements that evoke feelings of belonging and community are more likely to emotionally engage women, while men are more likely to respond positively to advertising that emphasizes prestige, adventure, and empowerment (Brown 2012). Gender differences might, therefore, also apply to ethnic advertising appeals, recognising that the LGBTQT cohort might have different preferences. Women seem to be more attuned to linguistic subtleties (Lee 2009) and valuing ethnically resonant cues to promote diversity, challenge stereotypes, or highlight social issues within their own culture can garner positive responses. Women thus appreciate advertisements that contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society. In terms of a South African context, Slippers *et al.* (2013) found that female Afrikaans-speaking consumers have a greater preference for textual cues (content in their native language) in marketing communication.

The following hypotheses were thus formulated. Male and female South African consumers differ significantly in terms of their ethnic identification dimensions (commitment to own ethnic group H^{1a}; exploration to learn about own ethnic group H^{1b}); attitudes towards textual cues (English advertising H^{1c}; Home language advertising H^{1d}) and visual cues (ethnically resonant cues from own culture H^{1e}; ethnically resonant cues from diverse cultures H^{1f}) in advertising ethnic appeals.

2.2.2 Age

Ethnic identification: Past international research indicates marked variations in ethnic self-identification between younger and older consumers. Typically, older generations exhibit a higher degree of ethnic identification with their own culture and ethnicity (Chattaraman & Lennon 2008; Licsandru & Cui 2019). This was confirmed in the recent study by Intharacks *et al.* (2023) investigating the impact of ethnic identity on consumer behaviour among three

generations of Lao and Filipinos. Their research revealed significant disparities not only among consumers from the same ethnic background across different generations but also between consumers hailing from distinct ethnic backgrounds. Millennials, characterised by their high cultural acceptance and relatively greater freedom from identity constraints, are progressively gaining influence in advocating for ethnic diversity and social inclusion (Shao 2023; Valbuna 2018).

Ethnically resonant advertising cues: Being notably culturally accepting and characterised by a less rigid identity, millennials exhibit a greater inclination to embrace multicultural marketing initiatives. Brands like L'Oreal, AirBnb, and Coca-Cola are continuously striving to craft culturally diverse messages aimed at resonating with this youthful and progressively diverse demographic (Licsandru & Cui 2019). Licsandru and Cui (2019) found that millennial consumers in the UK respond positively to multi-ethnic advertising that showcases diversity and highlights not only similarities but also differences among people from different cultures, provided it conveys a sense of closeness or coherence. Conversely, Bragg *et al.* (2019) observed that white adolescents in the US prefer minority endorsers in advertising targeting black audiences, rather than majority endorsers. The preference for black endorsers among younger white consumers is likely due to the perception among black adolescents of being fashionable, particularly in music and fashion styles.

Some found no age disparities regarding textual cues. Slippers *et al.* (2013), for example, found that Afrikaans consumers of all ages prefer advertising in their native language (textual cues). The age groups of this minority group (Afrikaans-speaking consumers) thus showed no significant differences. Conversely, Ahn and Lee (2017) suggest that young Koreans have more positive attitudes toward advertising in English than those in Korean.

The subsequent hypotheses were formulated as follows. South African consumers of different age groups differ significantly in terms of their ethnic identification (commitment to own ethnic group H^{2a} ; exploration to learn about own ethnic group H^{2b}), attitudes towards textual cues (English advertising H^{2c} ; home language advertising H^{2d}), attitudes towards visual cues (ethnically resonant cues from own culture H^{2e} ; ethnically resonant cues from diverse cultures H^{2f}) in advertising ethnic appeals.

2.2.3 Ethnic groups

Ethnic identification: Appiah's (2001) findings emphasise the positive impact of a strong black ethnic identity on the sense of similarity and identification with black models in advertisements among black American consumers. Conversely, the study suggests that white adolescents, irrespective of their ethnic identity, equally find black character advertisements with varying levels of black cultural cues appealing compared to similar white character advertisements. Furthermore, the study of Lee *et al.* (2013) into the effects of ethnic identification and culturally embedded advertising reveals that low Asian ethnic identifiers tend to relate more to Asian spokespersons when accompanied by Asian cultural cues, but no significant congruence difference is observed in comparison to low/high white cultural cues in values advocacy ads.

Ethnically resonant advertising cues: The meta-analyses by Kareklas and Polonsky (2010) and Sierra *et al.* (2012) on American consumers' responses, concluded that consumers of different race groups tend to be more positive towards ethnically resonant visual cues from their own culture (i.e. models of their ethnicity) than that of other race groups. This was even important for minority groups (Hispanic, black, and Asian) compared to majority groups (white consumers). Meyers and Morgan (2013) also found that African Americans respond differently to ethnic advertising than other groups preferring ethnic visual cues. However, research by Strebinger *et al.* (2018) in East Asian countries with ethnic-majority and ethnic-minority consumers (Japan, China, Austria, and Canada) concluded that the ethnic-majority prefers different-ethnicity models (all-Caucasian) in advertising for luxury brands rather than multi-ethnic models. In a 1990s South African study, Du Plessis and Boshoff (1995) found that Afrikaans-speaking consumers are less positive towards marketing and advertising practices than other groups. However, subsequent studies did not identify ethnic-related differences (Boshoff & Eeden 2001; Lawson *et al.* 2001).

Considering the past research, it was postulated that the ethnic groups differ significantly in terms of their: Ethnic identification dimensions (commitment to own ethnic group H^{3a}; exploration to learn about own ethnic group H^{3b}), attitudes towards textual cues (English advertising H^{3c}; home language advertising H^{3d}) and attitudes towards visual cues (ethnically resonant cues from own culture H^{3e}; ethnically resonant cues from diverse cultures H^{3f}) in advertising ethnic appeals.

3. RESEARCH STRATEGY

This study followed a positivistic paradigm and utilised a descriptive research design to depict and clarify the connections between the variables under review without altering them. Prior surveys examined consumers' social identity in a South African context by comparing the responses of the numeric white minority racial group with the black numeric majority racial group to targeted visual advertising (Grier & Deshpandé 2001; Johnson 2013). The current study aimed to improve upon past research by examining self-identified ethnic groups' views rather than comparing racial groups, since ethnicity identity tends to be a more accurate predictor of social identity in South Africa compared to race (Heere *et al.* 2015). Recognising the intricate and debatable nature of race as a social construct, the current study employed purposeful sampling to select consumers from four ethnic groups in South Africa: Afrikaans, English, Nguni, and Sotho-Tswana. Only bilingual consumers were surveyed, as we sought to investigate their perspectives as non-native English speakers concerning the use of English in advertising ethnic appeals. The survey was limited to four ethnic groups due to budget and time constraints.

An online structured questionnaire was distributed on social media platforms via a research company. The survey was completed by those who passed filter questions to ensure they were proficient in at least one African language and English, as an additional language, and self-identified to the major ethnic groups selected. This resulted in a sample size of 704 completed surveys.

The questionnaire was adjusted based on existing scales for multigroup ethnic identification (Phinney 1992), attitudes towards visual and textual cues used in advertising ethnic appeal (Mehta 2000), and demographic questions. Statistical data analysis was performed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 software and AMOS.

4. RESULTS

The following paragraphs discuss the results of the descriptive and inferential statistics conducted for the study.

4.1 SAMPLE & DESCRIPTIVES

The demographic profiles of the 704 respondents in terms of gender, age, and ethnic group are depicted in Table 1.

TABLE 1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Gender	Freq.	(%)	Age	Freq.	(%)	Ethnic groups	Freq.	(%)
Male	345	49%	Younger (19-30 years)	321	46%	Afrikaans	110	16%
Female	359	51%	Middle (31-40 years)	196	28%	English	105	15%
			Older (40+ years)	187	27%	Sotho-Tswana	330	47%
						Nguni	159	23%

The survey had a near-equal split in gender, with 51% of respondents identifying as female and 49% as male. Most of the respondents (45.6%; 321) were in the younger age group (19-30 years), followed by the middle-aged group (31-40 years) which made up 27.80% (196) of respondents, while 26.60% were over 40 years old. Regarding ethnic identity, the majority of respondents self-identified as Sotho-Tswana (46,9%; 330), followed by Nguni (22,6%, 159), Afrikaans (15,6%;110), and English (14,9%;105). Among the Sotho-Tswana ethnic group the most common home language groups were Sepedi (16.20%;114), Sesotho (10.40%; 73), and Setswana (20.30%; 143). The Nguni group (22.59%, 159) included the isiZulu (14.2%;100) and isiNdebele (8,4%; 59) home language groups.

Factor analysis was performed to determine the factor structure of the factors within this study. The descriptive statistics are summarised in Table 2 below. The reliability of each factor was assessed using the Cronbach alpha values, whereby a factor is deemed reliable if it has a Cronbach alpha score of 0.7, 0.6 can however be used in exploratory circumstances (Taber 2018).

TABLE 2 DESCRIPTIVE & RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Research Constructs	Items	Mean	SD	α
Ethnic Self-Identification		3,95	0,66	
Commitment to own ethnic group	3	4,13	0,65	0,69
Exploration to learn about own ethnic group	3	3,77	0,85	0,75
Attitudes toward Advertising Ethnic Appeals				
<i>Textual cues embedded in advertising</i>				
Attitudes toward English advertising	4	3,35	0,67	0,69
Attitudes toward home language advertising	4	3,72	0,72	0,80
<i>Visual cues embedded in advertising</i>				
Attitudes toward advertising with ethnically resonant cues from own culture	3	3,52	0,92	0,76
Attitudes toward advertising with ethnically resonant cues from diverse cultures	3	2,61	0,88	0,89

As seen in Table 2, the reliability analysis indicated that all measures used in this study showed satisfactory internal consistency with Cronbach alpha scores, ranging between 0.69 and 0.89 respectively for the 20 items. Once all the factors had been deemed to be valid and reliable, factor scores were obtained as a summary measure per factor as used in further analyses.

Descriptively, in terms of ethnic identification dimensions, commitment to ethnic identity ($M = 4,13$; $SD = 0,65$) and exploration of ethnic identity ($M = 3,77$; $SD = 0,05$) were high. When considering textual cues embedded in advertising, attitudes toward home language advertising ($M = 3,72$; $SD = 0,72$) was more positive than attitudes toward English advertising ($M = 3,35$; $SD = 0,67$). In terms of visual cues embedded in advertising, attitudes towards advertising with ethnically resonant cues from own culture ($M = 3,72$; $SD = 0,72$) was slightly more positive than attitudes toward advertising with ethnically resonant cues from diverse cultures ($M = 3,35$; $SD = 0,67$).

4.2 HYPOTHESES RESULTS

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES		DEPENDENT VARIABLES					
		Ethnic identification		Attitudes toward Advertising Ethnic Appeals			
		Commitment to own ethnic group	Exploration to learn about own ethnic group	Textual cues		Visual cues	
English advertising	Home language advertising			Ethnically resonant cues from own culture	Ethnically resonant cues from diverse cultures		
Gender		$t(702) = 0.74$, $p = 0.459$	$t(702) = 2.375$, $p = 0.018$	$t(702) = -0.121$, $p = 0.904$	$t(702) = 1.348$, $p = 0.178$	$t(702) = 1.215$, $p = 0.225$	$t(702) = -1.135$, $p = 0.256$
Male	Mean	4,14	3,85*	3,34	3,75	3,56	2,57
	SD	0,60	0,82*	0,65	0,69	0,90	0,87
Female	Mean	4,11	3,70*	3,35	3,68	3,47	2,65
	SD	0,69	0,88*	0,69	0,74	0,94	0,89
Age		Welch's F(2,380.885) =334.096, $p < 0.001$	Welch's F(2,413.28)= 562.428, $p < 0.001$	Welch's F(2,402.975) =0.934, $p = 0.394$	Welch's F(2,437.042) =878.622, $p < 0.001$	Welch's F(2,421.888) =1111.469, $p < 0.001$	Welch's F(2,434.805) =963.601, $p < 0.001$
Younger age group (19-30 years)	Mean	3,68*	3,11*	3,31	3,11*	2,71*	3,37*
	SD	0,68*	0,76*	0,65	0,45*	0,60*	0,61*
Middle-aged group (31-40 years)	Mean	4,36*	4,11*	3,35	3,89*	3,89*	2,26*
	SD	0,34*	0,44*	0,64	0,23*	0,51*	0,45*
Older age group (40+ years)	Mean	4,64*	4,57*	3,40	4,58*	4,51*	1,68*
	SD	0,12*	0,21*	0,74	0,34*	0,25*	0,25*
Major ethnic groups		Welch's F(3,289.925) = 0.944, $p = 0.42$	F(3,700)=1.75, $p = 0.156$	Welch's F(3,306.855) =74.833, $p < 0.001$	F(3,700)=1.178, $p = 0.317$	Welch's F(3,277.611) =1.141, $p = 0.333$	Welch's F(3,278.313) =1.189, $p = 0.314$
Afrikaans	Mean	4,15	3,63	3,01	3,69	3,38	2,74
	SD	0,55	0,91	0,55	0,77	1,01	0,94
English	Mean	4,06	3,89	3,20		3,61	2,52
	SD	0,64	0,79	0,33		0,84	0,80
Sotho-Tswana	Mean	4,11	3,77	3,57	3,71	3,53	2,61
	SD	0,72	0,86	0,65	0,74	0,93	0,89
Nguni	Mean	4,18	3,81	3,41	3,80	3,53	2,58
	SD	0,55	0,82	0,73	0,68	0,89	0,85

*all groups are significantly different

+ significant different group

† Indicates a significantly different group

4.2.1 Gender

Gender & Ethnic identification: Independent sample t-tests were run to determine if there are differences regarding the ethnic identification dimensions between males and females. No significant difference was found in commitment to their own ethnic groups. Therefore the null hypothesis for gender and commitment to own ethnic group was not rejected (H^{1a}). However, the exploration of ethnic identity H^{1b} was higher in the male group ($M=3.85$, $SD=0.82$), than in the female group ($M=3.70$, $SD=0.88$). There was thus a statistically significant difference of 0.1521 (95% CI, 0.0264 to 0.278), $t(702) = 2.375$, $p = .018$, Cohen's $d = 0.179$ for this ethnic identification dimension. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis for gender and exploration of ethnic identity H^{1b} was accepted.

Gender & Attitudes towards advertising ethnic appeals: No significant differences were found between males and females concerning their attitudes toward English advertising H^{1c} ($p = 0.904$) and attitudes toward home language advertising ($p = 0.178$). Similarly, no significant differences were found regarding the ethnically resonant cues from own culture ethnically resonant cues from diverse cultures. There is thus inadequate evidence to validate that the gender groups differ significantly regarding advertising ethnic appeals. Therefore, the null hypotheses for gender and attitudes towards advertising ethnic appeals in terms of textual cues (H^{1c-d}) as well as visual cues (H^{1e-f}) were not rejected.

4.2.2 Age

Age & Ethnic identification: One-way ANOVA tests were conducted to determine if the two ethnic identification dimensions were significantly different between the three age groups: young (19-30 years) ($n = 321$), middle (31-40 years) ($n = 196$), and older consumers (40+ years) ($n = 187$). Heterogeneity of variances was determined between groups, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ($p < 0.001$). The commitment to own ethnic group was statistically significantly different between age groups, Welch's $F(2, 380.885) = 334.096$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.413$. The Games-Howell post hoc analysis revealed that the mean commitment to own ethnic group score was significantly different between all age groups ($p < 0.001$). Younger consumers displayed a significantly lower commitment to their ethnic group ($M = 3.68$; $SD = 0.68$), compared to consumers aged between 31-40 years ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.34$) as well as those older than 40 years ($M = 4.64$; $SD = 0.12$).

The exploration to learn about own ethnic group was also statistically significantly different between the different age groups, Welch's $F(2, 413.28) = 562.428$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.553$. The Games-Howell post hoc analysis indicated that the means were significantly different between all the age groups ($p < 0.001$). The younger consumers were also significantly less inclined towards exploration to learn about their own ethnic group ($M = 3.11$; $SD = 0.7$), compared to the middle-aged group ($M = 4.11$; $SD = 0.44$) as well as the older age group ($M = 4.57$; $SD = 0.21$). There is thus support for commitment to own ethnic group (H^{2a}) and exploration to learn about own ethnic group (H^{2b}) with significant differences among different age groups.

Age & Attitudes towards advertising ethnic appeals: When comparing age groups, no significant differences were found regarding their attitudes toward English advertising, therefore the null hypothesis of H^{2c} was not rejected. The attitudes toward home language advertising, however, were statistically significantly different between age groups, Welch's $F(2, 437.042) = 878.622$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.734$. Games-Howell post hoc analysis revealed that the attitudes toward the home language advertising mean were significantly different between all the different age groups ($p < 0.001$). Mature consumers in the middle-aged group ($M = 3.89$; $SD = 0.23$) and older age group ($M = 4.58$; $SD = 0.34$) were significantly more positive towards advertising in their home language than the younger consumers ($M = 3.11$; $SD = 0.45$). There is thus support for H^{2d} with significant differences among different age groups regarding attitudes toward home language advertising.

Attitudes towards advertising with ethnically resonant cues from own culture were statistically significantly different when comparing the differences between age groups, Welch's $F(2, 421.888) = 1111.469$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.701$. Games-Howell post hoc analysis revealed that the means were significantly different for all the age groups ($p < 0.001$). Both consumers who are in the middle-aged group ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.51$) and older age group ($M = 4.51$; $SD = 0.25$) were significantly more positive towards advertising with ethnically resonant cues from their own culture than younger consumers ($M = 2.71$; $SD = 0.60$).

The different age groups also had statistically significantly different attitudes toward advertising with ethnically resonant cues from diverse cultures, Welch's $F(2, 434.805) = 963.601$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.686$. Games-Howell post hoc analysis showed that all the age groups were different regarding this aspect. ($p < 0.001$). The younger consumers were significantly more positive towards ($M = 3.37$; $SD = 0.61$) multicultural advertising, compared to consumers who are 31-40 years ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.45$) and those older than 40 years ($M = 1.68$; $SD = 0.25$) who were not keen on multicultural visual cues embedded in advertising. There is thus support for H^{2e} and H^{2f} with significant differences among different age groups regarding attitudes toward visual cues embedded in advertising.

4.2.3 Ethnic Groups

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if attitudes toward English advertising were significantly different when comparing the major ethnic groups surveyed. The respondents classified themselves into four major ethnic groups: Afrikaans (n = 110), English (n = 105), Sotho-Tswana (n = 330), and Nguni (n = 159). Heterogeneity of variances was determined between groups, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ($p < 0.001$).

Ethnic groups & Ethnic identification: When comparing ethnic groups no significant differences were found regarding their ethnic identification dimensions, therefore, the null hypothesis of H^{3a} and H^{3b} were not rejected.

Ethnic groups & Attitudes towards advertising ethnic appeals: Attitudes toward English advertising were statistically significantly different when comparing the ethnic groups, Welch's $F(2, 306.855) = 74.833$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.161$. Games-Howell post hoc analysis revealed that the mean attitude toward English advertising score was significantly different between the Afrikaans group and Sotho-Tswana group ($p < 0.001$), Afrikaans group and Nguni group ($p < 0.001$), English group and Sotho-Tswana group ($p < 0.001$), and Afrikaans group and Nguni group ($p < 0.001$). The Afrikaans group had significantly lower attitudes toward English advertising ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.55$), compared to the other ethnic groups. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis regarding the difference in ethnic groups regarding attitudes toward English advertising (H^{3c}) was accepted. When comparing ethnic groups no significant differences were found regarding their attitudes to visual cues embedded in advertising, therefore, the null hypothesis of H^{3e} and H^{3f} were not rejected.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No significant gender disparities in commitment to ethnic identity were revealed (H^{1a}). Both males and females displayed similarly high levels of commitment to their ethnic identity. This finding diverges from some prior studies that have suggested gender-based differences in this aspect. For instance, Lee (2009) reported higher degrees of ethnic self-identification among male adolescent consumers. Similarly, studies by Khanlou (2005), Kinket and Verkuyten (1997), and Zimmermann *et al.* (2016) have identified varying gender disparities in ethnic self-identification. However, our research does not support the presence of such disparities in the commitment to ethnic identity (H^{1b}). No gender disparities were found in attitudes towards advertising ethnic appeals (H^{1c-f}). This contrasts with prior research that indicates women generally exhibit higher receptivity to ethnically resonant cues compared to males (Fam *et al.* 2019; Roux 2023; Slippers *et al.* 2013).

Younger South African consumers displayed lower commitment to their ethnic community and less cultural exploration compared to older generations (H^{2a-b}). This aligns with international research, indicating that younger generations often have weaker ethnic identification due to cultural acceptance and freedom from identity constraints. Millennials, in particular, advocate for ethnic diversity and social inclusion (Shao 2023; Valbuna 2018). No disparities were observed in attitudes toward English advertising (H^{2c}). However, older generations had significantly more positive views of advertising in their native language, compared to younger consumers (H^{2d}). This aligns with global research indicating that older individuals favour advertising in their native language over English (Ahn & Lee 2017). Mature consumers favour culture-specific advertising (H^{2e}), while younger consumers prefer multicultural marketing (H^{2f}). This aligns with prior research, showing younger consumers' acceptance and preference for multicultural marketing (Bragg *et al.* 2019; Licsandru & Cui 2019).

When comparing the major ethnic groups, no significant differences were found regarding their ethnic identification dimensions (H^{3a-b}). This is in contrast to the finding that minority ethnic groups (e.g. black American consumers) tend to have higher ethnic identity than other ethnic groups (Appiah 2001). Afrikaans consumers were significantly less positive toward English advertising compared to the other ethnic groups (H^{3c}). This aligns with prior research suggesting Afrikaans consumers are more critical towards advertising practices and prefer advertising in their native language (Du Plessis & Boshoff 1995; Slippers *et al.* 2013). No significant differences were found regarding their

attitudes to visual cues embedded in advertising (H^{3e-f}). This contrasts with prior research suggesting that minority groups respond more positively to ethnically congruent visual cues, such as models from their ethnicity, as opposed to cues from other racial groups in an American context (Kareklas & Polonsky 2010; Meyers & Morgan 2013; Sierra *et al.* 2012).

Based on the study results, advertisers could consider the following practical recommendations:

- *Gender-based targeted advertising:* Craft advertising campaigns tailored to engage males through a focus on ethnic identity exploration. Marketers could, for example, create educational content or events showcasing their brands by working together with cultural organisations emphasising the value of learning about one's roots. This cultural content must be aligned with the type of brand advertised. An automotive brand could, for example, integrate visual cues related to exploring one's heritage via travel, while family-orientated brands could depict fathers' and sons' connection when preparing or eating traditional meals or partaking in ceremonies.
- *Customized advertising strategies for diverse age groups:* Audiences could be segmented and specific marketing campaigns created targeting younger consumers based on their values and interests. Advertisers should be mindful that younger consumers may have a less pronounced sense of ethnic identity within their own cultural groups. They may, therefore, be more receptive to advertising that resonates with broader cultural and societal values rather than explicit ethnic identity. Organisations should consider inclusive branding by developing advertising campaigns that infuse inclusive and diverse values into the brand messaging. This should highlight the significance of unity and belonging in a broader cultural context. It is also advisable for advertisers to showcase how their products or services can benefit society as a whole to align with the values that strike a chord with younger consumers. Given that younger consumers are more receptive to multicultural visual cues, while older generations favour advertising in their home language and ethnically resonant cues from their own culture, advertisers should curate campaigns that are tailored to these age-specific preferences. For instance, advertisers could design advertising materials that incorporate rich tapestry cultural elements to appeal to younger audiences, simultaneously producing content in their native language and featuring elements from the older generation's culture to resonate with the mature audience. This approach has the potential to optimise the impact of advertising campaigns and increase their effectiveness among different age groups.
- *Ethnically targeted advertising.* Advertisers can tailor campaigns for Afrikaans consumers by creating Afrikaans content to enhance effectiveness. Visual cues in advertising, should maintain a diverse, inclusive approach without ethnic customisation, as it appeals to a broader audience. Visual cues can be a powerful tool for conveying messages that transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, making them a valuable element in advertising campaigns tailored to a broad spectrum of ethnic groups.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

While previous research in South Africa has examined social group identity in advertising, it is limited, outdated, and lacks a focus on ethnic identity and demographic variations. This study, guided by social identity theory and cue evaluation theory, addressed the gaps in diversity and inclusion in advertising and cross-cultural marketing. It explored disparities among South African consumers in terms of their ethnic identification and attitudes toward ethnic advertising appeals. The findings offer valuable insights for marketers, shedding light on how diverse demographic segments within major ethnic groups in South Africa relate to their own and other ethnic groups. Moreover, it reveals varying marketing communication preferences within a single ethnicity, presenting opportunities for targeted marketing strategies.

Certainly, future research can delve further into the areas suggested by the recommendations for advertisers to gain a deeper understanding of consumer preferences and attitudes in advertising. Here are some potential avenues for future research:

- *Language Preferences and Advertising Effectiveness*: Conduct studies to assess the impact of language customisation in advertising on the attitudes and purchase behaviour of consumers from different ethnic groups. Investigate whether using both English and Afrikaans, as suggested in the recommendation, results in better advertising effectiveness compared to campaigns delivered in a single language.
- *Cultural and Visual Cues in Advertising*: Explore the role of visual cues in advertising in more depth. Investigate whether there are specific visual elements that resonate with a broader, diverse audience across different ethnic groups. This research can provide insights into the design of visually appealing advertising campaigns that transcend cultural boundaries.
- *Long-term Effects of Ethnic Advertising*: Examine the long-term effects of advertising campaigns tailored to different ethnic groups, particularly the impact on brand loyalty, brand perception, and customer retention. This research can help advertisers understand the sustainability of ethnicity-focused advertising strategies.
- *Consumer Perceptions and Ethnic Advertising Ethics*: Investigate the ethical dimensions of ethnic advertising, including potential concerns related to stereotyping, cultural appropriation, and inclusivity. Understand how consumers from different ethnic backgrounds perceive and respond to advertising campaigns in this context.
- *Cross-Cultural Advertising Approaches*: Explore the effectiveness of cross-cultural advertising approaches that aim to unite diverse ethnic groups through a shared cultural narrative or values. Investigate whether such approaches can bridge differences and resonate with a wider audience.
- *Consumer Engagement Across Digital and Traditional Media*: Analyse how consumer preferences for language and visual cues in advertising differ between traditional media (e.g. TV, print) and digital media (e.g. social media, online ads). Assess whether age and ethnicity play varying roles in these preferences across different media channels.
- *Comparative Studies in Different Regions*: Extend research to other regions or countries to identify similarities and differences in consumer responses to ethnic advertising. Compare the findings from South Africa with those from other multicultural societies to draw more general conclusions.

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