

Do minorities prefer ads with white people?

August 24 2017, by Mohammed El Hazzouri, Kelley Main And Sergio Carvalho



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The marketplace is becoming more inclusive than ever. Today, advertisements that include models from ethnic minorities are commonplace. That wasn't the norm a few decades ago.

Academic and market research show that [ethnic minority](#) consumers like advertisements that include their own ethnic group. They also appreciate

brands that use such advertising.

However, research has overlooked how ethnic minority consumers evaluate advertising that feature members of *other* ethnic minorities.

In a forthcoming paper in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, our team of marketing experts at three Canadian universities [reports a backlash effect](#). Ethnic minority consumers feel more ostracized by advertisements featuring models who belong to other ethnic minority groups than they do when they see ads with white models. And that leads to a less favourable attitude toward those advertisements.

In North America, white models advertising a variety of products has been the norm for decades. We argue that when advertisers include ethnic minority models, racially diverse consumers take notice.

But if the models are not from their own ethnic group, they may wonder why the advertisers chose models of another race or culture. They question why their own ethnicity is not represented.

We conducted five experimental studies with American and Canadian participants belonging to different ethnic minority groups. Participants consistently reported more positive attitudes towards advertisements that featured white models. They felt ostracized by the advertisements featuring members of other ethnic minorities.

This backlash was especially true for participants whose membership in their own ethnic group was important to them. It was strongest for participants with so-called high social-dominance orientation, a personality trait indicative of political conservatism.

Advertisements that feature multiple models of different ethnicities

suffer from the backlash too.

In one study, Asian and Latino American participants were shown a bank advertisement that included models from several [ethnic backgrounds](#). For half of the participants, the advertisement included a person belonging to their own ethnicity. For the other half, the advertisement excluded models belonging to their own ethnicity.

Participants who saw the advertisement that featured a [model](#) of their own ethnic group evaluated the advertisement more positively than those who did not see their ethnic group represented.

Portrayals of compassion change ad perceptions

We also found that advertisements that promote thoughts of compassion do not face the same backlash as other advertisements. In one study, ethnic minority participants who viewed an advertisement featuring another ethnic minority showed higher preference for the advertisement when it included words like sympathetic, gentle and forgiving than when it did not include such words.

In general, compassion increases our perceived similarity to others. And so advertisements highlighting compassion make us more likely to see people as similar to us regardless of their ethnicity.

Our takeaway from this research is that ethnic minority consumers do not see themselves as one large minority group. They take note of which ethnicity is represented in advertisements, and may not appreciate advertisers who consistently overlook theirs.

We encourage advertisers to be inclusive, because ads featuring ethnic minorities are received positively by those groups that are included. Advertisers should also aim to be thoughtful when it comes to which

[ethnic groups](#) they highlight in their [advertising](#).

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Do minorities prefer ads with white people? (2017, August 24) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-08-minorities-ads-white-people.html>

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