

THE USE OF BLACKS IN MAGAZINE ADVERTISING:
SOME CHANGES IN THE 1970 to 1980 PERIOD

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Abstract

The black consumer is becoming increasingly important to marketers of consumer products. This importance can be seen in increases in numbers of black consumers as well as in increases in their discretionary purchasing power. To determine if these increases are resulting in greater use of black models in advertisements appearing in mass circulation magazines, a study was conducted on print media for the years 1970, 1975 and 1980. Additional issues examined in the study were the roles depicted by blacks in subject ads, and the products with which they were associated. The findings indicate that although blacks are now portrayed more frequently than in the past, marketers continue to underplay the significance of this important consumer segment.

Introduction

The economic importance of black Americans as a consumer group should not be overlooked given recent population and socioeconomic developments [11]. In 1978 there were over 25 million black Americans with an aggregate personal income of almost \$70 billion. This represents 11.7 percent of the population, the largest non-white segment, and 15.0 percent of the U. S. personal income for 1978 [10]. Moreover, population growth in this market segment has exhibited a steady growth pattern since 1950 [10].

Black consumers are an especially important group to manufacturers of products such as cooked cereals, syrup, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages, clothing, shoes, and canned luncheon meat, since they purchase these products out of proportion to their numbers. Moreover, the black consumer tends to be more brand conscious than other consumer groups, favoring more popular brands in the product class, and more brand loyal [1]. These characteristics combined with increases in population and purchasing power of the black consumer serve to emphasize the importance of developing marketing communications that are able to reach and influence this market segment.

In developing advertising for the black segment, previous research emphasizes that importance of using black role models [2, 5, 7]. This finding appears to be generalizable to both TV and print advertising. Specifically, Gibson [5] and Choudhury and Schmidt [2] found that the use of black models in print ads is so important that it may determine to a great degree who gets the black segment of the market. Likewise, Schlinger and Plummer suggests that TV "commercials which use black models are more meaningful to black viewers than all-white commercials. Black respondents clearly favored the black-cast commercial over the white-cast commercial; they appeared to emphathize more with the characters and to react more positively to the advertised brand." [7, p.153] Moreover, two of the studies observed no adverse affect of the use of black role models on the white market [2, 7].

Although black role models appear to be important in effectively directing marketing communications to the black market segment, previous research indicates that

few advertisements employ black models and that those that do, portray blacks in low status roles. Specifically Shuey, King and Griffith [8] observing advertisements in six mass circulation magazines from 1940 to 1950 found that black models represented less than one percent of all advertisements and that 80 percent of the blacks pictured were portrayed as cooks, maids and servants.

Cox [4] in a partial replication of the Shuey, King and Griffith [8] study considered magazine advertising during the period 1967 to 1968. He found that while the number of advertisements portraying blacks had changed little (i.e. from one percent to two percent) since 1950, the role of the black had changed. Specifically, he observed more than 55 percent of the black adults in entertainer, sportsman, professional, business, student or clerical roles. However when the Cox study was replicated by Colfax and Sternberg [3] in 1970, they found that 40 percent of the blacks pictured in the advertisements were on record album covers. The other black models were portrayed most often as "token blacks", children or welfare/charity recipients.

Kassarjian [6] in 1969 considered advertising in mass circulation magazines from 1946 to 1965. He observed a U-shaped frequency of blacks in advertisements. That is, the use of blacks in advertisements declined in 1956 and increased in 1965 but only to its 1946 level. However, he found that blacks were portrayed with higher occupational status even though they were "seldom found in conventional middle-class settings" [6, p.29].

Finally, Stutts and Pride in a partial replication of the Kassarjian study found that advertisements using black models increased significantly from 1965 to 1970 but then leveled off. [9, p. 261] However, they did not consider the role of the black model in the observed advertisements during the 1965 to 1970 period.

To determine the present status of blacks in print media advertising, a study was undertaken as described below. The purposes of this study were:

1. To determine the frequency of use of black models in mass circulation magazine advertising.
2. To determine the role depicted by the black models in print advertising.
3. To determine if advertising using black models is associated with a particular product or service.

Methodology

The mass circulation consumer magazines selected for this study were Better Homes and Gardens, Reader's Digest, Sports Illustrated, and Times. They were selected because of their availability over the period of the study, 1970-1980, and because of their high circulation and broad segment appeal.

All advertisements in each magazine were reviewed quarterly for the years 1970, 1975, and 1980. In the case of the monthly publications, the issues reviewed were January, March, June and October. These months were selected to avoid issues with abnormally high and non-representative advertising frequencies such as pre-holiday, back-to-school, and so forth. In the case of Time, the first weekly issue in the subject month was viewed.

All advertisements that included people in the selected media, were viewed. Drawings, cartoons, and pictorial ads not including people, were not considered. In each ad containing people, the ad was reviewed to determine number of blacks shown in the ad, the role portrayed by the black if one or more were present, and the product being advertised if a black were used in the ad.

The magazines reviewed were obtained in the Piedmont area of North Carolina, thus they may contain slight regional variations from issues that would be available elsewhere. No attempt was made to control for this possibility. Also, no attempt was made to control for duplicate ads either within or between publications.

Findings

Table 1 shows that the number of blacks depicted in advertisements portraying people increased from 4 percent in 1970, to 5.4 percent in 1975; and increased again to 7.7 percent in 1980. Using a difference of proportions test, the changes from 1970 to 1975 and from 1975 to 1980 are significant at the .01 level. That is, when a difference of proportion Z statistic was calculated on the change in percent of blacks depicted in advertisements in the 1970 to 1975 period, the calculated Z of 63.7 was greater than the critical Z value for the rejection of the null hypotheses at the .01 level of significance. The calculated Z of 84.07 for the change from period 1975 to 1980 exceeded the critical Z for the rejection of the null hypotheses at the .01 level of significance. Thus, the percentage of blacks in ads depicting people does appear to be increasing, at least in the publications chosen for this study.

With regard to the role depicted by blacks in print advertising, roles seem to be moving more in the direction of higher status portrayal of blacks. In the advertisements depicting blacks that were reviewed for the study, where role determination was possible, 11 percent of the ads portrayed blacks as either professionals or white collar employees, 33 percent portrayed them as entertainers and athletes. Only 3 percent portrayed blacks in blue collar or other lower status roles.

Table 2 demonstrates the findings with regard to type of product being promoted in advertisements depicting blacks. Although statistical hypotheses testing would be questionable, due to low cell frequencies, some interesting changes are evident in the table. For example, there has been a remarkable increase in the use of blacks in automobile advertising, from 5.9 percent of advertisements depicting blacks in 1970, in the magazines reviewed here, to almost 10 percent in 1980. There have also been some noteworthy declines, in the advertising of audio-equipment/records/entertainment and in the area of books/magazines for example.

Discussion

The increasing use of blacks in advertisements depicting people indicates that at least some marketers are responding to the realities of today's demographics. Still, the 1980 black percentage shown in this study, 7.7 percent, trails both the population and the income figures cited above [10]. Thus, it would appear that blacks are still underrepresented, at least in comparison to these statistics. Nevertheless, the trend toward greater use of blacks in advertisements depicting people, which was identified by Kassarian [6] and by Stutts and Pride [9], appears to be continuing.

The role of black models in the 1970 to 1980 period noted here is also improving. Again, this echoes the finding of Kassarian [6], but in contrast to his findings, the advertisements considered here do tend to portray blacks in middle-class settings. Even when role portrayed by the black model was not clear, setting of the ads tended to reflect middle-class surroundings and values. The findings reported here also fit well with those of Cox [4] who found an increasing tendency to portray blacks as entertainers, athletes and professionals.

The products associated with ads depicting blacks also are changing. Whereas in the Kassarian study it was noted that "advertisers with large advertising budgets, such as manufacturers of patent medicines, automobiles" and so forth fail to use blacks in their ads [6, p.39], the present study indicates that this no longer appears to be true. On the contrary, this study notes a remarkable increase in the usage of blacks to promote automobiles, drugs and cosmetics. Yet, this study noted no pronounced move in the direction of using blacks to promote food products - an area which would seem to be an excellent choice for depicting blacks in promotion [1].

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the change in the use of black role models in mass circulation magazine advertising from 1970 to 1980. Specifically, the investigation considered three aspects of the black role model: the frequency of use of blacks in advertisements, the role portrayed by the blacks pictured and the advertised products which used black models. Results of the study suggest that both the number of blacks in advertisements and the status of the black models have increased in the magazines surveyed during the period of investigation. In addition, the advertised product using black models has changed. That is, in 1980 more blacks were pictured in automobile, drug and cosmetic advertisements than were pictured in earlier ads. Declines were observed in the use of blacks in audio/records/entertainment and books/magazines over this period.

The results would suggest that at least for the magazines surveyed, advertisers are becoming more aware of the black market and are directing more magazine advertising toward this segment. However, this advertising is still not proportional to the numbers of blacks in the market place nor to the purchasing power of the black segment. Advertisers may though be spending part of their advertising dollar aimed at the black market in predominantly black magazines such as Ebony rather than more mass circulation magazines. Further study is needed to consider the cross advertising in mass and black magazines. Investigations along these lines would help to develop a clearer picture of the extent to which marketers are reaching the large and growing black market segment.

TABLE 1

TYPE OF ADVERTISEMENT BY MAGAZINE AND YEAR

<u>Year and Magazine</u>	<u>Number of Ads Depicting People</u>	<u>Number of Ads Depicting Blacks</u>	<u>Percentage of Ads Depicting Blacks</u>
<u>1970</u>			
Better Homes and Gardens	185	6	3.2
Reader's Digest	117	7	6.0
Sports Illustrated	65	3	4.6
Time	<u>59</u>	<u>1</u>	1.7
Total	426	17	
Mean:	$\frac{\text{Ads Depicting Blacks}}{\text{Ads Depicting People}} = \frac{17}{426} = 4\%$		
<u>1975</u>			
Better Homes and Gardens	149	4	2.7
Reader's Digest	98	3	3.0
Sports Illustrated	99	8	8.0
Time	<u>45</u>	<u>6</u>	13.3
Total	391	21	
Mean:	$\frac{\text{Ads Depicting Blacks}}{\text{Ads Depicting People}} = \frac{21}{391} = 5.4\%*$		
<u>1980</u>			
Better Homes and Gardens	237	7	3.0
Reader's Digest	133	16	12.0
Sports Illustrated	100	14	14.0
Time	<u>69</u>	<u>4</u>	5.8
Total	539	41	
Mean:	$\frac{\text{Ads Depicting Blacks}}{\text{Ads Depicting People}} = \frac{41}{539} = 7.7%*$		

* Mean percent significantly different from previous period using a difference of proportion test and $p = .01$

TABLE 2

PRODUCTS USING BLACKS IN ADVERTISING
BY YEAR BY PERCENT

<u>PRODUCT</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Armed Forces	0%	9.5%	4.9%	5.1%
Audio Equipment/Records/Entertainment	23.5	9.5	7.3	11.4
Automobile	5.9	14.2	24.4	17.7
Banks/Insurance	0	9.5	9.8	7.6
Books/Magazines	17.7	23.8	4.9	12.7
Drugs/Cosmetics/Tobacco Products	0	4.8	9.8	6.3
Food/Beverage/Cleaning	17.7	0	7.3	7.6
Home Materials/Equipment	11.8	9.5	4.9	7.6
Industrial Supplies/Equipment	11.8	0	7.3	6.3
Sports Equipment/Toys	0	4.8	7.3	5.1
Travel/Airlines/Tourism	11.8	9.5	4.9	7.6
Miscellaneous	<u>0</u>	<u>4.8</u>	<u>7.3</u>	<u>5.1</u>
TOTALS	100.2%*	99.9%*	100.1%*	100.1%*
Sample Size	17	21	41	79

*Totals to other than 100 percent due to rounding.

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