

# Ethnic advertising: adolescents' attitudes towards target and non-target advertisements

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This article aims to explore attitudinal and behavioural differences between target and non-target groups of ethnic advertisements. It seeks to expand the existing body of knowledge by investigating these differences from the perspective of young consumers in an Eastern context. This helps in testing the established theories of distinctiveness and cultural schemas in an Eastern society.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study sample consists of 1,600 randomly selected adolescents from different states of Malaysia. Data were analysed using MANOVA, ANOVA and t-test to explore the group differences between adolescents based on their ethnicity and advertisement type.

**Findings** – The results indicate a significant group difference between target and non-target respondents to the advertisement. It also shows that ethnicity is a viable target variable for both majority and minority ethnic groups in Malaysia.

**Research limitations/implications** – Although there are many ethnic groups in Malaysia this research only investigated two ethnic groups. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to other ethnic minority groups in Malaysia.

**Originality/value** – The study explores the possibility of using ethnicity as a target variable for adolescents in an Eastern context. It investigates the issue in a holistic manner by incorporating views from target as well as non-target groups.

**Keywords** Ethnic groups, Target markets, Adolescents, Malaysia, Attitudes, Behaviour

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Ethnic marketing research is driven by the assumption that ethnicity can affect a wide range of consumer behaviour, such as eating habits, music, dressing preferences and choices in leisure activities (Bocock, 1993; Burton, 2000). Past research also suggests that these behaviours can be stimulated, enhanced and further reinforced by communicating on ethnic lines (de Run, 2007; Deshpande and Stayman, 1994; Koslow *et al.*, 1994). One common way to achieve this objective is by incorporating cultural and ethnic cues such as language, using an ad model of similar ethnic background, symbols or any combination of these in their communication strategy (Appiah, 2001).

Despite its practical relevance and contemporary application in Eastern multi-ethnic societies, ethnic targeting remains on the fringes of academic research. Most Eastern societies would be suitable for multi-ethnic marketing. However, theoretical development in this vital area of market and academic research is limited. Two important gaps in past research justify this argument. First, research on ethnic marketing was mostly conducted in Western societies. Their findings need not be applicable to Eastern societies unless they possess proper theoretical and conceptual validation (SteenKamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Second, research on ethnic advertising was generally focused on adult groups. Therefore, it is not appropriate to generalize these findings to other demographic groups, based on gender, income, education, age, or socio-economic status. Past research suggests that age

Received July 2009  
Revised January 2010  
Accepted April 2010